

Montgomery Township Agricultural Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 11, 2024

Attendance: (X) Back; (X) Fiori; (X) Johnson; (X) Pariso; (X) Voorhees

Advisors: () Rayner

TC Liaison: (X) Ahn

Staff: (X) Wasilauski, Open Space & Stewardship Director

Visitors:

The meeting was called to order at 8:33AM in the main floor conference room of the Municipal Center.

- **Reorganization**

Election of member as Chairperson

- Dr. Back was nominated by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Ms. Pariso.
- There were no other nominations.
- All in favor: all; Opposed: none

Election of member as Vice-Chairperson

- Nomination of Ms. Voorhees by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Ms. Pariso
- There were no other nominations.
- All in favor: all; Opposed: none

- **Approval of Minutes** – December 7, 2023

- Motion: Dr. Back; Second: Ms. Voorhees
- All in favor: all; Opposed: none

- **Public Comment**

- There were no members of the public present wishing to make comment.

- **Farmland Preservation Plan**

- Ms. Wasilauski submitted the draft plan to the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) on September 19 for review. The SADC previously communicated that they anticipated completing their review in early 2024. The Committee asked Ms. Wasilauski to follow-up for an update from the State.

- **Special Events on Preserved Farmland**

- In February 2023, Governor Murphy signed special legislation (S-757) that allows all preserved farms to host “special occasion events” or “SOEs” (e.g. weddings, family reunions).
- This legislation follows a pilot program that allowed these events on preserved properties that operate as wineries.
- Ms. Voorhees mentioned that she was starting the application process and it was quite lengthy.

Montgomery Township Agricultural Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

March 11, 2024

- Dr. Back mentioned his experience at the County Ag. Board.
- Mr. Fiori mentioned that perhaps the Township Committee could make a general comment to the County and/or State regarding the legislation and making the application process less onerous for farmers.

- **Soil Protection Standards**
 - The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) posted all of the comments received during the public comment period. The members asked Ms. Wasilauski to forward the link.

- **Statewide Farmland Preservation Formula**
 - Ms. Wasilauski shared that the SADC is developing a statewide farmland preservation valuation formula. This formula could be used instead of the traditional appraisal process.
 - Ms. Wasilauski shared Interim Policy P-56 with the members.
 - The members indicated the formula would need to account for a large number of variables.
 - Mr. Fiori mentioned that appraisals can sometimes go out of date quickly, so the formula may present an opportunity to quickly update a valuation.

- **Tree Preservation Ordinance**
 - Ms. Wasilauski gave a presentation on the proposed ordinance which would regulate tree removal, and require the planting of replacement trees in certain instances. The ordinance is a requirement for every municipality in the State per new stormwater regulations in 2023 from NJ Department of Environmental Protection.
 - The members asked questions about the permit application and review process.

- **Acquisition Updates**
 - Fenton/Safro (12001/20) Camp Meeting Avenue; 19.6 acres
 - No update.
 - Johnson & Johnson (13001/15) Grandview Road; 125 acres
 - The Committee discussed the recent transition from Johnson and Johnson to Kenvue and the possibility that Kenvue may shut down their operation in Montgomery in about 2 years.
 - Bethke (17008/1) Rutland & Harlingen Road; 10.8 acres
 - The property owner previously proposed to subdivide a small portion of the property to sell to the adjacent property owner, and then sell the remainder to the Township.
 - In November, the owner said the sale to the neighbor would not move forward, and now offered the entire property for sale to the Township.

Montgomery Township Agricultural Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes

March 11, 2024

- Ms. Wasilauski made an offer to Mr. Bethke on November 13, and re-sent that offer on December 7. There has been no response.
- NJ Dept. of Corrections (25001/27, 27001/7.01); Route 601 & Burnt Hill Road; 400 acres
 - Preserved by special legislation 1988
 - The members discussed the vulnerability of the preservation being overturned with Committeeperson Ahn.
- Georgianna Franklin Brennan (block 30001 lot 9) Route 518; 40.2 acres
 - Sent letter to property owner January 8, 2021 – no update
- Hosea (Block 31010 Lots 10, 12 & 13) Cherry Valley Road; 75 acres
 - Property owner declined to move forward in 2020 – no update

Ms. Pariso recused herself from discussion and left the room.

- Irish (12001/15) Fairview Road; 34.3 acres
 - Ms. Wasilauski mentioned that Mr. Irish had listed the property for sale recently for \$1,644,000, and had since lowered the price to \$1,550,000.
 - Ms. Wasilauski mentioned that many of the neighbors had reached out about potential preservation. Ms. Wasilauski told them that the Township had previously worked with Mr. Irish regarding a potential purchase/preservation, but they were unable to reach an agreement on terms.

Ms. Pariso returned to the meeting room.

- **Best Management Practices**

- There was no update to discuss on the BMPs listed on the agenda:
 - Invasives
 - Spotted lanternfly
 - Ailanthus
 - Bradford pear
 - Spotted knapweed
 - Mugwort
 - No Till
 - Herbicide/pesticide use
 - Detention basin maintenance
 - Fencing
 - milkweed

- **Monitoring/Violations updates**

- None

Montgomery Township Agricultural Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 11, 2024

- **Camp Meeting Avenue Bridge Replacement**

- Representatives from NJDOT, Somerset County and the Township Engineer had a meeting on August 7, 2023 to discuss the project which is now in the DOT “pipeline” for construction.
- The Township awaits updated plans from NJDOT.

- **Planning & Zoning Board Applications**

A discussion of the following applications ensued, but no formal comments were determined to be necessary by the scope of this Committee.

- PB-08-23: Carrier Clinic (block 2001 lot 2 and block 1001 lot 14.02)
- BA-08-23: Michael & Jeanne Reilly (17 Augusta Court)
- PB-01-24: RPM Development (block 20001 lot 10.05) – amendment
- BA-06-23: Stellar Land Assets (block 35001 lot 15)
- BA-07-23: Bedens Brook Club – tennis hut & pump house (block 31001 lots 38 & 39)

- **Old/New Business**

- Montgomery Friends of Open Space Farmers Market
 - Committeeperson Ahn mentioned that the Friends’ Farmers Market has moved to the new Municipal Complex for their Winter Market days, and will host their weekly summer/fall market in the main front parking lot. The Township is working with the Friends to have an informational booth where other local farms could feature flyers, brochures or other information. The booth could be staffed by a HS volunteer.
- Committeeperson Ahn also suggested that farmers could consider having an “open house” type of event on a weekend so the public could feel comfortable visiting the farm(s) and learning about what they do, grow, raise, etc.

- **Correspondence / News**

- No updates

- **Upcoming Events**

- **Upcoming meetings:** April 8, 2024
May 13, 2024

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30AM.