

APPROVED MINUTES
Kent County Agricultural Preservation Board
Wednesday, May 12, 2010
Location: Kent/MSU Extension

Meeting called to order at 11:40 a.m. by Gabe Hudson
Members Present: Tom Antor, Carlton Blough, Gabe Hudson, Dennis Heffron, Sr. Lucille Janowiak
Members Absent: Jerry Davis, Suzie Reinbold
Staff Present: Jen DeHaan, Kendra Wills

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ADOPTION OF April 14, 2010 MINUTES

Antor moved and Blough seconded the adoption of the minutes of April 14 as presented. Unanimous.

GUEST PRESENTER: SHAWN MCKENNY OF THE ALLEGAN CONSERVATION DISTRICT ON THE HEALTHY WATERS, RURAL PRIDE INITIATIVE

McKenny introduced himself as the District Conservationist for the Allegan County USDA NRCS office. He distributed a packet of information on the Healthy Waters, Rural Pride (HWRP) project which is designed to tie farmland preservation with water protection measures (i.e. grass waterways and buffer strips) in seven counties in West Michigan. McKenny stated that the Allegan County PDR Program was designed to require 35' foot buffer strips along all streams, county drains, creeks and rivers for all PDR farms – however, Allegan County has yet to preserve a farm through the county's PDR Program. McKenny noted that several county Agricultural Preservation Board members from around West Michigan are participating in the quarterly HWRP meetings and Kent County would also be invited. Committee members feel that tying water protection with farmland protection may open up new funding sources for PDR (i.e. EPA 319 grant funds).

After some discussion the Ag Board agreed that there was little interest in requiring all PDR participants to install a 35' buffer along water courses; however, perhaps that could be added to the scoring system for 2011 if people are willing to do that additional points would be awarded. In addition, there was no interest from the Ag Board interest in changing the ordinance to participate in the HWRP program. (McKenny did not believe this was a requirement but would verify.) Wills agreed to send out meeting notices for HWRP meetings so Kent County could be represented.

PDR FUNDING SUSTAINABILITY SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

Antor reported that the PDR Funding Sustainability Subcommittee had a very informative meeting earlier this week. The SubC is trying to understand how much funding is required to meet the ordinance's goal of preserving 25,000 acres of farmland. A handout from the SubC meeting was distributed for review. \$2,500 per acres is being used as the estimated cost of purchasing developing rights for one acre. The handout give estimates of funding required for several scenarios over a period of 15 years or 25 years to achieve the goal. The handout also notes that an increase in staff support would likely be required if 10 farms will be preserved annually on a regular basis.

Antor also noted that Matt Woolford, Kent County Equalization Director, gave a presentation on the amount that agricultural land contributes in property taxes to the General Fund. He determined that less than 2% of the SEV for Kent County is open agricultural land. It was noted that this does not factor in the agricultural processors such as West Michigan Turkey Producers Co-Op, Country Fresh, King Milling, Jack Brown Produce, etc. as those are classified as commercial or industrial. Woolford calculated that \$782,333 goes to Kent County's general fund on an

annual basis from property taxes on open agricultural lands. It was also noted that some active farmland is classified by local tax assessors as residential rather than agricultural (i.e. Cannon Township).

The SubC is examining a variety of different possible funding mechanisms for PDR. One that was discussed is the possibility of a TIFA on agricultural property to support PDR; however, it was noted this would require state legislation as TIFA for this purpose is currently not permitted.

Antor also noted that EPIC MRA has been contracted to conduct a phone poll to measure the public's knowledge about PDR. A meeting possibly in June would be held with EPIC MRA to discuss the questions and details of the phone poll. The Kent County Administrator's office secured \$15,000 in grant funding from Frey, Grand Rapids Community Foundation and Wege Foundation to fund this phone poll. The Ag Board would be involved in the development of the poll but specific details on how have not been determined at this time.

ADDITIONAL FEDERAL FUNDING FOR PDR

Wills reported that just yesterday USDA NRCS announced that Michigan's Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program had been allocated an additional \$2.1 million to support PDR projects. Grant proposals will be due on July 1. This will require BOC approval and a very tight turn around. Wills noted that five parcels (2 from the James Bradford Family LLC in Sparta, Don Wollander in Nelson, Kruithoffs in Tyrone and Phil and Mary Lou Heffron in Grattan) have been appraised. After some discussion the Ag Board agreed that an attempt should be made to include all five farms in the proposal to USDA. Wills will be attending a meeting in Lansing on May 27 to find out the application requirements. Heffron stated that he would like to attend this meeting as well. The Ag Board also noted that they supported the use of 2011 grant funds for these farms as future federal funding is never a sure thing.

Wills also reported that Brian Thomas with USDA NRCS in Lansing has verbally and electronically (email) confirmed that all five of Kent County's farms submitted for federal funding in February 2010 were awarded federal funding. However, written agreements have yet to be approved and mailed by USDA in Washington D.C. Therefore, this information should remain private until written agreements have been signed by the USDA and Kent County.

UPDATE ON 2010 PDR APPLICATION CYCLE

Wills reported that 29 applications had been submitted to the 2010 Kent County PDR Program from ten (10) townships. Two properties have never applied before, including the first farm to apply from Cascade Township. Wills noted that five properties (Bradford Family LLC with two parcels, Kruithoffs, Phil and Mary Lou Heffron, and Don Wollander) are in a "limbo" stage of having an appraisal but not being included in the February 2010 federal grant proposal as there was not enough local matching funding to include them.

Township Board are asked to approve all applications in May and June. Jay Hoekstra and Wills work on the scoring in June and mail each applicant their score and next steps in July.

NEW PROGRAM IDEA: PARTNERING WITH THE MI DEPT OF AG TO ENCOURAGE DONATION OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS ON FARMLAND

Wills reported that there may be a few property owners of productive farmland in Kent County that would be willing to donate their development rights in exchange for federal income tax credits. Wills contacted the Michigan Department of Agriculture (Elizabeth Juras, MDA) and verified that MDA is still accepting donations of development rights on farmland. Juras emailed Wills the criteria which is very similar to PDR. The idea of the Kent County Agricultural Preservation Fund and/or PDR Endowment Fund monies to pay the cost of an appraisal and any closing costs (approximately \$2,500 - \$4,000 per farm) was presented by Wills as an idea to encourage Kent County property owners to donate easements. Ag Board members were very positive about this idea. Antor commented that this would be another tool in the toolbox to preserve farmland and very little cost. Wills was

instructed to move forward with the program by contacting MDA. More information will be presented at future meetings.

EIGHTH FARM TO BE PRESERVED

A closing for the 170 acre Steven and Cindy Koning field crop farm in Vergennes Township is scheduled for May 25, 2010. This will be the first farm where the property owner makes a required contribution of approximately \$5,000 to the PDR Endowment Fund. After the Koning farm is preserved, the Kent County PDR Program with have preserved 8 farms totaling 928 acres.

PUBLIC EDUCATION PLAN

Hudson reported that there were several visitors to the Ag Board's booth at the Earth Day event at the John Ball Zoo. He thanked Tom and his wife as well as Suzie and Sister Lucielle for assisting with staffing of the booth. Hudson noted that the booth at the Grand Rapids Public Museum's Earth and Sky Days was not as successful. It was noted that staffing booths is a time consuming activity that may or may not be worth the time and effort. The next Ag Board booth will be the November Food and Wine Festival booth at DeVos Place. Janowiak asked if a game can be created where a bell is rung to attract more attention and excitement at the booth. Hudson requested quotes for an Ag Board banner to be printed. Wills said she would have her summer intern work on these projects.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:50 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for June 9 at 11:30 AM.
Written by Kendra Wills.