

MINUTES OF THE MERCER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD
MEETING HELD MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 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 7:05 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 – Absent
Gary Mount – Present
Kristine Walsh – Absent
Theodora Wang – Present

B. Non-voting Members:

Bill Agress/County Planning Board Liaison – Present (arrived 7:30 pm)
Meredith Melendez/Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension – Present

C. Others Present:

Emily Blackman, CADB Administrator
Leslie Floyd, County Planning Director
Amy Mandelbaum, SADC
Public: Dan Pace

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On a motion by Mr. Mount and seconded by Mr. D'Amico, the minutes of the October 5, 2020 regular meeting were unanimously approved.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT: Mr. Pace, former Mercer CADB Administrator, gave his regards to all and let the Board know that he is leading open space acquisitions for Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (FOHVOS).

VI. CORRESPONDENCE:

- a. **Farm Leases** - Ms. Blackman notified the Board that the County will be holding a bid for a farm lease of ~10 tillable acres off of Rabbit Hill Road and Route 571 in West Windsor. The County owns the property and it is preserved as open space, but can be leased to a farmer as an interim use. The bid will likely open at the end of December or early next year.

VII. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS

A. SADC:

Ms. Mandelbaum provided an update on SADC-funded preservation projects in the County.

She also shared that the SADC is continuing to finalize soil protection standards and is forming a new committee next year to look at SADC land acquisition strategies going forward. She invited the Board to provide comments.

B. Land Development Activity: The County's Chowdhury farm preservation project is on the County Planning Board's December 9th agenda. The subdivision to create a farm lot, trail lot and residential lots was approved by Hopewell Township's Planning Board at the end of October and is now coming before the County's Board.

C. Farmland Preservation Updates:

a. **Discussion of Wert Farm Exception Area** – The CADB last discussed the Wert farm exception area location at the October meeting and Ms. Blackman reintroduced the issue for discussion. At the October meeting, the Board suggested there might be a residential exception at the top of the driveway and a farm market exception at the bottom of the driveway along Mine Road. Using this as a guide, Ms. Blackman prepared an aerial map for the Board with a 1.5-acre residential exception at the top of the driveway that includes the barn and a 0.5-acre farm market exception at the bottom of the driveway along Mine Road. The Board agreed that the 1.5-acre residential exception makes sense in terms of size and location – it takes advantage of the views across the valley and would allow a house to be built without significant impact to the large overstory trees. After discussion, the Board agreed that the farm market exception should be 1-acre rather than 0.5-acre to give a future owner more flexibility to develop a viable business. Ms. Floyd reminded the Board that the locations are subject to perc tests and may need to be adjusted. Mr. Mount made a motion to approve the 1.5-acre residential exception and 1-acre farm market exception on the Wert Farm. Mr. D'Amico seconded. The motion was passed unanimously.

IX. OLD BUSINESS: None

X. NEW BUSINESS

A. Mercer County Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan Final Draft – Resolution for Adoption

Ms. Blackman presented the final draft of the County Farmland Preservation Plan update and a resolution for adoption for the Board's consideration. Board members received the final draft of the plan by email two weeks prior to the meeting for review. Ms. Blackman noted two minor changes she made to the draft – the addition of the County logo and a sentence that will acknowledge SADC grant funding for plan preparation if the grant is approved. Ms. Floyd noted that the plan will go before the County Planning Board for consideration at the earliest opportunity in 2021. The Board thanked Ms. Blackman for her work on the plan. Mr. D'Amico made a motion to approve the resolution to adopt the 2020 Mercer County Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan. Mr. Mount seconded. The motion was passed unanimously.

(Mr. Agress arrived)

XI. DISCUSSION

A. Delegation of Authority – Solar Applications

Ms. Blackman presented the question of delegation of authority for solar applications to the Board. At the October meeting, the Board heard a solar application for a preserved farm and

commented that the SADC's application process seems overly burdensome for solar arrays that have a negligible impact on farmland. In response to the Board's comment, Ms. Armstrong of the SADC let Ms. Blackman know that the Burlington County CADB has given authority to their CADB Administrator to approve solar applications without CADB input, thereby enabling the applicant to speed up the application process somewhat. Ms. Blackman asked the Board whether this was something they would want to consider. After discussion, the Board decided that they do not want to delegate this authority and prefer to hear the applications at their meetings. The Board feels there is value in keeping abreast of the SADC's processes and does not believe that removing the requirement for an applicant to come to CADB meetings would substantially improve the application process.

B. 2021 Meeting Times

Ms. Blackman asked the Board what time they would like to hold meetings in 2021 – the reorganization meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 1st. The Board agreed to hold the February 1st meeting at 7:00 pm and consider the time for the rest of the year's meetings then. During the growing season, meetings will likely be held at the usual time of 7:30 pm.

XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None

XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION: None was required.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 pm. The next scheduled meeting of the MCADB is February 1st, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Blackman
MCADB Secretary

Date adopted: April 5, 2021

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.