

Luzerne County Farmland Preservation Board

Meeting Minutes – April 17, 2020

The Luzerne County Farmland Preservation Board met via conference call Friday, April 17, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually. Anyone interested in attending the meeting had the opportunity to email or call the Conservation District prior to the meeting. At that time, they would have been given the meeting log in information. Documents discussed during the meeting were available on the Conservation District website.

Attendance: The following members were in attendance: Linda Thoma, Board Chair; Jon Lucas, farmer; Rich Yost, municipal; Matt Balliet, farmer; Jennifer Lauri, program administrator; Bryan McManus, former commercial.

Meeting Minutes:

Linda Thoma called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. The meeting was recorded for minute taking purposes as well as availability if requested. The meeting can be found at <https://transcripts.gotomeeting.com/#/s/0f9db6fdbc91d8fb9a140045cc710cd86ce13aba4d1312b9b4a8f828356bb78> until this meeting's minutes are approved.

The meeting minutes for December 3, 2019 were presented for approval via email prior to the meeting, also available on the Conservation District website. Rich Yost made the motion to approve the minutes. Jon Lucas seconded it. Motion passed. Minutes for this meeting will be signed at the next physical meeting.

Jennifer shared information for the farms currently being worked on, Gary & Cathy Moyer, Richard and Susan Larock, Helen Stanovich and Robert Kashubski. The three farms are projected to be preserved at the June 11, 2020 State Board meeting.

Jennifer discussed the Joseph and Patricia Gans farm. The Board reviewed the appraisal information and based on the appraisal completed for their farm, Matt Balliet made the motion to offer Joseph and Patricia Gans \$3,400.00 per acre for the easement of their 276.9-acre farm. Rich Yost seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Jennifer informed the Board that our State funds allocation will be less than originally anticipated due to needing to fill gaps in the State budget. At this time, we do not know the amount of State funds being allocated.

Jennifer presented a change we are requesting to make to our Guide. The change would be to section "Procedures for Easement Evaluation and Purchase" and more specifically under "Evaluation and Ranking Applications". The change would be the addition of the below paragraph:

If an applicant, after his farm has been ranked, decides to alter the application from the manner in which it was ranked for that calendar year, the applicant must withdraw the application until the next round of applications are accepted. If the landowner withdraws the application, or changes the acreage to be included after an appraisal has been completed, he is

then responsible for any costs resulting from the board's selection of the site, including appraisal costs, survey, or other incidental costs related to the acquisition process.

Matt Balliet made a motion to approve the additional verbiage to our guide. Jon Lucas seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Jennifer discussed with the Board the current 2020 waitlist of applicants. The farm at the top of the list is Benjamin Smith in Hollenback Township with 132 acres. Matt made a motion to move forward and proceed with the Benjamin Smith preservation. Rich Yost seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Linda questioned the score of a farm on our waitlist. Linda and Matt agreed that it was out of the ordinary for a farm in the location it is to rank so high. Jennifer will be going over this application and LESA again for this farm.

Matt Balliet also questioned his own application score on the waitlist. Matt felt the score was low based on the soils on the farm and location. Jennifer will also be reviewing Matt Balliet's farm application and the LESA.

Jennifer discussed with the Board possibly lowering the minimum acreage in order to apply to our County program. We have received inquiries from interested applicants; however, they fall slightly short with the acreage. Information was presented that Jennifer had learned from the State and that being that we could change our subdivision rules so that more than 2 acres with a house can be subdivided. This would be of interest in situations where a farm is being distributed amongst a family and not all members of the family are interested in preservation. After discussion, the Board would like to revisit this option in the future since we have at least 20 applicants on the waitlist that are meeting the minimum acreage.

Jennifer updated the Board on getting appraisal refunds back to the farm owners recently preserved. Refunds have been sorted out and distributed.

Jennifer provided an update on inspections being done and all farms have been in compliance thus far.


Linda mentioned inconsistencies she found cited in the State's "The Guide to Farmland Preservation." The information in our Guide comes verbatim from the State's. Linda asked if, in the future, we have to make small changes such as typos or citation references to our Guide, can we make those changes without needing Board approval? Rich Yost made the motion to approve no meeting needed or Board approval to make small changes. Jon Lucas seconded this motion. Motion passed.

Rich Yost made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:27 a.m. Jon Lucas seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Prepared By:


Jennifer Lauri

For:


Jon Lucas (Secretary)