

**ORANGE COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION BOARD**

MEETING SUMMARY—APPROVED

August 19th, 2015

Environment & Agricultural Center – Conference Room
306 Revere Road, Hillsborough, NC
7:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vaughn Compton, Howard McAdams, Renee McPherson (Chair), Gordon Neville, Ashley Parker, Renee Parker, Noah Ranells, Amanda Scherle, Kathy Shambley, Sheila Thomas-Ambat, Richal Vanhook, Kim Woods (Vice-Chair)

MEMBERS ABSENT/EXCUSED: None

GUESTS: Jane Saiers

STAFF: Mike Ortosky, Agriculture Economic Development Coordinator, Economic Development; Gail Hughes, Soil Conservationist, DEAPR - Orange Soil & Water Conservation District, and Peter Sandbeck, Cultural Resources Coordinator, DEAPR

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1. **Call to Order:** Chair McPherson called the meeting to order at 7:33 PM.
 2. **Chair Comments/Introductions:** Chair McPherson welcomed the new members and asked all members and staff to introduce themselves and say a few words about why they were there.
 3. **Consideration of Additions to Agenda:** None
 4. **Meeting Summary / Minutes – May 20th, 2015 (Attachment 1):** Ashley Parker moved to accept the minutes/summary; seconded by Neville; motion carried.
 5. **Items for Decision:**

New VAD and EVAD applications: (Attachment 2): Hughes presented an overview of the application before the members for an EVAD for RambleRill Farm. This is our first formal application for a farm that is not in our present use program. The owners applied a few years ago but at that time all farms had to be in present use in order to qualify. The board voted to eliminate this requirement and that revision was approved by the County Commissioners in early June. So she contacted Jane to let her know that her farm would now be eligible. Hughes provided a brief explanation of the VAD/EVAD program and questions from members. She showed the farms now enrolled on a new county map. Members commented on the increase in farms enrolled over the past three years. Like all other farms, this application has been reviewed by staff and meets all the criteria and requirements for APB consideration for the EVAD programs. She revised the

VAD/EVAD application form to add language telling applicants they are eligible to serve on the APB once their farm is approved; there is a place for them to indicate interest.

Jane Saiers and Darin Knapp: 10.1 acres for EVAD: (New Hope/Hillsborough District): Farm located at 913 Arthur Minnis Road. They grow grapes, Shiitake mushrooms, blueberries, strawberries, asparagus and annual vegetables. Ashley Parker moved to approve RambleRill Farm for EVAD; seconded by Compton; motion carried.

6. Items for Discussion:

- a. Membership: Chair McPherson noted that we still have two district vacancies: New Hope/Hillsborough and Schley/Eno. Staff introduced a prospective new member, Jane Saiers, owner of RambleRill Farm, who submitted the online application. Ms. Saiers expressed her interest in serving on the APB. Ranells moved to recommend Ms. Saiers as the member for the New Hope/Hillsborough District; seconded by Neville. Motion carried.
- b. Idea for holding a breakfast meeting/informational event for prospective VAD/EVAD applicants: Hughes explained the concept of having the APB host a breakfast meeting geared toward property owners who might be considering enrolling their farms in the VAD/EVAD, along with farmers already enrolled. This could be both informational and recognize the current participants. Sponsors could help underwrite the cost of a breakfast. Discussion followed about the scope of the audience, scheduling and location. Winter seems like the best time, but must work with Ag Summit schedule, or perhaps combine with that. Mid-January seems like a good time. Possible locations include Mapleview and the Grange. Members agreed it was a good idea. Woods moved that we proceed to look into this possibility; seconded by Ranells; motion carried. Hughes will report back.
- c. Update on Ag Economic Development Grant Program: Ortosky reported that they had six applicants and approved four at their July meeting; two were deferred pending additional information. Since that time they received two more applications for a total of eight received to date. All but one have been approved at some level. The next meeting will be November, then February, then possibly shift to an annual basis after that to make it more competitive. There are two categories: small grants up to \$1,000, and large grants up to \$10,000. They have criteria to guide how the grants must be used. This fund has accumulated approximately \$168,000 due to the lack of disbursements, but that number will decline over time as we award grants. New grants include hoop houses, a well, poultry processing equipment and agricultural production items. They have promoted it quite a bit but plan to increase promotion and visibility for the next round. The goal is to make this program attractive to any farmer for any type of project. Applicants have to provide proof that the money was spent as stipulated.
- d. Review of APB purpose and duties: Staff reviewed briefly the section of the APB ordinance that spells out the board's purpose and duties. Ranells commented on the size and diversity of the group as it now stands with the additional new members, and reminded members that this is the only board that officially advises/assists the BOCC with all matters relating to agriculture.

- e. *Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Plan:* This is a small portion of the 2009 plan, just the executive summary and the implementation schedule. Staff hoped members could look this over as time permits and allow newer members to see it for the first time. Have we succeeded/accomplished some of the goals? Is it time to review this and begin the process of updating/revisiting it? Portions of this are now getting dated, with old statistics dating back to 2002. It may require forming a committee to tackle. Ortosky noted that he worked on several of these, notably for Wake County, and that now these are focusing more on production and marketing, with the new interest in aggregators and food hubs. The state Dept. of Agriculture does promote the creation of these plans as part of each county's program eligibility, so they are required. Plans for other counties are available online on the Ag Dept's web site. For example, Caswell just did a new one recently. Having a current plan will improve the County's chance to get federal and state farmland preservation funds. Members agreed that ag has changed a great deal since this was released, and would like to review this and work toward an updated version, perhaps starting this winter. It may be possible to get modest funding assistance for the update.

7. **Informational Items / Future Agenda Items**

- a. *Board of County Commissioners approve "present-use" change in APB ordinance:* The BOCC did approve the APB's proposed ordinance language change to eliminate the requirement that all farms must be in the "present use" program in order to be eligible to participate in the VAD/EVAD program. The new modified language is now in place on the County website as an addition, so property owners will know that this is now the new rule. The new language will get rolled into a new revised version of the APB ordinance this fall.

8. **Time for Information Sharing:**

Ag Extension position has been advertised and will be filled soon: Several members commented that the new position was advertised and that interviews will be coming up soon. This is a position of critical importance to agriculture here and will have an influence/impact on our farmers for years or decades to come. Members would like to see the Ag Board involved in some way in the interview process. This position will be a livestock and crops agent, along with sustainable agriculture. Compton noted that he and McAdams were allowed to sit in on the interviews when the present Extension Director was hired, but were not able to have any input. Vanhook moved to have the Chair send a letter to the appropriate person seeking APB participation in the interview process; seconded by Ashley Parker; motion carried. The Chair asked staff to draft a letter.

9. *Adjournment:* Ranells moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by McAdams; motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 pm