

MINUTES OF THE MERCER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
MEETING HELD MONDAY AUGUST 3, 2020  
IN THE EXTENSION SERVICE BUILDING  
1440 PARKSIDE AVENUE, EWING, N.J.

***\*\*Meeting via Zoom online platform due to Covid-19 County facility closure\*\****

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Steve Jany called this meeting to order at 7:33 PM.

**II. COMPLIANCE STATEMENT**

Mr. Jany announced that pursuant to the Sunshine Law, notice of this meeting was mailed to the Trenton Times and the Trentonian, and was posted on the County Planning Department's website, including a public zoom meeting link and instructions.

**III. ROLL CALL**

**A. Voting Members:**

Steve Jany, Chairman – Present  
Frank D'Amico, Vice-Chairman – Present  
Scott Ellis – Present  
Laurie Emde – Present  
Gary Mount – Present  
Kristine Walsh – Present  
Theodora Wang – Present

**B. Non-voting Members:**

Bill Agress/County Planning Board Liaison – Present  
Meredith Melendez/Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension – Present

**C. Others Present:**

Emily Blackman, CADB Administrator  
Leslie Floyd, County Planning Director  
Andrew Lloyd, Assistant Planner, Mercer County  
Public: Charanjit Singh

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

On a motion by Mr. Mount and seconded by Mr. Ellis, the minutes of the June 1, 2020 regular meeting were unanimously approved.

**V. PUBLIC COMMENT: None**

**VI. CORRESPONDENCE:** Ms. Blackman shared that she has received multiple inquires from people looking for land to lease and she asked the Board if there are any other resources to point people to other than the SADC's Farm Link site. The Board agreed that the Farm Link site is the best place to look; other organizations' listings have been incorporated into the site.

**VII. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS**

**A. SADC:**

Ms. Blackman shared an update provided by Ms. Mandelbaum. The SADC staff took some furlough days in July and so there was no July SADC meeting. The SADC is resuming

mediations sessions and continues to process preservation applications. There are a number of different Special Occasion Events (SOE) bills in the NJ legislature. At the June SADC meeting, the Board heard Mr. Hart's Rural Microenterprise (RME) request in concept. The Board was very supportive and he is expected to come back with a full application. Finally, there are currently 11 active preservation applications in the County. Mr. Agress pointed out that they are all in Hopewell.

**B. Land Development Activity: None**

**C. Farmland Preservation Status:**

Ms. Blackman reported that the Chowdhury Farm survey is complete and the Chowdhurys are expected to apply to Hopewell Township for the subdivision soon. The Kerr Farm survey is in progress and the final CADB resolution is on the agenda at this meeting. Finally, the County made an offer to purchase the Wert Farm in Hopewell for farmland preservation.

**IX. OLD BUSINESS**

**A. House Request: Singh Farm, Uncle Petes Road, Hamilton Township**

Ms. Blackman presented Mr. Singh's house request for the Board's consideration. The request was first heard at the June meeting and the Board declined to act until it could be shown that progress had been made towards addressing the erosion and flooding impacting the neighboring Bartolone property and Uncle Petes Road. Mr. Singh asked that his request be revisited at the August meeting following some work he did on the property to install a berm. Ms. Blackman visited the farm on July 27<sup>th</sup> and reported that the berm appeared to be successful in keeping water from the Bartolone property. She observed several areas in the field where water had been pooling and negatively impacting the soybeans. She did not observe any furrows in the soil, as would be expected if water was moving at high speed. She shared pictures with the Board from her visit. She also shared pictures sent by Ms. Bartolone showing muddy water running into the drainage ditch and pooling on the road during a rainstorm.

Mr. Jany stated that he drove by the farm during a rainstorm and noted that the drainage pipe appears too small to handle the volume of water coming from the farm. He also noted that the berm needs to be seeded with a heavy grass to hold the soil, especially outside of the growing season. Ms. Emde noted that the flooding at the top of the Bartolone driveway needs to be addressed. Mr. Mount noted that it appears the drainage ditch is not big enough to handle the water. Mr. Singh stated that the water flooding the road was largely due to the Guzikowski farm across the road and that all farms in the area have some amount of erosion. Mr. Ellis reiterated the need to seed the berm with permanent vegetation. Mr. Singh added that he wants to plant fruit trees along the property boundary and that he wants to build a house and barn to properly store his equipment, which has been damaged without a place to store it. Mr. Ellis stated that Kentucky 31 fescue would be a good choice for the seeding. Ms. Melendez noted that the NRCS has some resources about berm plantings. Mr. Mount noted that fruit trees, while a nice addition, will not do much to hold the soil and that the grass would still be needed.

Ms. Floyd proposed that the Board think about what conditions it would want to impose on the house construction. She stated the need for Mr. Singh to engage an engineer to design the site to ensure that the new impervious surface does not exacerbate the flooding and erosion. Mr. Singh added that he also wants to build a barn to house his equipment. Mr. Jany proposed that the Board consider granting the house request with the conditions that Mr. Singh hire an engineer as stated by Ms. Floyd, seed the berm and a 5-foot buffer with an

appropriate grass and receive all Township approvals. Ms. Blackman stated that it might be useful to require a cover crop in winter. The Board discussed this option and felt that it should be a recommendation rather than a requirement. Mr. Ellis made a motion to approve the house request with the conditions as stated and Ms. Walsh seconded. Mr. Ellis asked if the Board might see the draft resolution before voting. It was decided that Ms. Blackman would draft a resolution as soon as possible and email it to the Board for an electronic vote.

(Ms. Emde left the meeting)

## **X. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Final Kerr Farm Resolution for SADC Cost-Share Grants**

Ms. Blackman presented the draft final resolution for the Kerr Farm SADC cost-share grants. Mr. Mount made a motion to approve the resolution as written and Mr. D'Amico seconded. The resolution was unanimously approved.

## **XI. DISCUSSION**

### **A. County Farmland Preservation Plan: First Draft Review**

The first draft of the County's Farm Plan update was provided via email to Board members ahead of the meeting. Ms. Blackman presented some highlights of the first draft, including tables, charts and maps with Mercer County farmland statistics and the County's preservation program. Mr. Mount asked that he see the document with track changes, but later decided it would be easier to compare clean versions of the old and new plans. Ms. Blackman asked the Board if they have an opinion as to which farmland acreage dataset is the most accurate – the NJDEP Land Use Land Cover data collected by categorizing satellite imagery by land use, the Census of Agriculture data collected by surveys, or the farmland assessment tax data. The Board believes that the tax assessment data is the most accurate. The Census of Agriculture data shows an increase in farmland acreage in recent years that is at odds with the other datasets. Ms. Melendez believes this may be due to the fact that there was a big push to increase response to the last census, so numbers may be inflated compared to previous years. Mr. Mount asked whether the County's ADA still meets the 90% criteria (no more than 90% of a County's agricultural land base can be included in an ADA). Ms. Blackman stated that Mercer's ADA is well within this criterion.

Ms. Blackman asked the Board if there are Agricultural Management Practices (AMPs) that they would like to see the SADC develop that would be beneficial for Mercer County when Right to Farm issues come up. She suggested that animal processing might be one and also that guidance related to hemp and marijuana will be needed if marijuana is legalized in the state. Mr. Mount agreed that an animal processing AMP would be especially beneficial for Mercer County – he is aware that small operations are struggling to find processing facilities and are considering using mobile units, so it is possible that the Board may see this as a Right to Farm issue in the future. Mr. Lloyd suggested that deer processing might be included – Ms. Floyd responded that deer processing would be a good practice to include in a RME, but would not be considered farming. Ms. Melendez added that an AMP addressing value-added items would be useful, as she knows of many examples of farmers wishing to process other farm's products for sale, but sometimes find the health department regulations to be overly burdensome.

The final draft of the plan will be presented to the Board at the October 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, with adoption considered at the December 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.

## **XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None**

**XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION:** None was required.

**XIV. ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Mount made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 PM. Mr. Ellis seconded. The next scheduled meeting of the MCADB is October 5th, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Blackman  
*MCADB Secretary*

**Date adopted: October 5, 2020**

Attachments, if any, are made a part of the permanent record and are filed in the Minute Book, and are located in the Mercer County Planning Department Office. All copies are available upon request.