

MINUTES

Farmland Protection Program Durham Soil and Water Conservation District Virtual Zoom Meeting

Meeting Number: 7 (Farmland Protection Advisory Board) Date: November 18, 2021

Advisory Board Present:

Nicole Connelly – Chair – Little River VAD
David Heeks – At Large
Heidi Carter – County Commissioner
Nancy Herndon – Cape Fear VAD
Matthew Eagle – At Large
Lindsay White – At Large
William Sparrow – Business Representative
Samantha Gasson – At Large

Others Present:

Sherry Scully – Soil & Water
Lisa Marochak – Soil & Water
Celeste Burns – Open Space
Jane Korest – Open Space
Donna Rewalt – Cooperative Extension
Janel Ohletz – Cooperative Extension

The regular monthly meeting of the Farmland Protection Advisory Board was held on Thursday, November 18, 2021 and called to order at 6:38 pm by the Chair. The meeting was held as a virtual Zoom meeting.

1. **Financial Report** - Lisa Marochak reminded Board that money in account will need to be spent by April 2022. She will have costs for needed VAD materials at the December meeting. Farmer Breakfast Series will exhaust another portion of the budget. Nicole suggested that some money go towards the video that is being created and suggestion made that schools be provided the remaining money.
2. **Presentation provided by Celeste Burns** on Durham County's Easements and Open Space. Celeste reviewed the program's process of acquisition. Different funding sources were discussed as well as overall financial and environmental benefits of the program. Detailed maps were shared with group to show the 21,350 acres that have been preserved in the past 20 years, since program inception. Stories were also shared of those who have preserved acreage, then purchased more of family farm and enrolled it as well. Celeste and Jane both commended the landowners that have made this choice to permanently protect their land.

Celeste has been working on acquiring two additional easements. A motion and advisory recommendation for supporting these easements was requested. Motion made by Bill Sparrow to approve the Claude and Clara Glenn farm and the Alston Glenn Farm. Samantha Gasson seconded the motion. Motion passed with unanimous vote.
3. **Lindsay White's** background has included work with the Conservation Fund with NRCS in Washington, DC. She shared details of opportunities that FPAB may find helpful when considering plans for the future. Lindsay first mentioned NC farm link that helps match farmers to farmland. This has been a topic mentioned at several meetings. Lindsay talked of ideas from other state programs as well as some national programs that are currently available to landowners. Multiple Financing choices for small farms are also available. She included a lease to own pilot program offered through Emory University that is just getting started but is successful. Lindsay offered to send out the links to these websites with further information to Board.

This conversation sparked further discussion about the Durham County Farm Campus. Janel has and continues to look for opportunities for a feasibility study on this project. Acquiring land is another challenge. David mentioned that the county has acquired farmable land around Lake Michie that might be an option. Jane offered to assist with the land search as she was a part of the original group that was investigating this idea.

Lindsay will also reach out to David and others to discuss some of the information offered tonight further. Nicole mentioned the possibility of a Work Group discussing this further.

4. **Agriculture Economic Development update** – Sherry Scully reported that the Ag Economic Development Committee met and is in the process of updating the Grant Program.

Farmer Breakfast Series planned for January and February. Dates proposed are January 20th and February 23rd. Topics were discussed. It was decided that the most important topic pressing on the county at the moment is the Comprehensive Plan. It was requested that Karl Colosna come to discuss the plan and provide specific information concerning the agricultural planning for Durham County. This will give attendees opportunity to become more informed and provide public comment prior to January 31. Sherry will follow through with the planning of this Breakfast.

5. **Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD)** – No new applications at this time.
6. **Cooperative Extension Report** – Farm School will again be offered in the spring of 2022 which starts in February. Janel is currently training with American Farmland Trust to learn more of farmland transition to the next generation. She will be putting training together this spring and summer.

Next Meeting – December 16, 2021 at 6:30 pm. The meeting will be held virtually via Zoom.

Adjourn – With no further discussion or business, Chair, Nicole Connelly adjourned the meeting at 8:06 pm.

Nicole Connelly
Chairman

Sherry Scully
Soil and Water

December 16, 2021
Date approved