

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

FINAL MEETING MINUTES

July 13, 2020

Supervisors: David Williams, Patrick Hearn, Andrew Mintz, Kathie Becker, Elizabeth Austin, Associate Supervisor. Kathie and Liz had intermittent connectivity.

Contractors: Susan Thomas, Frances Gillespie (present for her report)

Partners: Heidi Ramsey, Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), Rachel Phillips Barnes, (NRCS) stayed for the entire meeting.

Volunteers: Liz McGuire (excused herself at the end of the meeting)

Quorum: Chairman David Williams confirmed there was a quorum and opened the meeting at 6:50 p.m. Thunderstorms hampered clarity throughout the meeting, particularly for cell phone users for audio, but also at some points for video.

Rachel Phillips Barnes, the new Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Massachusetts introduced herself. Rachel started with NRCS in Westford in 2002 (there is a plaque hanging in the office honoring her work with Envirothon Volunteers), moved around the Commonwealth and New Hampshire over the intervening years, and is happy to assume her goal job in this position, back, at least part of the time, in the Westford Field Office.

Minutes: The June 9th meeting minutes were approved with Liz M's edits rendered before the meeting. Andrew made the motion, David seconded and all were in favor.

District Conservationist Report: Sue had asked Heidi to report on Conservation Stewardship Applications (CSP) because they are a different kind of application and applicant being processed this month. Heidi reported that they are wrapping up this process. Eleven applications were received from across the Commonwealth (mostly central Massachusetts), although none processed to date are from Middlesex County.

The most common applications processed by NRCS are part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The CSP program provides incentives for a higher level of stewardship and is designed to provide support to landowners who may not have resource concerns and are ready take additional steps to improve their stewardship of their lands. This program is being promoted right now and is available to prior EQIP program participants as well as other landowners who can meet a minimum set of threshold requirements. Rachel concurred that this is a program that encourages a higher standard of stewardship.

Sue asked if this program was designed to reach a broader set of landowners. Heidi responded that it is. One difference from the EQIP program is that CSP producers are paid for each acre that is in stewardship and managed in accordance with CSP requirements. The CSP program also has a broader scope of potential candidates, including orchards, who do not traditionally have a need of EQIP services, and urban farmers. A friend of Bob Purcell's (Conservation Planner, NRCS Westford/Holden) has done some CSP work in Rhode Island that Bob is going to inquire about to see if it might be replicated with Commonwealth landowners. CSP also includes forestry as an eligible agricultural segment as long as the lessee or landholder has a management plan in place. Two forestry applications might make it before the deadline, one with 300 acres under management and a second with 600. One of these may be in Middlesex County. Heidi will keep the District apprised.

David asked if Land Trusts might apply and Heidi and Rachel replied that yes, however it is usually the operator who leases the land who ends up applying in this case and that New Hampshire has a lot of forest acreage managed under this program. It is definitely a possibility for Commonwealth Land Trusts and other forest managers.

Plant Sale Coordinator's Report: Fall Sale: Frances reported that the Fall sale brochure has been mailed and the web site is live. Orders are being received and are equal or greater in number than last year. Orders will close at the end of August. Flexibility may be required with regard to the location this year because the Commonwealth has not yet decided if state lands will be able to issue permits to have gatherings in September (Great Brook Farm is state land). The brochure informs customers of this possibility and emails have been collected with orders so customers can be reached easily in the event of a change. Unlike the spring sale, the fall sale cannot be delayed any later than the current dates or the perennials will be unsaleable (they don't look good late in the season), however this is a smaller sale and should not require as much labor to relocate and administer in the event of a change and/or continued need to social distance at pick up.

Sue asked Frances to make the final decision about a change in location in mid August, about a month out from the actual sale, so there is plentiful time to make a venue change if necessary. Sue offered her assistance. Sue also reminded the Supervisors that they do not meet again until September and asked if the Supervisors wanted any input into this decision. The Supervisors expressed confidence in Frances making the decision.

Treasurer's Report/banking: Sue remarked that despite the adverse conditions this spring, the spring tree sale made a decent profit thanks to Frances, and that the fall bulb sale is off to a good start. She pointed out that May and June are months when we pay off the spring plant

sale vendors and our insurance comes due, so money is going out. Reimbursement for the EEA grants will not come in until sometime over the summer, with fall plant sale income. Andrew made the motion to approve the reports, David seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Financial Review: Sue reported that the FY 2019 financial review was completed by the CPA. He had two recommendations:

1. MCD change the contract status of the District Administrator position to that of an employee in order to avoid questions and fines in the event of an audit. Sue and Kathie are getting quotes from payroll services to help assess what impact this change will have on the budget. The current estimate for a payroll service is \$1,000.
2. MCD engage him to perform the FY 2020 sooner rather than later. Liz confirmed that we cannot be reimbursed for the FY 2020 review until the FY 2021 EEA grant is approved, as the grant pays for the review, unless MCD wishes to be out of pocket.

Budget: Sue is still working on the budget for FY 2021. While an approved budget is listed as a requirement for submitting the EEA grant proposals, Liz believes we have submitted a draft budget in the past and recommended Sue call Tom to confirm. Sue has some questions on the budget that she will pursue with Liz.

FY 2019 EEA Grant Review: Sue has submitted the July interim grant report for this grant and will be submitting for reimbursement for both the FY2019 and FY 2020 grants at the end of the month when all FY 2020 expenses will be accounted for, as requested by EEA. Sue and Amy hope to have a plan in place by the September meeting for the balance of this grant. Web site design (in order to attract and serve audiences for outreach), the customer database and a focus on timely topics will drive the grant work this year.

FY 2020 EEA Grant Review: Sue summarized the work to date on this grant. Tom Akin has agreed to serve on the Supervisory Board and Sue has had preliminary discussions and made public data requests of Sean Bowen, Michael Gold and Thomas Cahill with MDAR. She didn't mention the role composters have in the grant and Patrick reminded her. Rachel spoke about the needs that may exist with stable waste/bedding and the possibility of lab testing. Sue had sent a draft contract agreement between herself and the Board for the Project Manager position on this grant to the Board before the meeting. Liz expressed concern that having 2 billing rates may be difficult to track. Sue wasn't sure, since the way she reads the grants the hours (administrative vs project management) need to be reported separately anyway for the grant, however, raising the rate for project management from \$23 per hour to \$25 per hour will reduce the hours available from 1000 to 960. Sue feels this will probably be ok given the changes needed under coronavirus restrictions during the time period -site visits may not play as big a part as anticipated. She has already revised her tracking and reporting to capture this

detail for July, having realized the need when doing the first interim grant report for the FY 2020 grant. Liz suggested the Supervisors arrange to meet in executive session to finalize the contract.

FY 2021 EEA Grant: MCD's Letter of Inquiry was accepted and MCD has been invited to submit a full proposal due July 24th. Sue is working on the proposal and will be in touch as appropriate or desired as the draft is finalized. She asked Liz to set aside some time for her to discuss both MCD's budget and process and the grant budget process she has used in the past. Sue will ask Tom if she can sign on behalf of David with the full proposal as she did for the Letter of Inquiry.

Elementary Education: Sue had shared the NACD Pollinator Field Day Curriculum Guide with Andrew and reported that she believed a Field Day might be something MCD could do next spring or in 2022 with planning and funding. Andrew enthusiastically agreed. A discussion of tables and manpower ensued and Heidi volunteered NRCS to help staff stations should MCD go ahead with this offering. David pointed out that the Federal Fish and Wildlife property in Maynard has a pollinator garden already and might be a good site and Andrew reminded us of how enthusiastic the Principal McGillicuddy was in their discussions. The Board agreed that this would be a good first foray into elementary education and are eager to pursue it.

Review NRCS MOU/SOU: Sue will send the Board a summary as well as the full documents. The item that must be kept uppermost in mind is privacy. We are held to our commitment to keep producer/landowner information confidential at all times. Heidi agreed to give a reminder presentation on PII (Personally Identifying Information) and how it must be protected at our September meeting. An annual review of this standard is a good practice.

Approve FY 2021 Annual Plan: The Board has discussed this extensively at previous meetings. Patrick presented the final draft that he and Andrew polished after the last discussion, Andrew made the motion to approve it, David made the second motion, and all were in favor. Heidi asked for a copy. Sue will send it to her.

Begin the 3-5 year planning process: Sue introduced the topic and asked that the Board start to brainstorm and create a working document. The most recent long-range plan she could find in the files is from 1982. She will scan it and send it to the Board. One thing Liz had brought to her attention was the upcoming 75th anniversary of MCD. Sue would like to use that event as a springboard for a year of outreach, with a topic or event each month, and relevant trivia or facts featured in our publications/media feeds.

Liz has expressed a desire to be part of the planning and celebration. She envisions a dinner event in line with the 50th anniversary celebration. She and David both would like to recruit Dick Gelpke, a former Supervisor and Professor of Cartography to present his maps of the County showing how things have changed over the years.

Patrick mentioned discussion how air and water quality are changing with our changing climate and that we might highlight these changes in our outreach and as we reflect on 75 years in the District. Sue recommended a recent television broadcast on climate that referred to atmospheric weather as rivers in the sky and discussed new research on how these currents are changing our climate. She will find the reference. Another possible topic is neocortinoids. Sue also mentioned that she is thinking about how the environment does not respect borders and that the District might think of partnering with Districts across state lines, like Merrimack County Conservation District (MCCD) which is in New Hampshire, in addition to neighboring MA Districts. Heidi pointed out that NACD and New England NACD have a campaign to highlight districts and that we might collaborate with them/set a goal to be featured. Additional topics discussed included: Urban farming (contact Rose Aruda), backyard gardeners, foresters and orchardists, in addition to a possible survey of small farms, including or in addition to urban farmers. NRCS is trying to better understand and service urban farmers and is looking for contacts in the County. Sue will forward information on Mill City Grows to Heidi.

Training and recruitment update: The State Commission Meeting was cancelled, so Sue asked Tom Andersen how we might get our Supervisors sworn in. He advised that we pass a resolution agreeing that they can be sworn in remotely. Patrick made the motion that Tom take whatever measures are necessary to have our elected Supervisors sworn in. Andrew seconded the motion and all were in favor. Heidi mentioned that Tom had attended the virtual meeting of the Berkshire Conservation District so their new supervisors could take the oath during that meeting, and that it was quite moving to take part in the meeting. Sue will follow up with Tom and produce the recruiting document discussed in June for all to distribute and use.

Annual Meeting: The Board agreed to keep to the original Annual Meeting date of December 7th and address any necessary modifications due to coronavirus as they come up at the time.

New Business:

Watershed News:

1. Tour of Delaney and Tyler Dams – Liz wondered if the Board would enjoy a tour of these features in September. The Board liked the idea. Sue will follow up with Jim Lyons to set a date. David wondered if we might include a stop to see the high tunnel at Hillside School since it is nearby. Sue will check into that as well.
2. Unkety and James Brook project – replication of Palmer River process. Sue explained that this project is coming up and will keep the Board updated on how the District might support it.

Important Dates:

1. NOFA Conference – multiple: July and August – Patrick attending

2. SVT Legislative Breakfast – July 23, 2020
3. Deadline for FY 2021 EEA Grant Proposal – July 24, 2020
4. Deadline for EEA FY 2020 Grant Year (FY 2019 and FY 2020 grants) Expense Reimbursement Submissions – July 31, 2020
5. Next Supervisor’s Board Meeting: September 14, 2020
6. Fall Plant Sale: September 17 (set up), 18 and 19

Andrew made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 p.m. David seconded, all were in favor.

Minutes recorded and respectfully submitted,

Susan Lavigne Thomas

District Administrator

