

Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board Meeting
February 1, 2017
Kent/MSU Extension Office
11:30 AM

Members Present: Carl Blough (Ag Interest), Dennis Heffron (Ag Interest), Suzie Reinbold (Real Estate Interest), Ed Robinette (Township Interest), Russ Slater (Ag Interest) Michele Van Houten (Conservation Interest) and Robert Womack (County Commissioner)

Staff Present: Stacy Byers (Board Coordinator) and Debbie Green (Kent/MSU Extension)

Staff Absent: Mary Swanson (Administrator's Office)

I. Welcome and Call to Order – the meeting was called to order at 11:32 a.m. by Chairman, Denny Heffron

The new County Commissioner, Robert Womack, assigned to the Agricultural Preservation Board for a one-year term was introduced and he gave a little background on himself. His email is: robert.womack@kentcountymi.gov and his phone number is: (616) 295-8953.

The Board Members went around the table and introduced themselves and their interest on the board.

Denny Heffron gave an overview of what the objective is of this board and how the board works to preserve farmland.

II. Public Comment - None

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

IV. Review and Adoption of December 6, 2016 Minutes (January 4 meeting canceled due to lack of quorum) – Russ made a motion to accept the December 6, 2016 meeting minutes. Suzie seconded the motion and the motion passed.

V. New Business

- a. Election of officers for 2017 – The current 2016 officers are: Chairman, Denny Heffron; Vice-Chairman, Michele Van Houten and Secretary, Suzie Reinbold. Discussion followed among the members regarding keeping the officers the same as in 2016 and if they would be willing to serve again in 2017. Suzie made the

motion to keep the same officers for 2017. Carl seconded the motion and the motion passed.

The 2017 officers are: Chairman, Denny Heffron; Vice-Chairman, Michele Van Houten and Secretary, Suzie Reinbold.

- b. 2016/2017 Meeting Schedule – Stacy passed out the schedule dates for the 2017 meetings of the Agricultural Preservation Board and said that it was just a suggested listing and asked for comments/suggestions. Ed made a motion to accept the meeting dates listed. Suzie seconded the motion and the motion passed. It was suggested that members pencil in all of the dates on their calendars, however, Stacy will still send out monthly reminders as to whether there will be a meeting that month.
- c. Appraisal Policy – Stacy has been working on updating the “Kent County Agriculture Preservation Board Application and Appraisal Process and Policies” and she handed out copies to the members. The purpose of this update is because of the number of applicants that go through the farmland preservation application process and then back out at the last minute. After this process, the board is left with the bill for the appraisal and the applicant owes nothing. With the updated process, the applicant will be shown an average value of land in their area. If they proceed, an appraisal will be ordered. After the appraisal is completed, if the value of land is at the average or above and the applicant backs out, the applicant is responsible for the cost of the appraisal fee. A land map will be created and the appraisals already completed will be divided into land regions to give the applicant a good idea what property in their region has been appraised at already.

A good year for the Agriculture Preservation Board would be the financial ability to preserve 4-5 farms per year.

VI. Old Business

- a. ACEP Grant Application – The FRPP deadline for applications is February 10 this year. Currently, the board is moving forward with the Roth property which is 114 acres. The funding will come from the Wege Grant and a \$5,000 donation from the Roths.
- b. Landowner Awareness Meetings – It was suggested that the board hold two meetings to invite landowners to find out how the farmland preservation process works. A suggestion was made to hold one morning meeting and one evening meeting to meet the needs of landowners. The first meeting was suggested for

some time in March and will be a breakfast meeting at 8:00 a.m. The location would be in the Grattan/Vergennes Township area, possibly at the Lowell Township Hall on March 1. The board could ask the Farm Bureau to sponsor the meeting and pay for the breakfast food.

The second meeting would be in April and be an evening meeting in the Sparta area. The idea was brought up that the Farm Bureau Legislative Breakfast is held in April and possibly the board could be placed on their agenda for the morning to explain about the farmland preservation program. Denny will try to find out the date and a contact person for Stacy to contact about a spot on their agenda for that day. If not, the board's thoughts were that they could hold their meeting right after the Legislative Breakfast is over and the farmers would still be in attendance. We will have to see how this works out.

Carl Blough had two items to bring up to the board members. First, Bert Blakey is interested in getting more agricultural businesses into the area and he is working with the Wege and Frey Foundations to check into funding sources for these businesses. Secondly, Carl has been appointed to be the District Director of the Corn Growers Association and he will be resigning from the Agricultural Preservation Board after the June, 2017 meeting.

VII. Public Comment - None

VIII. Adjournment – Suzie made a motion to close the meeting. Carl seconded the motion and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 12:29 p.m.

Next Board Meeting is March 1, 2017 at 11:30 AM at Kent/MSU Extension.