

MINUTES OF THE MERCER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD
MEETING HELD MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2024
IN THE EXTENSION SERVICE BUILDING
1440 PARKSIDE AVENUE, EWING, N.J.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chair D'Amico called this meeting to order at 19:31.

II. COMPLIANCE STATEMENT WITH THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT

Vice-Chair D'Amico announced that pursuant to the Sunshine Law, notice of this meeting was mailed to the Trenton Times on February 15, 2024 and posted on the County Planning Department's website.

III. ROLL CALL

a. Voting Members:

Mr. Steve Jany, Chair – not present
Mr. Frank D'Amico, Vice-Chair – present
Mr. Scott Ellis – present
Mr. Gary Mount – present
Ms. Theodora Wang – present
Ms. Emily Blackman – not present

B. Non-voting Members:

Ms. Meredith Melendez/Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension – present
Mr. William Agress, County Planning Board Liaison – present

C. Others Present:

Mr. Charles Roohr, SADC
Ms. Stephanie Krieser, SADC
Mr. David Kimmel, SADC
Ms. Daphne Bacon, SADC
Mr. Pieter Coetzee, American Farmland Trust
Ms. Susan Bacso, MCADB Attorney
Ms. Cindy Taylor, Mercer County Land Preservation Coordinator
Ms. Diane Kottas, Mercer County CADB Administrator

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On a motion by Ms. Wang and seconded by Mr. Ellis, the minutes of the May 6, 2024 meeting were approved unanimously, Mr. Mount abstained due to absence.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

VI. GUEST SPEAKERS

a. Pieter Coetzee (American Farmland Trust) – ACEP-ALE Presentation

Mr. Coetzee gave a brief presentation on the USDA's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Agricultural Land Easements Program and how it could work in Mercer County. Mr. Coetzee highlighted the differences between this program and the SADC preservation program and noted that they can be combined. He is willing to come back and talk to the Board further.

b. SADC Outreach for Statewide Formula Value Development

Deputy Executive Director, Charles Roohr, gave a brief presentation on the development of the new Statewide Formula Value to be used in farmland preservation. Stephanie Kreiser, Chief of Acquisitions, led a discussion with the Board on what attributes are of most importance when considering a farm for preservation.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE: None

VIII. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS

a. SADC

Mr. Kimmel from the SADC presented.

Executive Director Payne to retire: SADC Executive Director Susan Payne will retire effective June 1, 2024. A subcommittee will conduct a search to fill the vacancy.

Soil Protection Standards: The Committee approved the publication of proposed changes to the original soil protection standards rule proposal. Changes will be published in the NJ Register and will be subject to an additional 60-day comment period.

Statewide Formula Value: CADB outreach will occur during the summer months in order to solicit comments from members and staff on the development of the SFV.

New Employees: There are three new employees: Stephanie Kreiser – Chief of Acquisitions, Jessica Brandeisky – Next Gen Assistant Coordinator and Brendon Pearsall – Next Gen Farmer Senior Coordinator

Princeton Farm Associates Special Occasion Events: SADC approved its second SOE application.

Revisions to Ag Mediation and Ag Management Practice Rules: Adopted rules were sent to the NJ Register as an amended rule proposal.

Buckhorn Creek Farm Preservation: The SADC purchased a ~566-acre farm in White Township, Warren County

b. Land Development

There are no Land Development applications on the upcoming County Planning Board agenda within the Agricultural Development Area (ADA).

c. Farmland Preservation Updates

Britton Farm: Ms. Kottas reported on staff's return visit to the farm of Jim Britton. Ms. Kottas, Ms. Taylor and Paul Schiariti, Mercer County Soil Conservation District

Manager, met with Mr. Britton. The building of unknown ag use will be utilized as a garage, storage area and office. Mr. Britton explained that the soil mounds were being used as a racetrack for his family's recreational use. He would like to fence in the area as pasture for horses and keep the racetrack. Board members discussed the issue and determined that the soil mounds are a violation of the Deed of Easement and that a letter should be drafted instructing Mr. Britton to remove them, returning the area to its former condition. The Board also asked for more clarification and documents on the berms and pond that have been constructed on the property. It was decided that a return visit to the farm with Board members in attendance was warranted.

Thangaraju Farm: Ms. Kottas reported on Staff's visit to the Thangaraju Farm in Robbinsville. It was noted during the visit that landscaping vehicles for Garden Artisans LLC were being stored on the Premises. The Board agreed to have Staff send a letter reminding Mr. Thangaraju that storing landscaping business equipment is not an approved ag use of the Premises. It was also discussed that Mr. Thangaraju should be reminded that housing in the barn is not allowed.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

a. SSAMP Policy revisions

Tabled until the August meeting.

X. NEW BUSINESS

None

XI. DISCUSSION:

None

XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None

XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION: None required

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

- a.** Vice-Chair D'Amico adjourned the meeting at 21:44. The next scheduled meeting of the MCADB is August 5, 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Kottas

Diane Kottas
Secretary to the Board