

**AGRICULTURAL AND LAND CONSERVATION
COMMITTEE MINUTES
April 22, 2024**

The meeting of the Stafford County Agricultural and Land Conservation Committee for Monday, April 22, 2024, was called to order at 7:05 p.m., in the ABC Conference Room in the George L. Gordon Government Center by Chairman John Howe.

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

Staff Present: Kathy Baker and Vicki Sowers

Guests: John Harris and Charlene Thomas (Farmer’s Market Applicant)

1. Call to Order

John Howe, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and confirmed there was a quorum present.

2. Public Presentations

John Harris asked to speak to the committee with suggestions and comments regarding the current PDR application process. He introduced himself as a previous and current benefactor of the PDR Program and disclosed that he was a former member of this committee. Harris said he has two properties already in the PDR Program and is currently working to secure another of his properties to the program. He said he is a believer but would like to share feedback from the applicant’s standpoint as he goes through the current application.

1. Compensation/Appraisal process.

Criteria – County uses high/best use of property which equals density. Mr. Harris said he got his own appraiser after the County completed theirs. His appraiser had a different approach and although the results were similar in the end – how the two appraisers reached them were different. Mr. Harris suggests the committee should work on defining “high/best use of property” moving forward. He said the appraisers need clarity up front and the County Attorney could help with the language. He also requested the committee offer an opportunity for the applicant to review and debate the appraisal during the process. He said the program is a success and the purpose is to make the process and program better.

2. Taxes

Mr. Harris explained that there are three layers of government in the PDR Program process Local, State, and Federal – TAXES. He explained this is the reason for doing his own appraisal and documentation. In order to safely protect the assets, he explained that it is recommended that a large amount of pre-work and study be completed – survey, engineering, etc. Keep all reports in case of an audit. He said this report can cost anywhere from \$10,000 - \$30,000. Mr. Harris requests that the committee/County consider some type of letter similar to a Zoning Determination Letter that would provide and confirm this type of information as some other localities do. He said if the committee could put something like this together/some type of documentation it could help incentive and encourage more property participation

in the PDR Program. Kathy Baker responded to the request briefly acknowledging that this type of document is a risk to the County. Mr. Harris asked the committee to consider what could be done that would help – less cost to applicants.

Mr. Harris concluded with his gratitude to the committee for their time as he departed the meeting.

Mr. Howe made a motion to move the Unfinished Business agenda item up since Ms. Charlene Thomas was present for her portion of the meeting. Mr. Jeff Adams seconded. All approved (4-0).

3. Unfinished Business

- **Farmer's Market Application – Charlene Thomas**

Ms. Charlene Thomas was welcomed back. She gave a summary of where she is so far with the process – working on an Emergency Preparedness Plan and is waiting for VDOT's response to parking lot approval (same as previously submitted – Rt. 630 Commuter Lot). Mr. Howe asked for her expected capacity – how many vendors with parking? Ms. Thomas said it holds about 517 and noted the spaces in yellow on the map provided, but said she is looking at about 40 vendors. Mr. Adams said his main comments are that two items be added to the Rules and Guidelines vendor paperwork – 1. No dogs allowed other than service dogs. 2. Tent weights must be a requirement. Ms. Baker asked if he had a recommendation. Mr. Adams said 25lbs. per leg. Tim O'Leary agreed and advised Ms. Thomas that not having this requirement could be a liability. Ms. Thomas said she can add this. Mr. Howe and Mr. Adams both continued discussion regarding the Rules and Guidelines suggested amendments.

Mr. O'Leary asked Ms. Thomas about her vendor list (currently 22 vendors noted on handout). He said he looked them up and can identify nine (9) that are outside of the Farmers Market Guidelines by definition. Discussion ensued regarding produce vs. non-produce, and the criteria needed to be a vendor in the market.

Ms. Thomas explained the market is access to food and community – hand produced. Mr. Adams asked about the crafts. He said Farmer's Markets are typically for "consumed" goods – eat and drink with goat milk soap an example of being an exception. Ms. Thomas said due timing and late in the year for the fall market planning, she has not had as much interest from the agricultural side for 2024. Mr. Rudasill suggested that the vendors are more as seen at a flea market.

Ms. Baker was asked if permitting was already established. She said the permit has not been obtained yet. She has contacted VDOT. Mr. O'Leary disclosed that last sentence of the Farmer's Market Ordinance indicating the specific types of vendors that are allowed. Discussion continued regarding the Ordinance and what be required by staff/committee and the BOS to amend the ordinance to include crafts.

Ms. Baker offered some insight regarding allowance of crafts. She said it depends what type of craft it is/by-product of Stafford County. She said the rule is 80% must be local (within 125-mile radius) and 20% can be from outside of that area. Examples and details were given.

Ms. Baker asked Ms. Thomas for more information on the nine (9) non-produce vendors.

Mr. Adams suggested tabling the item and Mr. O’Leary made the motion to table until next meeting in order to get additional information about the proposed vendors. Mr. Adams seconded. Vote approved to table for more information (4-0).

4. Staff Update (moved from Agenda Item 3)

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

Ms. Baker advised that the Harris Property is finalizing details of the deed and could be ready to close by next month – end of June - but since the required cut-off wasn’t met, there will be a loss of \$175,000 of 2022 matching funds. She said the AP Legacy (White Oak) property appraisal is in and the request for matching funds grant through VDACS isn’t quite enough to cover the appraised value, but there are existing VDACS funds that can be applied. She also said that the deed draft is going through the first review. There could be an August closing on this one. Open Space Value (no dwelling on the property) was discussed. Ms. Baker announced that the next two (2) properties’ – Long and Bell – appraisals will begin soon. The appraisals are needed to determine the amount of funds that will be needed. She advised that since the appraisal only lasts for six (6) months, a new appraisal could be required prior to final closing on these properties if not closed within six months. She said there are six (6) total properties – two (2) more after these appraisals – hopefully may all be done by end of the year.

Ms. Baker explained that by summer the next round of match fund applications will be opening. This will assist to know if Federal funds will be needed – it is preferred to use State funding due to the complexity and length of time associated with Federal funds.

Mr. Adams suggested/asked if it is possible to make payments to the property owners over time as opposed to one lump sum. He said it would be similar to winning the lottery and choosing to take payments over time – offer assistance/delays on real estate taxes? Ms. Baker said she had done some research in previous years with regard to other localities using creative ways to pay/fund the PDR Programs. Virginia Beach was an example discussed. Ms. Baker said she will do some research and prior to the next round of applications, and the committee can review options.

Ms. Baker announced that the Board approved the FY25 budget which included \$15,000 to assist with land owner out-of-pocket costs when they are looking to donate their land. The process needs to be finalized – criteria for accepting land is still in progress. Laura Hassell of NVCT (partner with Stafford County) is assisting with this project.

Ms. Baker said she wants to visit Mr. Harris’ requests (from Public Presentation Agenda Item). She said as for appraisals, there are specifications that the USDA/VCLF/DoD requires as part of their funding criteria and the county is bound by those guidelines. She said she would look at other localities for how they handle the documentation he requested/suggested. Discussion ensued regarding whole process.

5. New Business

- **Land Conservation – Target Areas**

Ms. Baker handed out a Future Land Use map and an Open Space Land map

She said the Board has suggested considering conservation efforts include criteria to be targeted around unsafe/substandard roads. She said that NVCT has a GIS based program that can build layers based on priorities. The map will show lands to target and then can zero in on those property owners. Ms. Baker asked if there are any other suggestions/parameters to consider? Mr. Adams started a discussion regarding the 20-acre minimum now that the cluster ordinance is in place (20 acres = 3 homes). He also stated that the REPI (Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration) program area around Quantico be included on the map. Ms. Baker asked for anyone with thoughts or suggestions to send her an email.

6. Approval of Minutes

- February 26, 2024

Mr. Adams motioned to approve the February 26, 2024 minutes. Mr. Rudasill seconded. Minutes approved with 4-0 vote.

7. Member Comments

Mr. O'Leary – None

Mr. Adams – Announced that on May 14th, a tour will be offered on his property for the Conservation Conference and would like to invite everyone. It is on Tuesday from 1:00-3:00 p.m. Ms. Baker said she annually visits PDR Properties and if anyone would like to ride along/visit, just let her know.

Mr. Rudasille – None

Mr. Howe – Announced that he had visited his grandchildren's elementary schools for Career Day and spoke of agriculture. He advised that the kids were most impressed with his tractor.

8. Next Meeting

- June 24, 2024

9. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss Chairman Howe adjourned the meeting at 8:38 p.m.