

MINUTES OF THE MERCER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD
MEETING HELD MONDAY OCTOBER 5, 2020
IN THE EXTENSION SERVICE BUILDING
1440 PARKSIDE AVENUE, EWING, N.J.

*****Meeting via Zoom online platform due to Covid-19*****

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 (arrived for Old Business)
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
Amy Mandelbaum, SADC
Public: Anne & George Carcagno, Mark Bortman (Exact Solar)

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On a motion by Mr. D'Amico and seconded by Ms. Emde, the minutes of the August 3, 2020 regular meeting were unanimously approved.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

VI. CORRESPONDENCE: None

VII. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS

A. SADC:

Ms. Mandelbaum shared that the Auer Farm on Bear Tavern Road closed. In addition, the SADC will be holding training sessions for local officials about the Right to Farm law and other applicable SADC policies. The SADC continues to hold its monthly meetings remotely.

B. Land Development Activity: None

C. Farmland Preservation Status:

Ms. Blackman reported that the Kerr farm survey is almost complete. The Chowdhury farm subdivision will be on the Hopewell Township Planning Board agenda on October 22nd. The Wert farm agreement of sale was recently approved by the County Freeholders and technical work has begun. Ms. Blackman asked the Board for feedback about the location and size of the exception area on the Wert farm. There is an existing driveway and a barn in an approximately 2-acre wooded portion of the property, which could be a good location for the exception area. Alternatively, the Board discussed the possibility of putting the exception along Mine Road to facilitate a future farm stand. It might also be possible to have two exception areas – one for a house near the existing barn and one along the road for a stand, although two may not be possible given the relatively small size of the property (35 acres). The property will be auctioned by the County as a preserved farm, so consideration should also be given to where a future owner might want to build a house, as the property has excellent views across the valley. In addition, the property might need a fairly substantial exception area to allow a future owner to be profitable farming, given the potential high cost of the property. The Board will revisit this discussion at the December meeting.

IX. OLD BUSINESS: None

X. NEW BUSINESS

A. Benioff Farm Solar Request, Hopewell Township

Ms. Blackman presented the Benioff farm solar request for the Board’s consideration. The application will be heard and its outcome decided by the SADC, but the SADC has requested a letter from the CADB with any comments about the application. Mr. Ellis recused himself from the discussion and vote because he is also a member of the SADC Board and plans to participate in their discussion of this application.

Mr. Benioff is proposing putting a 0.05-acre (2,151 sq. ft) ground-mounted solar array on his 113-acre farm to provide electricity for the farm buildings and house. A letter from his engineer was included with the application and stated that ground-mounting is necessary because no adequate roof exists on the property. In addition, the array will not have concrete footings and thus will cause minimal soil disturbance. The array will be located along an existing driveway in an area that is currently lawn; no active farmland will be taken out of production. The Board asked whether any trees will need to be removed for the installation. Mr. Mark Bortman of Exact Solar was present at the meeting via telephone and is the contractor for Mr. Benioff. Mr. Bortman stated that no trees will be removed.

Board members did not have any comments about the application, but stated that the SADC’s solar application process seems overly burdensome for an application like this that will take up so little area relative to the size of the farm. They stated that the SADC should consider a waiver process for minor applications like this one. Mr. Mount made a motion to approve the application and include the CADB’s comments about the application process in a letter. Ms. Walsh seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Ellis recused. Ms. Blackman will provide a draft letter for the Board’s comments before sending it to the SADC.

B. Carcagno Farm Target Request, Hopewell Township

Ms. Blackman presented the Carcagno farm for the Board’s consideration as a targeted farm for preservation. The farm is adjacent to the Hopewell West Project area and is within the ADA. It is also adjacent to the Cifelli property, which is a targeted farm and is under contract to be preserved as open space with D&R Greenway Land Trust. The Carcagno farm is 83 acres in size, with a house, forest and about 17 acres of tillable area that are currently in

pasture for sheep. The property's soil is almost all prime or of statewide importance according to NRCS soil mapping.

SADC cost-share funding requires that 25 acres or 50% of a property, whichever is less, be tillable. Anne and George Carcagno were present at the meeting via telephone and stated that they are willing to clear 8 acres of overgrown pasture to get to the 25-acre minimum to qualify for farmland preservation. In the past, they have considered open space preservation and would be willing to consider it again if a non-profit partner is interested. They are waiting to hear back from D&R Greenway. However, their preference is for farmland preservation or perhaps a combination of farmland and open space. Ms. Blackman noted that Ms. Carcagno is a member of the Hopewell Township Agricultural Advisory Committee and would need to step down from the Committee if the Township were to become involved in preserving the property. The Board discussed targeting the farm now or waiting to see what the Carcagnos hear about open space preservation options. They asked if there was a downside to moving ahead with targeting at this meeting. Ms. Floyd and Ms. Blackman stated that there is no downside – targeting does not commit either the County or the landowner to preservation.

Mr. Mount stated that he knows the Carcagnos personally and would recuse himself from a vote. Ms. Emde stated that she is an employee of D&R Greenway Land Trust and would also recuse herself from a vote. Mr. D'Amico made a motion to target the Carcagno farm for preservation and expand the Hopewell West Project Area to include it. Ms. Wang seconded. The motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Mount and Ms. Emde recused. Ms. Blackman will draft a resolution.

XI. DISCUSSION

A. County Farmland Preservation Plan: Second Draft Review

The second draft of the County's Farm Plan update was provided via email to Board members ahead of the meeting. Ms. Blackman asked for Board feedback about the draft and shared some comments provided by the SADC related to farm equipment signage on roads and the CADB's house size policy. The policy states that the CADB will review it every three years, so Ms. Blackman asked if the Board believed any changes were needed. The Board did not think that the house size policy needs to be revised. Other SADC comments were minor and in general, they spoke highly of the draft plan. There were no further comments from the Board members. Ms. Floyd and Ms. Blackman thanked Mr. Lloyd of the Planning Department for his work on Chapter 3. The Board thanked Ms. Blackman for her work on the plan. Ms. Blackman will incorporate the SADC's comments. The final draft of the plan will be presented to the Board at the December 7th, 2020 meeting and considered for adoption.

XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None

XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION: None was required.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Walsh made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 PM. Mr. Jany seconded. The next scheduled meeting of the MCADB is December 7th, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Blackman
MCADB Secretary

Date adopted: December 7, 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.