

# Orange County Agricultural Preservation Board

## Approved Meeting Summary: January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023

\*\*\*Bonnie Davis Center\*\*\*

6:30 p.m.

**Members Present:** Compton, Fickle, Hooten, Hughes, McAdams, McKnight, McPherson, Myers, Saiers, Wagger, Woods

**Members Absent:** Hooten, McAdams, Sykes, Taylor **Guests:** Dana Hall, Tax Administration, PUV Program

**Staff:** Jessica Perrin, Resource Conservation Coordinator, Soil and Water; Mike Ortosky, Community & Rural Development Agent, Extension, and Peter Sandbeck, Cultural Resources Coordinator, DEAPR

1. **Call to order:** Chair McKnight called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.
2. **Chair Comments/Introductions:** None
3. **Considerations of Additions to Agenda:** Staff asked to add membership to the agenda; McKnight proposed adding this as a discussion item.
4. **Meeting Summary/Minutes:** Hughes moved to approve the meeting summary, seconded by McPherson; motion passed.
5. **Discussion Items:**
  - a) **Membership:** Staff reported on the resignation of newly appointed member Nancy Petry shortly after holding the recent orientation for new members, then reviewed the existing applicant resumes that were on file. Discussion followed. Staff will provide updated applicant information to members for consideration at the March meeting.
  - b) **Orange County PUV Program update:** McKnight introduced Dana Hall, the newly appointed PUV Compliance Review Appraiser. Hall provided an overview of this new initiative and her role to review all 3,077 current PUV farm parcels for compliance with the program rules and requirements. She is required to audit at least one-eighth of all farms every year. Orange Co has not done this in the past. They are working out the details of the random selection process. They will focus on whether or not all farm/parcels are meeting the current requirements for forestry, agriculture and horticulture. She will also be requesting past three years of proof of farm income. She will send out a compliance review letter which asks for all required information and responses within 60 days—this will essentially be everything needed for a new application. She then will review and make a determination. Forestry management plans are running 6-8 months, so for those she will issue a conditional

approval, pending the receipt of the final plan. She will also make a farm visit. This process will include acreage verification. Landowners will then have 60 days to bring their farm into compliance. This will be a major undertaking for her as the only staffer, and so it will take some time to work through the various steps of creating a new process so that she can meet the program goals. Members expressed various concerns but in general felt that this was a worthwhile undertaking if it will help keep the program viable by weeding out those that don't really qualify. Members thanked Ms. Hall for her presentation.

- c) Farmland Preservation Subcommittee presentation and update:** Saiers provided a brief update of the progress being made by the subcommittee, along with a presentation showing the overall findings and statistics generated by a survey of the farm owners who attended the VAD breakfast program. 46 farmers completed the survey, or approx. 2/3 of the farmer/landowners in attendance. The results showed pretty consistent patterns, with a majority of farmers agreeing on many of the same issues as being of highest concern on the key questions as follows, with the top answers shown in parentheses: 1) how long have you been farming? (*20+ years*); 2) most important topics for an information session/workshop? (*diversifying farm income and succession planning*); 3) barriers to making a living farming? (*high costs of equipment, infrastructure, farmland and labor*); 4) plans for the future? (*keep farming until retire; pass along to children; protect with easements*). **A pdf version of the survey presentation is attached to the minutes for reference.** Discussion followed about how to reach beyond this group since these respondents are already enrolled in the VAD program and thus have some level of proven interest in farmland preservation. One way is to compare VAD farm parcels with PUV parcels, for example, and also compare with parcels under permanent easements. The answers to the survey provide some useful guidance for how we might approach farmland preservation, both with the VAD participants, which are "low hanging fruit" and those who are not committed at present. With land selling at \$20,000 an acre, the next generation will tend to be motivated to sell. Compton shared the story of how he and his family were pushed to develop a viable succession and estate plan for their farm in a short period of time due to health concerns. Saiers also reported on her meeting with Evan Davis after the VAD breakfast; he believes that the EVAD could be a valuable carrot to move VAD farmers into easements. He noted that some counties have moved to looking at pure AG zoning, instead of the Ag/Residential we have here.
- d) Annual Report and Work Plan:** Staff reviewed the updated draft work plan, then asked for members to review on their own, then email any suggested additions, deletions or edits to staff by Jan. 27th. Staff also asked that they look at the plans for 2023 to make sure all has been included, and to offer any thoughts to add to the "emerging issues and concerns" section. The BOCC has scheduled their work session for our report for mid-February.

## 6. Informational Items/Future Agenda Items:

- a. **Ag Summit scheduled for Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>:** Perrin provided copies of the informational postcard that they are sending out to promote the event. The program agenda covers a variety of current topics, including a keynote by new president of NC Farm Bureau, succession planning, PUV, and showcasing the new mobile processing unit. Food will be catered by Mama Dips. Will be held at the Cedar Grove Ruritan Club.
  - b. **Staff report on VAD program:** Perrin provided a written report handout. The VAD breakfast was very successful, with 81 landowner participants. Expenses were \$1,700. They will resume installing VAD signs when it starts to dry out. She spoke with the County Attorney's office to get guidance on implementing the changes from our new ordinance revision. The BOCC approved all four of the new VAD and EVAD farm applications that she presented in December. She now has five applications in various stages that she'll plan to bring back to the APB by or before May to have them ready for the June BOCC meeting. Perrin also gave a brief overview of the current VAD process for the benefit of the new members. She plans to develop a new flow chart that helps illustrate how the process works. Discussion followed about the big picture goals of the APB and how this group could do outreach, to make connections with more members of the farming community about farmland protection. Right now we have county policies that encourage or at least enable farmland loss to large lot subdivision and other forms of development, so the updating of our farmland protection plan will be critical to helping to highlight the importance of farmland protection with the Planning Dept staff as they work on the new comprehensive plan for 2025.
  - c. **Ag Economic Development Update:** Ortosky provided a brief overview of current activities. The county defunded their agreement with the Food Council, so that staff position is no longer funded. They continue to administer the successful ag grant program and are pleased to note that they have awarded almost 100 grants and nearly \$1 million disbursed. They are considering doing a documentary video featuring the grant recipients. He continues to manage the 270 acre Breeze Farm to encourage new activities there. They have two growers there doing work right now, along with two incubator activities. They are still working with Tri Cog on a project to develop regional food processing facilities.
7. **Time for Information Sharing:** Staff reported on the Nature of Orange Photo contest coming up this spring. Information will be emailed to members. Woods reported on the showing of the documentary about the hog farmer called the "Trials of Joey Carter" about his legal challenge by attorneys from Texas. They will be showing it in Person and Granville in February. She will send an email to members with information. Compton reported on the Central Piedmont Livestock Show on April 11-12, coming up soon. Compton noted that the Board of Ed is now going to fund a new teaching barn and ag teacher at Cedar Ridge.
  8. **Adjournment:** Woods moved to adjourn, seconded by Hughes. Meeting adjourned at 8:09 pm.