

Approved Minutes
Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board
January 7, 2015
Location: Kent/MSU Extension

Members Present: Candace Chivis (County Commissioner), Carl Blough (Ag Interest), Dennis Heffron (Ag Interest), Ed Robinette (Township Interest), Russ Slater (Ag Interest) and Michele Van Houten (Conservation Interest)

Members Absent: Suzie Reinbold (Real Estate Interest)

Staff Present: Stacy Byers (Board Coordinator via phone), Debbie Green (Kent/MSU Extension Staff), Mary Swanson (Administrator's Office)

Public Present: None

Meeting began at 11:35 a.m.

I. Welcome and Call to Order – Chair, Dennis Heffron

II. Public Comment – None

III. Review Agenda and Declaration of Any Possible Conflict of Interest – Motion by Blough to approve agenda, seconded by Robinette. Motion passed. No conflict of interest expressed.

IV. Review and Adoption of November 5, 2014 Minutes (December 2014 Meeting was cancelled due to lack of quorum) – Meeting minutes were reviewed by members present. Motion by Robinette and seconded by Van Houten to adopt November 5, 2014 minutes. Motion passed

V. Old Business

a. 2014 FRPP applications – update Hall, Poulias

The Hall property closing should progress pretty quickly. The only thing still needed is the sub-ordination paperwork to be signed. The financing for the Hall farmland preservation was a combination of funds from the Wege Foundation from 2014 and 2015. No federal funds were used.

The Poulias property should close sometime in February. The financing for this property was a combination between Wege Foundation money and Federal money.

i. 2015 Wege Grant

Byers informed the board that the Wege Foundation has given \$150,000 toward Farmland Preservation for the 2015 year. This amount was \$24,000 less than was requested, however the board can check with the Frey Foundation and Grand Rapids Community Foundation to make up the difference.

b. 2013 FRPP Status – Frost and Vanoeffelen

The Frost property has closed. The Vanoeffelen property has been quite a challenge. The closing date that was set for January 13, 2015 has now been put on hold because of an oil & gas lease that showed up. The property closing cannot take place with an oil & gas lease that has been active in the last 5 years. Byers informed the committee members that they now have to obtain a Do Not Disturb Top Soil Agreement before the closing can proceed.

Discussion followed regarding adding a clause to the application regarding whether or not the farm has an oil & gas lease for the property. Byers stated that there already was a statement on the application. The committee discussed the issue of oil & gas leasing for easements and what means for farmers who want to preserve their land/easements. A Non-Disturbance Agreement must be obtained to proceed with the farmland preservation otherwise the Federal Government will not allow the application to go forward.

c. 2015 Application Cycle – Wittenbach

The Wittenbach farm is 108 acres and it has an oil & gas lease for 5 years. The lease was signed 2 years ago. The question came up as to whether or not the committee wants to proceed with this farm knowing about the oil & gas lease. Not sure if the Federal Government will accept the application knowing there is an oil & gas lease.

Another option for the 2015 cycle is the Roth property located in Vergennes Township. This farm is 114 acres (value \$1,750 per acre). This farm has been on the waiting list for farmland preservation since 2008. Mr. Roth has said that he will donate \$10,000 towards the easement. The application process takes approximately 18 months from application until closing.

Heffron informed the committee that a meeting will be set up within the next 2 months with Senator Gary Peters and Ag. Preservation people to discuss their dissatisfaction with the way things are going with farmland preservation.

A motion was made by Slater to put the Wittenbach property application on hold and continue work with the Roth property. Byers will check with the Wege Foundation to see if this substitution is acceptable to them. Blough seconded the motion and the motion carried.

The Roth farm will be the only property the committee will be working with for 2015.

d. MLCVEF Update

Byer said that the third and final tour of 2014 was well attended by over 50 people and was a good cross section of people. It was good to have picked the date for the tour to be before Deer Hunting Season.

The MLCVEF will be coming out with brochures to help promote farmland preservation. They may also start canvassing house to house to inform people about Ag. Preservation.

VI. New Business

a. 2015 Budget

Byers gave an update on the current funds available. There is a little extra cash leftover from the Wege Foundation because of the switch on farms to fund.

b. Coordinator Position

Byers informed the committee members that she has decided not to continue her work in Kent County or Ottawa County. However, she will work with the committee until a replacement is found or until things are completed. She will be here at least through March.

Mary Swanson told the committee that she has been in conversation with Mark Knudsen in Ottawa County talking about hiring a regional coordinator for both counties. She also discussed other options on how to fill the position, whether it be part-time or full-time and how many counties the new person could possibly cover (Ottawa/Kent/Allegan/Montcalm Counties). It will all depend on finding a candidate and working out the details.

c. Township Updates

Heffron asked for committee volunteers to attend township meetings to inform people about Farmland Preservation. The township meeting would possibly have a question and answer period for audience members.

Grattan/Cannon/Oakfield/Vergennes Townships – Dennis Heffron
Lowell/Bowne Townships – Carl Blough
Grand Rapids Townships – Ed Robinette
Alpine/Plainfield/Sparta Townships – Michele Van Houten
Caledonia/Gaines/Byron Townships – Russ Slater
Tyrone/Solon/Nelson/Spencer/Algoma/Courtland/Ada Townships – Dennis Heffron?

VII. Other

a. 2015 Election of Officers

Chair Person – Dennis Heffron
Co-Chair Person – Michele Van Houten

b. Review of Board Member Terms

Candace Chivis – 2 more years on Ag. Preservation Board
Russ Slater – 2016
Carl Blough – 2015
Michele Van Houten – 2015
Suzie Reinhold – 2017
Ed Robinette – Just Renewed – 2017
Dennis Heffron – Just Renewed - 2017

VIII. Public Comment - None

IX. Adjournment - 1:25 p.m.

Next Meeting February 4, 2015 at 11:30 AM at Kent/MSU Extension.