

Approved Minutes
Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board
Thursday, April 19, 2012
Location: County Building

Members Present: Carl Blough, Bryan Harrison, Gabe Hudson, Dennis Heffron, Sr. Lucille Janowiak, Suzie Reinbold

Members Absent: Commissioner Tom Antor

Guests: Jen DeHaan, Commissioner Sandi Frost Parrish, Commissioner Hirsch

Staff Present: Kendra Wills

Meeting called to order at 8:02 AM by Hudson.

Public Comment

Commissioner Hirsch said he appreciated being able to attend the Michigan Agricultural Preservation Board meeting with Mr. Hudson, S. Janowiak and Mrs. Wills on April 13.

Review of Agenda for Possible Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Adoption of March 8, 2012 Minutes

Motion by Reinbold with support from Janowiak to approve the minutes. Unanimous.

Discussion with Commissioner Frost Parrish Regarding Sustainable Funding for PDR

Commissioner Frost Parrish stated that 2012 will be her last year as Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners, however, she will be running for County Commissioner again in November. Her two remaining priorities for her term as Chairperson are transition of the zoo to a non-profit and long-term funding for PDR.

Commissioner Frost Parrish said she regretted appointing only supporters of the PDR Program to the PDR Funding Subcommittee led by Commissioner Talen in 2010. She believes this resulted in the lack of support for the Subcommittee's recommendations. As a result, she has appointed a new PDR Funding Subcommittee to work in 2012. Members of this Subcommittee include: Commissioners Rolls, Morgan, Hirsch, Antor and Talen. County Treasurer Ken Parrish has also become interested in working to find a long term funding source for PDR.

The 2012 will be developing their recommendation over the summer. One possible idea worth considering may be a \$10 million challenge grant to raise funds for the PDR Endowment Fund at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation (GRCF). Another possibility is the "one and done" millage idea for a one year, one time, one mill request to raise \$20 million, which would all be deposited in the PDR Endowment Fund at GRCF. This would allow for approximately \$1 million in local matching fund spending for the PDR Program. However, this millage request should not be seen as a way to "kill" the program if the millage does not pass says Commissioner Frost Parrish. Another possibility is a bond request and bond counsel has been asked to research this possibility.

Commissioner Frost Parrish encouraged the Preservation Board to hold a training program for township officials on the grant planning, zoning and land preservation tools that Grattan Township has put into practice.

Commissioner Frost Parrish also stated that she would support additional county funds so at least one full time person could be dedicated to staffing the Kent County PDR Program starting in January 2013 when a new staff person has been contracted/hired.

Commissioner Frost Parrish also felt there was a need for a three page white paper to build a case for support for the PDR Program. Perhaps Wondergem Consulting (Andy Guy) could be asked to do this work as they are currently under contract with Kent County.

Mr. Harrison stated that he would like to see an updated Cost of Services study completed for Kent County. He feels this information helps people understand that more tax dollars are spent to develop property for residential, commercial or industrial purposes rather than to preserve farmland through PDR. He requested a RFP be drafted and distributed to a few capable individuals and organizations that could do this work. Wills added that she felt it would be helpful for the study to explain who pays for which kinds of services. For example, what does the county pay for when a property is developed and what do townships pay for, etc. Mr. Harrison noted that he would like to release this cost of services study in an organized press conference.

Thursday, July 26, 2012 Farmland Preservation Bus Tour and Luncheon Reception

The Wege Foundation has graciously agreed to host a bus tour and luncheon reception at the Franciscan Center to support farmland preservation education. The Foundation will cover all costs. Invitees will include: County Commissioners, Township Officials, Foundation Board members, members of the Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund Board, Property Owners, the media, and the Government Affairs Committee of the Grand Rapids Association of Realtors. The bus tour will travel to Caledonia/Gaines and through the Parnell Avenue Corridor of preserved farmland.

Presentation of “preserved farmland” signs for the four farms preserved in 2011/12 will be awarded to property owners at the luncheon reception.

The Kruithoffs are recovering from a hog barn fire that happened earlier this year at one of their barns in Newaygo County. They will not be able to host a cook out this summer for their neighbors but perhaps in the summer of 2013.

Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund Board Meeting Results

Hudson, Janowiak, Hirsch and Wills traveled to Grand Ledge, MI on April 13, 2012 to attend the Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund Board meeting. The last time this Board met was in 2009. Gordon Wenk of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) served as chair. Other members of the public in attendance were: Legacy Land Conservancy from Washtenaw County, Stacy Byers of the Clinton and Ingham County PDR Programs, and a Michigan Farm Bureau government affairs staff member. Staff people of this Board are Rich Harlow and Beth Juras of the MDARD. Mr. Harlow began by distributing a handout with the revenue and expenses of both the PA 116 temporary farmland preservation program, which provides funding for the PDR grant program. After much discussion, it was determined that the PA 116 program is not financially sustainable due to the fact that it must cover all staffing costs, retirement costs, office equipment and office space. There was very little funding available for PDR grants in 2012, however, the Board decided to meet again in July to determine if a small amount of funds can be distributed for PDR grants.

Public Education Projects for 2012

Wills reported that an MSU Extension “Breakfast on the Farm” event will be held at Jim May’s farm on Saturday, August 4, 2012. This may be an opportunity to interact with the public and educate about farmland preservation. Between 1,000 – 2,000 people are expected to attend this four hour event. Volunteers will be needed.

Bill Hirsch and Scott Everett have been working to organize another trip to Lancaster, PA. The trip will take place on May 23 – 25. Interested participants are asked to contact Commissioner Hirsch. He is hoping to secure funding from the Wege Foundation and a donation of a private plane so there is little to no cost for participants.

Wills scheduled a meeting with the new Frey Foundation President, Steve Wilson, to update him on the PDR Program and status of the grant. This meeting will be held on May 3 at 10 AM at the Frey Foundation offices. Ag Board members may attend.

Other

Janowiak requested that the Michigan Farmers Union be invited to the July 26 farmland preservation event.

Heffron noted that Kent County Farm Bureau would not be able to financially support PDR in 2012. Funds are being spent on the Breakfast on the Farm event and another public outreach program.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned 9:40 AM.
Written by Kendra Wills