

Approved Minutes
Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board
Thursday, May 2, 2012
Location: Kent / MSU Extension

Members Present: Tom Antor, Carl Blough, Bryan Harrison, Gabe Hudson, Dennis Heffron, Sr. Lucille Janowiak, Suzie Reinbold
Members Absent: None
Guest: April Scholtz, Land Conservancy of West Michigan
Staff Present: Kendra Wills and Jennifer DeHaan

Meeting called to order at 11:30 AM by Hudson.

Public Comment

None.

Review of Agenda for Possible Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Adoption of April 19, 2012 Minutes

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

Discussion with April Scholtz Regarding Possible Collaboration Opportunities with Land Conservancy and PDR Program

For the past few meetings, the Preservation Board has been interested in exploring possible connections with the Land Conservancy of West Michigan to preserve farmland through donation of development rights by property owners. April distributed information on Land Conservancy of West Michigan (LCWM) programs and service area. They serve 14 counties in West Michigan from Saugatuck to Ludington. LCWM was founded by amateur naturalists 35 years ago. LCWM is not affiliated with The Nature Conservancy. They focus on preserving natural and scenic lands. They can help local governments acquire park land. They have a staff of eight people. They are a 501c3 non-profit organization and have an office in Grand Rapids on Monroe north of Leonard.

LCWM sometimes expand to farmland preservation as in the case of Mr. Wege's donation. They are particularly interested in preserving farmland along streams, corridors and lakes – but they don't have funds to pay for development rights and they don't have a farmland specialist on staff. LCWM is concerned about creating buffer strips between crop lands and streams/rivers to prevent run-off from farms. USDA NRCS is the organization that calculates the recommended width and type of buffer strips to protect water bodies from agricultural run-off. Like the Kent County PDR Program, they would rely on USDA NRCS to write a conservation plan for the property. LCWM shares the goals of the PDR Program to protect prime and unique soils, particularly on the Fruit Ridge.

The primary limiting factor for LCWM to begin protecting more farmland through easement donation is funding. They would need funds for increased staff and they would need to work with property owners or other private donors who would contribute to the endowment fund necessary for every property the LCWM preserves to fund the monitoring and enforcement of the easement. This endowment fund is usually between 5-10% of the total value of the easement.

April challenged the concept of creating a program similar to the Lancaster Farmland Preservation Trust as we don't have an Amish population and we don't have donors/funding sources at this time who are demanding this type of work. LCWM funders and members are mostly interested in wildlife habitat protection and watershed/water quality protection. Right now, there is not a strong demand from their funders or Board members to focus on farmland preservation in West Michigan. April believes there is a large funding base who support the preservation of the Amish way of life and that is what makes Lancaster unique and West Michigan agriculture doesn't have that kind of marketing appeal – Leelanau and Traverse City are the farthest ahead in this area.

After much discussion, April expressed a willingness to talk with her Board about the possibility of partnering with the Kent County PDR Program to preserve wooded areas and areas of farms bordering streams, rivers, lakes, and the PDR Program can pay property owners just for the crop land portion of the property. LCWM would likely not be able to pay property owners for the protection of these lands but property owners may receive some federal and state income tax credits for their donation. This may help save the Kent County PDR Program funds as funding would only be needed to preserve the productive farmland areas. The Preservation Board would have to forward PDR application information to LCWM for review to see which properties where this might work. Perhaps properties with riparian rights could be awarded points in the Kent County PDR Program Scoring Criteria to help further this potential collaboration between LCWM and the Kent County PDR Program. Wills agreed to write this up for the next staff person to explore.

Other

Harrison noted that the RFP for Kent County PDR Program staff support should be distributed to Peter Homeyer, former director of LCWM, who is now a private consultant.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned 12:55 PM.
Written by Kendra Wills