

DIRECTOR'S FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING

Ohio Department of Agriculture
Reynoldsburg, Ohio

August 15, 2007

Minutes taken by Kristen Jensen

*Disclaimer: Many individual opinions have been captured by the recorder but do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the entire Advisory Board.

To note: Prior to the meeting, Advisory Board Chairman, Mark A. Forni and Jody Fife passed out menus for lunch orders.

Mark Forni, Chairman of the Board, called the meeting to order at 10:17 a.m. in Seminar Room B of ODA's Bromfield Administration Building.

Advisory Board members present: Mark Forni, Chair, Jill Clark, Vice-Chair, John Detrick, Glenn Myers, Brian Williams, Jay Rausch, Doug Givens, Thomas Mazur, Lucille L. Hastings, Harold Weihl, Roger Wolfe, Roger Rhonemus.

Advisory Board members absent: Open position representing Development Interests.

ODA Staff members present: Jody Fife, Kristen Jensen, and Joel O'Connell, Assistant Attorney General.

Those present were asked by Mark Forni to briefly introduce themselves. Newspaper reporter, Marc Kovac was also present.

The future of the AEPP was briefly discussed with hope by the Board that additional funding would be forthcoming to prolong the program past the last round of funding coming up in 2008.

A general notion of working more closely if possible with the FRPP and its deadlines was addressed for the purpose of acquiring their additional funds. Mark explained the differences in program application deadlines and differences in the state and federal deeds such as allowance for oil and gas leases.

Wind turbines have been brought up by some individuals who are currently going through the easement process and a few who already have agricultural easement on their property. Mark is looking for initial thoughts on how this may or may not become part of the easement process.

Kristen Jensen gave an update on the results of the scoring process for the 2007 AEPP. She explained that the press release is pending approval but at the current time all Notice of Selection documents have been received from all landowners chosen for this round of funding. As soon as the press release is officially signed off by the Governor's office, results will be posted on the

office's website. Information was distributed so that members could see how their individual scores compared to others and how the final 20 farms were chosen with partial offers and individual acceptances.

Kristen and Mark asked for feedback of the scoring process from the board members... can staff provide additional information to make the process easier, were things understandable, what were general thoughts of the responses...

First time scorers used the "scoring methodology" extensively and found it helpful. Longer essays do not mean the essays are better... shorter can be better, if it eliminates the flowery language and addresses the question directly.

Mention of Tier II's subjectivity was called out and questioned as to whether that helps to save the "best" farms as opposed to the more objective Tier I section. The essay questions are not required by law. Other members agreed that other things about farming cannot become apparent to scorers that are important though yes and no questions, essays are good. Tier II questions can show a farmer's philosophy, its unique qualities, provide information about long-term planning and other active vs. non-active investments and improvements. The essays can help the advisory board members understand the farmer's dedication to the land's preservation.

From a historical view, past applications have come a long way. The process has been scrutinized, examined, and changed for the better over time. For instance, long range planning was not part of the essays but now it is extremely important and is part of the essay questions. The essays "give a face" to the farms. The essay idea came about perhaps because other states, like Michigan made personal interaction with the landowners a bigger part of their application process. They would conduct site visits to farms.

The State is being asked to invest in the farmer's operation, therefore, it is important to have the essay questions to find out what the farmer is doing to invest in his/her own operation. Does the farm offer something unique? Can we ask the questions differently?

Who ends up writing the essay responses? Sometimes sponsors, usually if they have a well resourced and professional staff. Other times individual farmers will write their responses. While style and grammar can vary greatly, advisory board members want to make sure they are scoring content. They appreciate the information provided through the essay portion.

It was noted that Butler and Lorain received offers which is interesting because of the urbanization issues occurring in the region.

Water lines- access may be more important than existence of a water line. #12 is in its current form for verification purposes.

Difference in the words "land trust" vs. "conservancy?"

There is not a huge gap of missing information gathered from the AEPP application and essay questions. Maybe technical issues or clarification in terminology needs to be worked on but no extreme changes have become apparently necessary

Smaller farms, if allowed into the process would be pushed out of the competitive numbers potentially because of the current point distribution and its priorities. Should we have another program or option for these smaller farms to be preserved if they are indicating they want to protect their farm?

Given the limited amount of funding for the current program this limits the scope of the program. Additional dedicated funding sources need to be found in order for the program to more disparate. Maybe the question would be 'should we add to this program in order to address the numerous farm issues and areas or create an entirely new program'?

This program, different from other Clean Ohio funded programs decided to spend its money slower... was this the best decision? This was termed in the past as a "pilot program." \$3.1 million was used each year instead of \$6.2 million because we didn't know the future game plan and farmland wanted to stay a participant as long as possible. Should we be giving money to individual counties and let them decide how to best use the funding? Currently, the AEPP has touched a total of 31 counties preserving farmland.

Tinkering around the edges with this program is a good idea. But we may need to focus more on finding dedicated sources of funding and we need to think about planning at the local level. Few counties put money into farmland preservation/protection at all. We need to think about how we can encourage counties to set-up programs to save and protect their farmland. If funding is dispersed to counties, one method to do so could use a weighted formula similar to the gas tax or the open space program.

The Director also has the ability to use a band-aid approach by using his discretion to address certain areas of the state that people may feel are not being equitably assisted... but making the program even more complicated would increase the cumbersome nature of the application process. Similar to the Pennsylvania program, we should think about giving money to established programmed counties that dedicate their own resources toward these efforts and also look into other additional policies.

Perhaps a subcommittee approach may be the best idea to addressing some of the short and long term concerns.

In regards to the small farm issue and their easement values.... Voters for the Clean Ohio funding are not necessarily receiving the funding from this program. Should we think about this more political side of the issue?

Lunch break was called at 12:02 pm and the meeting resumed at 12:35 pm.

Approval of the Minutes: The motion to approve the minutes was called by Doug Givens, seconded by John Detrick, and passed by the board.

ORAL VOTE: PASSED

In regards to the development board position that is still vacant, Mark stated that he has had conversations with a potential candidate that Brian Williams also knows and believes to be a strong candidate. It is hoped that this individual will be appointed before the next board meeting.

A long-term subcommittee consisting of Jill, Doug, Lucille, and Brian will look into additional ways to secure dedicated sources of funding for the future of the farmland preservation program.

A short-term subcommittee consisting of Tom, Brian, and Glenn will assist in the immediate application, such as terminology and clarification of application questions.

Tier II essays may need to be more focused on the unique qualities of farms... perhaps allowing lists could make this section more clear because the content is what truly matters. This is a chance for farms to “blow their own horn.” Rephrase the questions so that they can’t be mass produced. The way the questions read now is confusing because there are compound sentences that have sub-questions. We want to catch and capture the unique family or operation issues to let the farms shine beyond the objective numerical portion. Some applications do not address the actual questions. Many times answers to one question would be located in another response. Should scorers be looking for key words? Questions need to be written so they are simple to read, interpret, and answer, as well as easy for the board members to read the responses. Ex: good to say there is a will... but what does the will say? Explain the heirs and any stipulations within the will. 15C tell us what you’ve *done*. Not what you dream about or something hypothetical... change the wording for the question?

The office hopes to work with Cap City soon to begin the process for next year’s online application and create the needed changes. There is tentative hope to open the 2008 application at the beginning of the year... February 1st?

Joel is looking more closely into how wind turbines would be able to fit into the agricultural easement... would like to know from the advisory board their issues, questions, possible concerns and comments. Does the Department have an opinion on this issue? We’re assuming that the Governor supports them. Would there be a mechanism to reduce the offer if land did have wind turbines on it. Could this mimic the ways the easement currently deals with other non-agricultural development?

Roger Rhonemus moved to adjourn the meeting and Harold Weihl seconded the motion.
ORAL VOTE: PASSED - Meeting closed at 1:35 P.M.

Mark A. Forni
Advisory Board Chairman, Mark A. Forni

Kristen Jensen
Meeting Secretary, Kristen Jensen