

Kent County Agriculture Preservation Board Meeting

December 13, 2017

Kent/MSU Extension

11:30 A.M.

PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE

Members Present: Dennis Heffron (Ag Interest), Ed Robinette (Township Interest), Russ Slater (Ag Interest), Michele Van Houten (Conservation Interest) and Steven Versluis (Ag Interest)

Members Absent: Suzie Reinbold (Real Estate Interest) and Robert Womack (County Commissioner)

Staff Present: Stacy Byers (Board Coordinator), Debbie Green (Kent/MSU Extension) and Elliott Nelson (Administrator's Office)

- I. Welcome and Call to Order** – The meeting was called to order at 11:33 a.m. by Chairman, Dennis Heffron.
- II. Public Comment** - None
- III. Review Agenda and Declaration of Any Possible Conflict of Interest** - None
- IV. Review and Adoption of September 6, 2017 Minutes** – Ed Robinette made a motion to accept the September 6, 2017 minutes. Russ Slater seconded the motion and the motion passed. Just a reminder that there were no minutes from the October 4, 2017 meeting because there was not a quorum present at the meeting.
- V. New Business**
 - a. 2019 Budget Request** – A meeting took place with Commissioner Jim Sawfield and the ag group that Bert Blakey and others are a part of to discuss the sustainability of long term funding for preserving farm land.

After this meeting, Denny Heffron met with Mary Swanson regarding long term funding for Ag Preservation. It was decided that a request should come from the Ag Preservation Board to the County Commissioners to request \$300,000 funding from the 2019 Budget. Russ Slater made a motion to proceed with a request for funding to the county for the 2019 Budget. Steven Versluis seconded the motion and the motion passed.

Election of Officers for 2019 - Currently the officers are as follows: Dennis Heffron, Chairman; Michele Van Houten, Vice-Chairman and Suzie Reinbold, Secretary. Ed Robinette made the motion to continue next year with the same officers. Russ Slater seconded the motion and the motion passed.

VI. Old Business

- a. 2017 Application Cycle update – Sieracki Farm; Hefferan Trust Farm** – The survey and appraisals have been completed on the Sieracki Farm. The funding will come at the closing from the Wege Foundation.

Denny Heffron met with the Ada Township Board asking for help with funding the preservation of the Hefferan Trust Farm. The Ada Township Board was anxious to help fund the preservation of the Farrell Farm before they backed out of their preservation. It would be a smoother preservation process if Federal Funds were not requested.

Stacy explained how frustrating it is to work with the ACEP (Agricultural Conservation Easement Program) Program and not just in Michigan, it is nationwide. The problems/challenges come with the paperwork required and the wording that needs to be used in the paperwork. In the current NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) manual, the federal government program funds equal 45% of the total cost of preservation of a parcel of land.

b. 2016 Easements

- i. Bradford** – Stacy is planning on a January 2018 closing. The American Trust is funding \$110,000 of this preservation. There has been a little bit of a challenge because some of the farm land has been moved to a different trust (Estate Planning) during this process.
- ii. Roth** – The Roth's already have a great conservation plan in place, but this is the third easement draft for this property. The updated appraisal should be ready in January as well as the conservation plan. This preservation will be funded with a match from the Roth's. This property has been a challenge because of the oil and gas lease that is in place currently.

It was suggested that the topic of stewardship of farm land will become more of an important/active discussion in the coming years when the 3rd and 4th generation of farmers become the owners of the land.

- VII. Public Comment** – Guest, Scott Moton made some comments on what his opinions were regarding the topics discussed at the meeting.

VIII. Adjournment – A motion was made by Ed Robinette to adjourn the meeting. Steve Versluis seconded the motion and the motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 12:50 p.m.

Next meeting date is January 3, 2018 at 11:30 AM at Kent/MSU Extension.