

Approved Minutes
Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board
March 6, 2013
Location: Kent/MSU Extension

Members Present: Tom Antor (County Commissioner), Carl Blough (Ag Interest) Gabe Hudson (Ag Interest), Michele VanHouten (Conservation Interest), Denny Heffron (Ag Interest)

Members Absent: Suzie Reinbold (Real Estate Interest)

Guest: Stan Ponstein (County Commissioner)

Staff Present: Stacy Byers, Board Coordinator and Jennifer DeHaan, County Administrator's Office

Meeting called to order at 11:33am by Hudson.

I. Welcome and Call to Order: Gabe Hudson, Chair

No new members were present. Hudson requested an update on the status of the Kent County Board appointing a Township Representative. DeHaan stated that applications have been received and interviews are scheduled to be conducted in April by the Review Committee. According to the Board Office, if all goes as planned, the new member should be at the May meeting.

II. Public Comment: None.

III. Review Agenda and Declaration of Any Possible Conflict of Interest. None was heard.

IV. Review and Adoption of February 6, 2013 Minutes.

- a. *The February 6, 2013 meeting minutes were approved as amended. Motion by VanHouten, second by Blough to approve the February 6, 2013 minutes. Motion passed unanimously.*

V. Old Business

- a. *2012 Kent County application cycle update – review of February 28, 2013 Full Board Meeting to approve Option Agreements on Frost and VanOeffelen properties. – Byers gave a brief overview of the meeting and noted that Commissioners expressed their concern for the use of public dollars to purchase development rights and also that Mr. Vanoeffelen had received Federal Farm Subsidy payments from 1995 to 2012. Byers noted that the Option Agreements for the VanOeffelen and Frost properties were approved by the Board of Commissioners.*

Heffron commented that he spoke during public comment at the meeting about the need and importance for Federal Subsidies and further noted how Kent County was a wheat deficient county. Heffron stated if farmland is not protected Kent County may continue to see deficiencies and have to import products from other commodities as well. Antor commented he was concerned for the future of the PDR Program. He felt the board may take a different direction in the 2014 budget process, prioritizing funds away from farmland preservation and that the Ag Board needed to be thinking of alternative funding options. He stressed the need for long term dedicated funding. A discussion ensued.

VanHouten stated that there are many opportunities for community outreach and that the Board should be utilizing “social equity” to bring more awareness to the farmland preservation issue. She suggested a fund raising effort called “Peddle to Preserve” as an example, that a preservation program did in PA to promote the importance of trails and bikers and how the two work well together.

Hudson stated that he was concerned that if the County Board of Commissioners did not fund PDR in 2014 that the Ag Board will have a hard time convincing the Foundations to partner and dedicate funds. Foundations like to see the County contributing funds to protect farmland as well. Heffron urged the Ag Board to not give up that the budget was not a done deal and they needed to advocate for more funding. Commissioner Ponstein suggested the Ag Board contact the League of Conservation Voters to get ideas for promoting conservation issues. They do an excellent job of marketing the issue and are able to reach a broad base of the public. Antor suggested inviting a representative from a farmland preservation program that had a dedicated funding source to speak to the group about their experience and how they run the program Heffron suggested doing a newsletter to the individuals that signed up as an endorser of the program either through past fund raising events or interested businesses. Byers mentioned she spoke with Paula Blough about helping to develop the newsletter.

- i. *FRPP Grant Application due March 8, 2013* – Byers stated that the grant will be submitted this afternoon to the USDA-NRCS office.
- b. Updates
 - i. Patterson Farm closed February 25, 2013 – Byers updated the Board that the pending Patterson closing had taken place. The attorneys for the title company allowed the oil and gas lease to move forward without a termination or subordination agreement due to the five year clause.

VI. New Business

- a. Next steps for 2014 Agriculture Preservation Board – Heffron suggested being ready with a new application to the FRPP if additional funds become available. Byers discussed the Youngquist property. It was the third property slated for funding by the Ag board but taken off the docket in light of budget challenges. She will have the property ready if funds become available later in the year.

VII. Other. None.

VIII. Public Comment. No Public comment.

IX. Adjournment. Motion by Antor, seconded by VanHouten to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 1:55 pm.

Next Meeting: April 3, 2013 at 11:30 am at Kent/MSU Extension.