

***AGRICULTURAL AND LAND CONSERVATION
COMMITTEE MINUTES
January 29, 2024***

The meeting of the Stafford County Agricultural and Land Conservation Committee for Monday, January 29, 2024, was called to order at 7:00pm, in the Activities Conference Room in the George L. Gordon Government Center by Acting Planning and Zoning Director, Kathy Baker.

Members	Present	Absent
Jeff Adams	X	
Joanna Berger	X	
John Howe	X	
Tim O’Leary	X	
Benjamin Rudasill	X	

Staff Present: Kathy Baker and Vicki Sowers

1. Call to Order

Kathy Baker called the meeting to order at 7:00pm and confirmed there was a quorum present.

2. Welcome New Member – Tim O’Leary (George Washington District)

3. Organize Committee

- Election of Officers

Ms. Baker reminded everyone that officers can serve only two consecutive years.

Chairman: Jeff Adams nominated John Howe for Chairman. Ben Rudasill seconded the nomination. Passed, 5/0.

Vice-Chair: Ben Rudasill nominated Jeff Adams. No second needed. Passed, 5/0.

- 2024 Meeting Calendar

Jeff Adams made a motion to accept the calendar with the following changes: January 23 was moved to January 29 and the May 27 meeting is canceled. Edited calendar accepted, 5/0.

- 2024 Work Plan

The Committee reviewed the Work Plan section by section.

Jeff Adams questioned if the 2017 application round was complete. Ms. Baker reported that there is one more property, the one at the end of New Hope Church Road, which is very close to completion. The USDA appraisal came in at a higher amount so they had to work through the process to change the payment to the higher amount. Closing should be by the end of March. Once that’s complete the 2017 application round will be complete.

Mr. Howe asked if item 2B should be reworded to say something like “Work with Board of Supervisors in order to complete the 2022 applications round towards easement acquisitions”. Kathy agreed that the item can be reword since all are already in various stages of process. The County funds for the seven application is available. The matching funds are still needed.

In regards to items 3 and 4 Ms. Baker updated the Committee on the education outreach program and website improvements that have been made. In May there is a Virginia United Land Trust conference here in Fredericksburg at UMW. Field trips are planned for Crow’s Nest and the Adams’ farm. Laura Hassell is also working on the development of donated lands and the PDR program. Updates will be provided to the Commission periodically.

Mr. Howe would like to look further into a Farmer of the Year recognition similar to what Soil and Water Conservation District does in terms of recognizing individual farms or farmers for their efforts to conserve the resources and reduce the pollutants that gets in the streams and ultimately into the Chesapeake Bay. John Howe will look into this more.

Jeff Adams moved to accept the 2024 Work Plan with amendments. Ben Rudasill seconded. 2024 Work Plan accepted, 5/0.

- By-laws

By-laws were provided for review. Tim O’Leary questioned if Secretary should be removed since staff performs the secretarial duties. Kathy will talk to the County Attorney to see if it can be removed. Ben Rudasill made a motion to table the discussion pending clarification. Jeff Adams seconded. Motion passed, 5/0.

4. Public Presentations

Bob Roulette is in attendance to learn more about the PDR program and other conservation options that are available. He suggested it would be useful information for the public to know which lands/properties have already been considered for the program. He also suggested a list should be included on the website that shows which properties are in progress and what the status may be. He offered to speak to Ms. Hassell about what would be helpful on the website from a citizen’s perspective.

Mark and Allison Gage from the Rock Hill District are in attendance to learn a little more about what the Committee does and to get a little more involved with Stafford. Mr. Adams commented that there is an opening on this Commission in the Rock Hill District. Mr. Gage said he may take it into consideration once he learns a learns a little more about how Stafford County Government works.

Marshall Locklear and Robin and Lester Long are in attendance for the Farmer’s Market application.

5. Staff Update

- **Purchase of Development Rights Program Funding and Applications**

There are seven applications in the 2022 round and one of those has been withdrawn. They are looking at other agricultural uses for their land. Number one on the list is the John and Cathy Harris property on Spotted Tavern and Hartwood Road. It is being funded by Virginia Department of Agricultural and

Consumer Services matching funds from prior years. There is enough money to proceed and the deed is underway. They plan to meet later in the week and make additional recommendations. Ms. Baker hopes to close on that property by early summer. The second one in process is the Janet Harris Farm, which is in the George Washington District right on the King George line. It is 73 acres and funding has been received from Virginia Land Conservation Foundation. It could be closed by early to mid-summer. The appraisal is already underway. Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is granting new funds and these funds are not project specific. This means the committee can just work down the list in order. There is possibly enough matching funds available for the next two properties. If there isn't enough they will still proceed with one and wait until additional matching funds can be applied for. There are potentially four in process for this year and will complete the last two next year. Ms. Baker will keep the Commission updated on the progress.

6. New Business

- **Farmers Market Application – Long Family Market and Marshall Locklear**

Currently the Long Family Market is located in the Staffordboro commuter lot. The County Attorney has some concerns about signing the VDOT permit. VDOT requires the County to co-sponsor the permit. Ms. Long will be meeting with the BOS in early February to discuss the concerns. In the meantime, she will be meeting with Ms. Baker and the Economic Development department to discuss possible alternative locations within the County.

Ms. Baker provided a little background as this affects both of the applications. They are both held currently in the Saffordboro commuter lot, which is owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia. VDOT requires a permit and they won't accept permits from individuals so the County has been the sponsor for these permits since 2016. This year's permit was set to expire on March 31. When the County went to renew the application, it was brought to the County's attention that damage had been done to another commuter lot that the County had sponsored. The County Attorney decided to readdress the issue of holding the permits that the County is ultimately liable for. The Board of Supervisors wants to see the markets continue but have to question how much liability the County carries or if there's a way around that. The BOS will meet on February 6 to discuss if they want to accept that liability and responsibility and continue it there or if there is another location that would be more suitable. If school properties are used there are different liabilities and concerns that the school would take into consideration. The applications were brought forward for discussion with the same number of vendors, how they are operating and the same managers. The location is the only thing in question. They Commission can conditionally approved the applications for that location or have the applicant come back once the Board makes a decision. The biggest issue is parking since there is upwards of 3000 customers coming through every week. The two options for the Commission are to either table this until the next meeting or to vote for approval contingent upon Stafford County agreeing to enter into an agreement with VDOT. If they don't agree then the whole application changes and the applicants would need to come back to the Commission for approval.

Mr. Locklear questioned why Spotsylvania isn't having the same issues Stafford is. Spotsylvania County sponsors the farmer's market. Stafford doesn't. Stafford only sponsors the land use permit at the VDOT lot.

The Long Family Market uses 2.5 parking spaces per vendor for their 80+ vendors. They have 357 regular and 120 handicap parking spaces for customer parking. Marshall Market is in the same parking lot at the opposite end, across from Lowes.

Long Family Market has been at that lot for six years and never had an incident of damage. They carry a million dollar per occurrence insurance coverage and require every vendor onsite to also carry a million dollars of insurance coverage per occurrence. Stafford County is named as an additional insured on the policies.

Jeff Adams said if on Tuesday the Board decides against sponsoring the Market he is going recommend that Parks and Rec sponsor it at the 610 lot. This would at least help the vendors and customers continue to have a market.

Jeff Adams made a motion to approve the Long Family Market application contingent upon the County and VDOT coming to an agreement. Ben Rudasill seconded the motion to approve the Long Family Market as proposed. Motion passed, 5/0.

Jeff Adams made a motion to approve Marshall Farmers Market application contingent upon the County and VDOT coming to an agreement. Ben Rudasill seconded the motion. Motion passed, 5/0.

7. Approval of Minutes

Jeff Adams motioned to approve the April 24, 2023 minutes as printed. Joanna Berger seconded. The motion passed, 5/0.

8. Member Comments

Ben Rudasill expressed he was happy to meet again. He will chat with Mr. Roulette after the meeting about the PDR program. It's a great program but not a fast process. It's very beneficial.

Jeff Adams thinks they need a plan if VDOT says no to the market. Ms. Long said its not VDOT, it's the Board. VDOT hasn't changed their policy or done anything different. The County Attorney is the issue.

Ms. Baker said VDOT came to the County initially and said they have concerns about renewing the application because of the damage to the other lot. The County Attorney has not said the County was not going to do it, they are looking at other options. The County Attorney has only advised that there are concerns but has not said it can't happen.

Tim O'Leary pointed out that the commuter lots are used for all types of commercial motor vehicles. Tractor-trailers, buses and boats are left parked there because they aren't allowed to park in their own communities and they are a bigger liability than the Farmer's Markets. The Farmer's Market is good for the community while the vehicles left there are leaking or damaged and look messy. Mr. Locklear added the lots were cleaned up a while ago because of a big tractor trailer fire but people are starting to leave vehicles there again.

John Howe is concerned for the vendors who have already started prepping for the season and depend on the markets to sell their produce. He is also concerned about the citizens who deserve the opportunity to buy fresh local produce.

Joanna Berger said she is very impressed with how well the farmer's market is run. Ms. Long thanked her and pointed out they do other community and kid's programs. They have a program where they give the

kids money specifically for produce and they come back a let them know what they tried, how they liked it and she gives them different ideas of how to prepare it and other nutritional information. They also have a local farm that comes out twice a month with farm animals to give a little education about how the animals are raised. Ms. Berger said in 2019 she helped run a meal program for the homeless and the market would donate leftover produce after the market. The program helped teach volunteers how to prepare fresh foods and served it to the homeless. Ms. Long also mentioned they started a literacy program two years ago and local authors come out and take turns reading to the kids.

Tim O’Leary said he will be calling his Supervisor, Deuntay Diggs, on the way home and thinks all members should be doing the same thing, to let them know where they all stand on this issue.

Mr. Locklear shared that he has vendors who are struggling and depend on the market for their livelihood. They have no idea how many people this effects and the issue needs to be resolved.

9. Next Meeting

February 26, 2024

10. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss John Howe adjourned the meeting at 8:01pm.