

Orange County Agricultural Preservation Board

Approved Meeting Summary: March 17, 2021

****Virtual Meeting via GoToMeeting****

7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Anderson, Compton, Dawson, McAdams, McKnight, McPherson, Myers, Parker, Redding, Saiers, Shambley, Sykes, Vanhook, Woods

Members Absent: Finley

Guests: Roger Gunn, Orange County Real Property Appraisal Manager

Staff: Peter Sandbeck, Cultural Resources Coordinator; Mike Ortosky, Ag Economic Development Coordinator; Sherry Scully, Natural Resource Conservation Service.

1. **Call to order:** Chair Redding called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.
2. **Chair Comments/Introductions:** None
3. **Considerations of Additions to Agenda:** None
4. **Meeting Summary/Minutes:** November 18, 2020: Compton moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Saiers; minutes were approved.
5. **Items for Discussion:**
 - a) **Orange County PUV Program:** Roger Gunn, Real Property Appraisal Manager for Orange County, provided members with an overview of the PUV program and its administration in accordance with NC General Statutes 105-277.2-7. There are several broad requirements for enrolling: it has to be individually owned; it has to meet the size requirements (10 acres for agriculture; 5 acres for aquaculture; 5 acres for horticulture; and 20 acres for forestry--and for forestry land, there must be an approved written forestry management plan); income requirements for agriculture and horticulture of \$1000 per year for three years prior to making application. Being in the PUV program qualifies you by statute to be a bona fide farm in the eyes of the Planning Dept. It is a complex program. Members then posed a variety of questions about various topics. Is this program adjusting to recognize the increasing movement to smaller, intensive operations on minimal acreage? To date, the state has not moved to lower the acreage requirements, and only the state can do that. You must own a property for four years or reside on the property prior to Jan 1 of the year in which you apply, or be related to someone who owned the property. If you purchase a property that is already in the program, you must apply for enrollment and can participate if you meet the other requirements. Land protected by a conservation easement will be eligible if it allows for farming and selective timber harvesting. For equine operations, the income and acreage requirements still apply. Grazing fees are an allowable source of income. They require the written forestry management plans but not a written conservation plan. The initial qualifying tract must be contiguous, then you can add additional parcels that aren't contiguous. If you add forestry acreage, you need to have a forestry management plan in place as of Jan. 1 of the year that you apply for each new parcel, which can be smaller than the 20 acre minimum requirement for an owner's first parcel. He has a new

assistant, Dana Hall, handling the farming applications. There is no annual income requirement for forestry land as long as the plan has an approved timeline for harvesting. A new application is required for each new parcel. The owner has sixty days from the time of the transfer to make application. Chair Redding thanked Mr. Gunn for his presentation.

- b) Interest in updating the VAD sign design:** Staff reviewed past discussions about our present sign design, as we prepare to order new signs. Members agreed to maintain our existing sign design.

6. Items for Decision:

- a) New VAD/EVAD Applications (Attachment 2):** Sandbeck presented the current applications listed below. All of these farms meet the requirements/criteria for VAD/EVAD enrollment.
- **Annie Baggett – Sunshine Lavender Farm:** 21.95 ac, Caldwell Ag District: Lavender and other crops; managed forestry and woodland
 - **Greg Bohlen—Union Grove Farm:** 442.2 ac, New Hope and White Cross Ag Districts: Table Grapes, orchard, composting, event venue, managed forestry and woodland; *grouped under ownership entities as follows:*
 - 2b-1: Greg Bohlen: 101.30 acres, New Hope and White Cross Ag Districts
 - 2b-2: Bandit Farms LLC: 61.58 acres, New Hope and White Cross Ag Districts
 - 2b-3: Bandit Farms II LLC: 109.61 acres, White Cross Ag District
 - 2b-4: Bohlen Farms I LLC: 169.7 acres, New Hope Ag District
 - **Martin and Rebekah Bohlen:** 24.89 ac, White Cross Ag District, managed forestry
 - **Matt and Suzanne Case – Clearwind Farm:** 204.2 ac, Cane Creek/Buckhorn and White Cross Ag Districts: Pasture and hay land for riding, equine learning center, managed forestry
 - **Zachary Dodson:** 22.5 ac, New Hope Ag District: Pasture land, managed forestry
 - **Josh Williams – Union Grove Farm:** 39.05 ac, New Hope and White Cross Ag Districts, managed forestry and woodland
 - **Holcomb-Coon Rock Farm:** 45.78 acres; not presently located within an AG District boundary so not eligible to enroll as explained in more detail below.
 - **Fran and Aaron Kelly:** 63.47 acres, Cedar Grove Ag District: tobacco, soybeans and managed forestry and woodland

The above applications total 864.04 acres being proposed for enrollment, all in the VAD program. All farms/parcels must place is a requirement per our ordinance, before a farm can be approved by the BOCC. Staff presented the special situation with Holcomb/Coon Rock Farm application, on Dimmocks Mill Rd., where the farm is located just outside of the Hillsborough ETJ, but lies within county zoning jurisdiction. However, our VAD district boundary lines were drawn to exclude this little piece of the county from being in the VAD program. As things now stand, this property is not eligible to be enrolled in the VAD program. Staff will review this with the county attorney's office to develop a process for re-drawing the boundaries to include this piece of county zoned land within the most logical VAD boundary line. Anderson moved to approve all the farms for enrollment in VAD, seconded by McPherson; motion passed.

7. Informational Items/Future Agenda Items:

- a. Fine-tuning VAD application and approval process/clarification of program requirements:** We are working on a few adjustments to our process, to clarify the requirement for a conservation plan and forestry plan, and tracking our applications to ensure all plans are submitted prior to bringing the

applications to the APB for approval. We will coordinate with the land records staff to track changes to ownership, now that we have so many farms in the program. We'll add an online application too.

- b. Membership:** Staff noted that Vaughn Compton retired off the APB back in June, in his district position, so need a replacement. Members thanked Compton for his dedicated service.
- c. Meeting with BOCC to discuss annual report and work plan:** There will be the usual annual meeting with the BOCC coming up later this spring. Staff will keep you informed. This will be virtual.
- d. Future presentation by Animal Services about livestock dog protection:** Animal Services wishes to make a presentation soon regarding livestock dog care and treatment.
- e. Ag Economic Development report:** No report tonight.
- f. Next Steps on milk processing feasibility study:** McKnight provided an update/overview of the decline of dairying here. The new idea of cow shares has been gaining popularity. Consumers purchase a share of a cow and in return can get a regular allotment of raw milk. The use of raw milk presents some challenges but this does provide a way for existing dairy farmers to adapt and stay in the business. McKnight asked the members: 1) is there a demand for regional/group milk processing facility along the lines of PFAP, but just for dairy products? 2) is there a need for a testing program to support the increased production/consumption of raw milk? Can Orange Co. support a program of testing raw milk? This entails chain of custody and regulatory issues. Discussion followed. There is a general sense that raw milk does have a lot of interest, but brings challenges. We need to know how many people are really interested in producing. We got here over many years, starting in the 1940s using very local processing, then moving to regional, then almost national scale. So this would be going against the trends. Dairy farmers can't feed cows with price of feed and still make money. Are people who are not in cows right now willing to devote all the capital and time to developing a herd? Do we think it is important to maintain dairying in Orange Co. Sykes noted that 40 years ago there were over 90 dairies, but when he sold recently, he was only one of 4 active dairies left. He never would have started a conventional dairy farm unless it had been in his family already—it's too hard and takes too much capital. He moved to cow shares as a way to find a niche and gets good feedback, and is the only one so far doing this here. He offers shares for a yearly fee then you buy the product by the gallon. They market by Facebook, word of mouth, and their web site. The interest in raw milk is driven because this is the traditional way that cows were raised, in pasture, no processing, and they know where their milk is coming from. Raw milk can be easier to digest for some people, helped by the natural A-2 gene that is found in some Jersey cows. McPherson noted that if he could milk 40 cows and make money, he'd still be doing it. There are still people now in Orange Co who know the business, and still have the infrastructure, the barns etc. So we are in a time sensitive place in this discussion as folks will die off and/or sell their land. All agreed that dairying is a way of life that requires special dedication. Is the interest there for newcomers? McKnight asked members to mull over the concept of how/if it is going to be possible to have cows milked here in the long run? Dairying has a rich history here and she'd hate for all the citizens to have to be dependent on milk coming largely from Texas and California.

8. Time for Information Sharing: None

9. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.