



# BERKS COUNTY *agricultural land* PRESERVATION BOARD

Berks County Agricultural Center  
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**County Commissioners:**

Christian Y. Leinbach, Chair  
Kevin S. Barnhardt  
Michael S. Rivera

**Board Members:**

David L. Phillips, Chair  
James R. Coker, Vice Chair  
Robert E. Kopfer

Robert B. Ludgate, Sr., PE, PLS  
Kimberly J. McGrath  
Jeremy R. Meck

Steven C. Mohn  
Clyde A. B. Myers  
Louise A. Swartley

**Ex Officio:**

Robert C. Ziegenfus, Ph.D.

**Solicitor:**

Mark R. Sprow, Esq.

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## Minutes from the June 24, 2020 Meeting

The Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board (Board) held a regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, June 24, 2020 at 7:35 PM via virtual platform “**Microsoft Teams**.” David Phillips, Chair, called the meeting to order. Board members present included James Coker, Robert Kopfer, Kimberly McGrath, Jeremy Meck, Clyde Myers, David Phillips, and Louise Swartley. Also in attendance were Mark Sprow, Esq. Special Counsel for the Board; Tami Hildebrand, Executive Director.

### **I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS – None.**

### **II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the April 29, 2020 meeting, as drafted. (J. Coker, R. Kopfer)**

**Discussion: None**

**Vote: Motion approved.**

### **III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES**

- Tami Hildebrand reported that there were no changes in status of the farms in process between tonight’s meeting and when the list was previously distributed to the Board.
  - With the passage of the State’s 5-month budget, Doug Wolfgang, Executive Director of the Bureau of Farmland Preservation, encouraged County Administrators to submit outstanding farm recommendations as soon as possible. Hildebrand reviewed the status of the remaining seven (7) farms in process. She reported that Amanda Burkard-Sell would be returning to work on July 1<sup>st</sup> and she will focus on submitting these farms for the August and October State Board meetings.
  - Hildebrand referred to Section D. of the Status of Recommendations list of applications approved at the State Board meeting on June 11<sup>th</sup> and added that Wolfgang announced that with the approval of Docket #1915 will bring Berks County’s total acres preserved to 75,000 and will be the first county in the State to do so. Secretary of Agriculture, Russell Redding, offered on behalf of the State Board of Farmland Preservation and the PA Department of Agriculture - “Congratulations and great job to the Board and Staff, in meeting this milestone! Well done!”
  - David Phillips said that this is something to be proud of and is quite an accomplishment.
  - The Board discussed the likelihood of not being able to celebrate this milestone due to the current conditions associated with COVID-19 and the of inability to assemble more than 25 people. It decided that an event would be better suited to be held after the farm has settled and in the spring of 2021.
  - Jeremy Meck suggested the creation of an informative virtual event like schools are uploading lessons onto “You Tube.”

- Clyde Myers and Hildebrand will produce a Press release to announce the milestone, but without mentioning the owners name of the actual farm.
- Phillips stated that due to the Board not meeting in July, he suggested that it revisits this topic in August after assessing what the current circumstances are at that time.

#### IV. OLD BUSINESS

##### A. Reallocation of State 2020 Easement Purchase Funds

- Hildebrand reported that in March, the State Budget office redirected \$5 million from the initial \$43 million allocated in February leaving \$38 million for easement purchases in 2020 across 59 PA counties;
  - The Board was provided a revised funding schedule. It was reminded that the County certified \$1,044,578 in January, which was matched with \$2,703,607 by the State.
  - With the reallocation, the County's certification was matched with \$2,389,234, totaling \$3,433,812 for easement purchases in 2020; the reallocation realized a loss of \$314,373 to the County for easement purchases.

#### V. NEW BUSINESS

##### A. 2020 LESA Ranking Round 46 Results & Selection

- Hildebrand emailed the results of the Ranking to the Board prior to the meeting.
  - She noted that 117 eligible applications were ranked, which represented 8,197 acres. Scores ranged from the highest score of 76.11 to the lowest score of 28.38.
  - To determine how many farms/acres could be selected, Hildebrand reviewed how the cost of each farm is determined. Each application's acreage is multiplied by the cap of \$2,500 per acre then \$6,000 is added, per farm, as an approximation of the total cost of incidental expenses that will be incurred when preserving the farm. These incidentals expenses include the costs of an appraisal, survey, title work, and certified mail postage. Using this formula, the funds needed to preserve complete farms are exhausted at the 16<sup>th</sup> application, Docket #0815 which has a score of 54.59.
  - The Board was reminded that it cannot overspend the funds that have been allocated and that the cut-off score is determined by quarter, half or whole number scores.
  - Myers requested a review of how the docket numbers associated with each application are derived. Hildebrand reviewed that the first two digits of the docket number reflect the first year that the application is ranked, and the last two digits reflect where the application fell alphabetically, by landowner's name, depending upon the other applicants that are also being ranked for the first time that year.

**Motion: A motion was made to select the first 16 applications with a cut-off score of 54.50. (C. Myers, K. McGrath)**

**Discussion: None**

**Vote: Motion approved.**

**Motion: A motion was made to authorize the Executive Director the discretion in selecting additional farms until the funds are exhausted. (J. Coker, J. Meck)**

**Discussion: None**

**Vote: Motion approved.**

##### B. Proposed change to LESA Ranking "Scenic & Environmental Quality" Factor

- Hildebrand reported that she will present this topic to the Board in August and requested that the Board members keep the letter from Berks Nature and the aerial photograph of Docket #1337, which were previously distributed..
- C. USDA Farm Service Agency request for County Committee Nominations
- Hildebrand shared that the nomination period is open for candidates to the Farm Service Agency's County Committee from June 15<sup>th</sup> to August 1<sup>st</sup>.
    - Qualifications that the candidate must meet are:
      - Must reside in the Local Administrative Area (LAA) 2 region, which includes: Albany, Bern, Fleetwood, Greenwich, Hamburg, Laureldale, Leesport, Maiden creek, Muhlenberg, Ontelaunee, Perry, Reading, Richmond, Ruscombmanor, Tilden, Upper Bern, Windsor, and Wyomissing;
      - Must participate or cooperate in a program administered by FSA and, must sign and submit the nomination form FSA-339A
      - Must be eligible to vote in a County Committee election.
    - The Board discussed the potential candidates. Myers volunteered to provide names of potential candidates in that region and forward them to Hildebrand to contact and ask if they are interested in serving on the Committee.

## VI. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

### A. Easement Modification Requests

- Settlement #554.0 Dennis & Adele Dietrich
  - This 40.3-acre farm located in Upper Tulpehocken Township was preserved in April 2009. The Dietrich's are requesting to construct a 20' x 40' addition to an existing 20' x 30' run-in shed in a pasture. This request is acceptable under the terms of the easement.
- Settlement #456.0 Dean & Brenda Peiffer
  - This 100.1-acre farm located in Jefferson Township was preserved in September 2007. The Peiffer's are requesting to construct a 32' x 60' pole building that will store a combine, headers, and corn planter; it will also include a small workshop for equipment repairs. The building will not take farmland out of production. This request is acceptable under the terms of the easement.

### B. State Board of Farmland Preservation statistics from the June 11, 2020 meeting

- The statistics were distributed prior to the meeting.
  - Meck asked if Berks County's Program still held the 3<sup>rd</sup> in the nation position. Hildebrand responded that Bowers Publishing, which collected national farmland preservation program data, no longer exists and American Farmland Trust only tracks data at the State level, so this designation is difficult to determine.

### C. Berks County Ag Resources and Information Newsletter

- Hildebrand stated that a cooperative effort between the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) and Berks County Dept. of Agriculture has resulted in the creation of a newsletter that is distributed bi-weekly via email and snail mail. Its intention is to provide information on resources to support farmers and small businesses during these challenging times.
  - The Board provided positive feedback and supported its continuation.

D. Staff returning to work

- Hildebrand announced that the Staff will be returning to work after being furloughed since April 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - Amanda Burkard-Sell will begin working remotely on Wednesday, July 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - Kim Fies and Clyde Myers will resume farm inspections after returning on Wednesday, July 8<sup>th</sup>. Hildebrand reminded the Board that farms preserved through the Federal Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP) must be inspected annually and inspection reports must be filed with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) by August 15<sup>th</sup>. The Board and the FRPP have jointly preserved 54 farms, of which 52 farms remain to be inspected prior to August 15<sup>th</sup>. After this deadline has been met, Fies and Myers will resume inspecting all other farms that are scheduled for their annual inspection, including farms that settled in 2019, or have transferred ownership during 2019, farms that have changed their farming operations, and those farms with conservation issues. When not completing inspections, Fies and Myers will be working remotely.
  - The Agricultural Center remains closed to the Public until further notice.

VII. **CITIZEN COMMENT / BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR** – None

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- **Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 PM. (R. Kopfer, J. Meck)**

Respectfully submitted,

*Signature on file.*

Tami S. Hildebrand  
Executive Director