

Approved Minutes
Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board
February 4, 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), Debbie Green (Kent/MSU Extension Staff) and Mary Swanson (Administrator's Office), Christian Smith (Program Coordinator w/ Ms. Byers)

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** – None
- IV. **Review and Adoption of January 7, 2015 Minutes** – Motion to accept minutes as presented by Blough, seconded by Van Houten. Motion passed.
- V. **Old Business**
 - a. 2014 FRPP applications – update Hall, Poulias
Byers informed the board that the Poulias property paperwork is close to being submitted to the feds, hopefully by the end of the week. One good thing is that they have no active oil and gas leases.

The Hall property is missing paperwork and they are waiting for a copy of the survey. They also have two mortgages (Greenstone and FSA) that need to be paid off. This property should close by the end of the month because there are no federal funds involved with this closing.

- i. 2015 Wege Grant
Byers contacted the Wege Grant people and was told not to ask for any more money from the foundation. Currently the grant funds are earmarked for 107 acres of the Wittenbach property and now the Malone property which has 153 acres, but needs to be cut down to 100 acres covered because of the limited funds available.

The federal deadline for turning in paperwork on the properties is March 16. The next deadline would be to get the approval from the Kent County Board of Commissioners and Byers will try to get this on their

schedule for the first monthly meeting. Swanson informed the board that the full board of commissioners does not meet until the second commissioner meeting of each month.

As far as the Malone property paperwork, the holdup is waiting for the survey and appraisal to be done on the property. Also, there could be a challenge with the value of the land because of the small amount of road frontage available to the land.

- b. 2013 FRPP Status – Frost and Vanoeffelen
These two properties paperwork and processing has been completed.
- c. 2015 Application Cycle – Wittenbach, Roth/Malone
The Roth property (Grattan Twp.) has oil and gas lease issues.

Raymond Wittenbach is including his property in his estate planning and therefore cutting up his acreage into pieces. The same is true for the Richmond Farm and their estate planning.

Poulias and Vanoeffelen properties may need to get updated appraisals. The current appraisals were completed in February 2014 and may be outdated by now. The cost per appraisal is \$1,500.00

There was a motion made by Slater: Move forward with financing Malone property and this supersedes the Roth property. Robinette seconded the motion. The motion was voted on and passed.

VI. **New Business**

- a. 2015 Application Cycle
The current year's application cycle will run from May 1-July 31, 2015, however, there needs to be a staff person to run the application cycle. Byers will have completed her contract with Kent County at the end of March 2015. The cycle starts with the Township Board receiving the application and then gets passed on to the Ag. Preservation Board. The application cycle usually takes about 18 months generally to get through the process.

The cycle includes an announcement informing landowners that there will be an application cycle for farmland preservation. Next, postcards go out to the landowners with 20 acres or more of farm land. Then the cycle is open for 90 days for landowners to respond. If there are any interested landowners, packets are mailed out with more information on the process to apply. Last, you just wait for the application to come in from the landowners. During the cycle there is no money involved, only the applications are accepted and added to the current list.

It was suggested that no applications be submitted until Byers replacement has been hired. A motion was made by Robinette: Proceed with 2015 application cycle and any questions will be referred to the Ag Preservation Board members. Blough seconded the motion. The motion was voted on and passed.

Discussion followed as to what tools the ideal candidate should possess. The ideas included: need longevity, part-time county-based person and quick learning curve. Mary Swanson said that she is having a hard time finding a candidate to fill the consultant position. The Grand Rapids Land Conservancy was approached to take this over, but they were not interested.

i. **2015 Selection Criteria Review and Approval**

There was a suggestion made to add an item to the criteria. The item is to check for oil and gas leases (mineral rights) on the property involved. The leases are usually 5 years long and automatically renew after the first 5 years. The selection criteria need to be brought before the Board of Commissioners in April.

VII. Other

Byers informed the board that the Community Foundation Fund is growing and this money is used for paying for the property appraisals.

It was mentioned that Jeff from the Dept. of Equalization does free monitoring.

Byers recapped the list of board members and the township meetings that they agreed to visit to spread the word about farmland preservation. Byers also e-mailed the board members a summary of the program activities to use when talking at the township meetings.

VIII. Public Comment – none

IX. Adjournment – 12:50 p.m.

Next meeting is March 4, 2015 at 11:30 a.m. at the Kent/MSU Extension Office