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Director of Planning & Zoning

Harford County Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes
July 11, 2023

Opening

The meeting of the Harford County Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board was called to order at 7:00pm on July 11, 2023 at 220 South Main Street, Bel Air, Maryland 21014.

Board Attendees

Megan McMillian, Jim Morris, and John Stump

Jeff Holloway, and Jackie Smithson were unable to attend.

Staff: Bill Amoss & Jen Wilson

Guests: Randy Comer, Lisa Comer, Keith Comer, Bernie Schwartz, Carol Schwartz, Alex Spies

Approval of Minutes

Ms. McMillan moved to approve minutes from the June 6, 2023 meeting with Mr. Morris seconding. The minutes were approved unanimously.

New Business

- The Board reviewed a revised request by the Comer Family to create a lot around a pre-existing dwelling and an ag-subdivision of the 3 existing parcels. Mr. Amoss updated the Board on MALPF's position to not support a division of the pond area only, but MALPF will support dividing along the 3 existing parcels lines with the minor adjustment to straighten the boundary between 2 fields. MALPF also emphasized the purpose for the ag-subdivision must be related to ag production. While this is not exactly the layout the Comer Family wanted, the Board voted on the request to keep it moving forward with the state. Ms. McMillan moved to approve the requests as stated above. Mr. Morris seconded. The motion passed.
- The Board reviewed a revised request by Bernie & Carol Schwartz to adjust the boundary line between two parcels, one parcel is under a HALPP easement. This would create a 10-acre parcel with the existing dwelling still under the County easement. The remaining acreage (approximately 60 acres) would be consolidated with the Schwartz's adjacent parcel that is not currently under an easement. The 60 acres will still be subject to the current County easement after consolidation. Board members discussed the policy supported by the Administration of requiring at least 10

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acres to be maintained by the smaller parcel. Ms. McMillan moved to approve the request. Mr. Morris seconded. The motion passed.

- The Board reviewed a request by Jim Smith to provide approximately 9 acres of off-site/overflow parking for the hot air balloon festival schedule to take place on August 4-6 at Cedar Lane Park. The farm is under a MALPF easement. Mr. Spies, the festival organizer, explained the need for the parking due to the large number of attendees anticipated on the Saturday during the event and their desire not to bus attendees for long distances. Mr. Amoss shared with the Board that the County Administration does not support the use of the farm for overflow parking due to possible safety concerns with attendees trying to cross Routes 136 and 543 during or after the festival instead of waiting for buses to shuttle them. Mr. Stump did not support sending an approval to MALPF unless the County Administration and other agencies supported the proposal. Mr. Morris made a motion to recommend approval with several conditions including:
 1. no pedestrian crossing or walking to nearby park, only bus transportation with fencing and security services as indicated by the festival organizer.
 2. the festival receiving approval from Harford County Planning & Zoning, SHA, Harford County Sherriff Department, and all other County, State and Federal agencies as required.

Ms. McMillan seconded the motion. The motion passed. Mr. Amoss will verify with the County administration before the request/Board approval is forwarded to MALPF.

- The Board reviewed a request by Brad Milton to create a lot around a pre-existing dwelling and absorb the balance of the land into an adjacent parcel, and to also allow the septic system for the dwelling to be located on the farm parcel due to its unusual configuration if approved through the subdivision process. The Board discussed whether the Health Department would permit such a configuration. Mr. Morris motioned to approve the requests. Ms. McMillan seconded; the motion passed.
- The Board discussed a possible future request from the Martin Family/BGE to remove 7-10 acres of crop land from a County easement for the purposes of expanding a BGE substation located along Route 24 in Pylesville. The Board had several questions and concerns with such a request setting a precedence, removing land from production, changing land use from agriculture to a commercial use, and whether the County would be reimbursed for the money paid to purchase the easement. The Board agreed they are not in favor of taking land out of the easement for such a purpose as the intent of the program and easement is to protect the land in perpetuity. The Board's opinion will be forwarded to the County Administration for their consideration.
- Ms. Wilson and Mr. Amoss updated the Board on the State of Preservation Report being completed by Tom Daniels in conjunction with Harford Land Trust. Mr. Daniels completed a similar report for Lancaster Farmland Trust that we are hoping to replicate. The report would be used to educate local officials, lawmakers, and citizens on the benefits of preservation and to support the continuation of these programs.

- The Board discussed the idea of participating with Harford Land Trust to celebrate the County's preservation efforts and recognize an individual for their contributions to land preservation. The goal would be to spread the word on the continued success of the programs, educate members of the community about our efforts, and increase exposure for our programs and Harford Land Trust's through the shared event outreach. The Board would need to help decide who to recognize if this moves forward.
- Mr. Amoss updated the Board on the status of MALPF program. 14 applications were submitted to MALPF for the FY24 application cycle. Easements for Schwartz & Dallam from the FY22 cycle are close to settlement. Others continue to work on survey and deed requirements.
- Mr. Amoss updated the Board on the County program. BSA, Susan Peverley, and Shireman easements were settled prior to the end of the fiscal year. Milton also settled earlier in July. The remaining 8 easements have until the end of September to complete settlement without having to request an extension from the County Council. The revised program legislation still needs to move forward so it could be ready for Council review in the fall.
- Ms. Wilson updated the Board on the Rural Legacy program. 1 applicant is in process after an extended delay by the owner due to health concerns. Other applicants are needed after several interested owners are considering MALPF easements.
- Mr. Amoss updated the Board on the upcoming farm tour for legislators being hosted by the Soil Conservation District. Legislators from the State and County level plan to attend, as well as the County Executive and several Department Directors. Mr. Amoss & Ms. Wilson will have an opportunity to present to the group about the Ag Preservation Program during the lunch stop.

Updates

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30pm