

Orange County Agricultural Preservation Board

Approved Meeting Summary: May 17th, 2023

Bonnie Davis Center

6:30 p.m.

Members Present: Compton, Fickle, Hooten, Hughes, McAdams, Myers, Saiers, Sykes, Taylor, Wagger

Members Absent: McKnight, McPherson, Woods **Guests:** None

Staff: Jessica Perrin, Resource Conservation Coordinator-Orange Soil and Water; Peter Sandbeck, Cultural Resource Coordinator

1. **Call to order:** Acting Chair McAdams called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.
2. **Chair Comments/Introductions:** None
3. **Considerations of Additions to Agenda:** None
4. **Meeting Summary/Minutes:** Hughes moved to approve the minutes for the March 17th meeting, seconded by Sykes; motion carried.
5. **Items for Decision:**
 - a) **New VAD/EVAD Applications:** Perrin presented the current application now pending. These farms meet the requirements/criteria for VAD/EVAD enrollment. All have completed conservation and/or forest management plans unless otherwise noted.
 - **Larry and Judy Roberts, Trustees:** 73.23 acres (VAD), Schley/Eno Ag District, four parcels in hay, honey and managed forest land.
 - **Sven MacAller and Rita Lahlou:** 79.93 acres (EVAD), White Cross District: two parcels in small grains, corn, produce, and forestry.
 - **Jane Saiers and Darin Knapp/RambleRill Farm:** 18.33 acres (EVAD), New Hope Ag District, managed for hay with plans to transition to annual/perennial fruits and vegetables and woodlands.

Note: Sykes proposed a motion to approve the above three as a group, seconded by Hughes, motion carried. The following were presented for conditional approval, with conditions as noted:

- **Matthew Crabtree:** 43.99 acres (VAD), Cedar Grove Ag District, one parcel in managed forest and hay. This land was enrolled in the VAD as PIN 9859417109 by previous owners, Marvin and Diane Pope, who sold this to Mr. Crabtree. The

conservation plan has been prepared but is awaiting signature by the owner, so this is presented for approval contingent on being signed.

- **Marvin and Diane Pope:** 46.83 acres (VAD), Cedar Grove District, two parcels in tobacco, grain and managed forest land. The forest management plan has been submitted. The conservation plan has been completed and is awaiting signatures by the owners, so this is presented for approval contingent on being signed.

Hughes moved to approve these two applications, contingent upon the signatures being obtained for both as required, seconded by Compton; motion carried. The following two applications are not completed but are presented for information and discussion purposes:

- **Brian Woods:** submitted an application to enroll one parcel of 19.08 acres for VAD in the Caldwell District, in vegetable and fruit production. They just cleared this land and now have goats, a cow, chickens and rabbits. There are two issues: there is very little vegetation reestablished on the land as required to meet requirements for a conservation plan. They have not yet met the qualifications for being a bona fide farm as required to enroll in the VAD, so Perrin will work with them to determine how they might qualify.
- **McKenzie and Victoria Clayton:** submitted an application to enroll one parcel of 41.15 acres for VAD in Cedar Grove, with land in hay and forestry. Perrin will make a site visit to determine eligibility.

A new batch of VAD signs has been delivered and will be installed in June. As a sidebar, there have been two instances of these signs being reported missing, so Perrin will investigate to see if she can determine the cause, whether they are stolen or hit by the DOT mowers.

6. Discussion Items:

a) Farmland Preservation Subcommittee:

Saiers provided an update. Since the last meeting, we've been working with land conversion data, with a focus on grass land and pasture which are harder to evaluate. We are making progress with our GIS team on getting more granular on this. Also, we have been investigating how to conduct our own farm owners survey and how to reach the most landowners. Chatham County recently sent out three surveys for updating their farmland preservation plans—these look pretty solid and provide a good model for us to follow for our own. So we are making progress and will share a draft survey with the membership to get your input before we send that out. Discussion followed. Ortosky noted that Extension is looking into doing an ongoing farmer survey every two years. Also, we might benefit from consulting with Chatham to see how they think theirs worked. Perrin will put Jane in touch with the Chatham staffer working on this effort.

- ### b) Membership:
- We have one district position in the Schley/Eno district that has been hard to fill. Perrin provided an updated email listing for the VAD farmers in this district so staff will work on reaching out to all these owners to see if there is interest. Also, Saiers district position is set to expire on June 30 but we don't want her to leave yet. Staff will work with

the county clerk's office to see if there is a way to keep her on board. We also have one vacant at-large position.

7. Informational Items/Future Agenda Items:

- a. Blackwood Farm Park reopening ceremony:** Staff reported that there will be a grand ceremony for the reopening to be held on May 19th, to highlight the new parking and driveway improvements and the vault toilet; the park will now be open seven days a week.
- b. Staff report on VAD activity from Jessica Perrin:** this was provided earlier.
- c. Extension and Ag Economic Development Activities:** Ortosky provided a brief overview, they've requested using \$50k more per year which might get approved. They have applications ready for the June 30 deadline. At Breeze Farm, they've gotten 25k in funding to install a photovoltaic system to produce electricity and to do research on growing crops under and around the panels. They've received another grant of 40k to help with educational programming. There is a new group called the Working Lands Trust that might be helpful for our efforts, they've just started and have protected maybe 10k acres so far.
- d. Improved communication with Planning staff:** Staff wanted to recognize the good work of the new leadership there and reorganized work group has been very effective at reaching out to staff in other work areas to collaborate on projects of joint interest.

8. Time for Information Sharing: Members expressed interest in seeing an updated membership roster, which staff will share at the next meeting.

9. Adjournment: Hooten moved to adjourn, seconded by Hughes. Meeting adjourned at 7:31 pm.