

# **MICHIGAN AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION FUND BOARD**

Location:  
Farm Bureau Corporate Office  
7373 W. Saginaw Highway, Lansing, Michigan  
Board Room 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

Thursday, February 13, 2020

## **MEETING MINUTES**

### **BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**

Member Carl Bednarski (Chairman)  
Member Brian Bourdages (phone)  
Member Ken DeCock  
Member Jonathan Jarosz (phone)  
Member Peg Kohring  
Member Stephen Shine on behalf of Director Dan Eichinger  
Mark Swartz on behalf of Director Gary McDowell

### **STAFF PRESENT**

Elizabeth Brost  
Lindsay Woods

### **PUBLIC GUESTS PRESENT**

Matt Channing (Kent County program)  
Rich Harlow (Former APFB staff member)  
Becky Huttenga (Ottawa County program)  
Vern Kulman (Macomb County landowner)  
Barry Lonik (Webster Township program)  
Katie Montoya (Berrien County program)  
Jeff Schroeder (Macomb County program)  
Paul Wing (Barry County program)  
Sue Wing (Barry County program)

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Bednarski called the meeting to order at 1:07 pm.

Members Bourdages and Jarosz attended the meeting via conference call.

### **APPROVAL OF 08-01-2019 MEETING MINUTES**

Chairman Bednarski announced these minutes had previously been approved and are now available on the APFB website.

### **REVIEW SCORED APPLICATIONS**

Elizabeth Brost provided the Board with a detailed explanation of how each application was scored based on program points and parcel points. There was a total of 13 parcels submitted from 9 local programs.

The results are as follows:

1. Webster Township – Base Lake
2. Washtenaw County - Poulter
3. Webster Township – Stillwood Farm
4. Grand Traverse County – Cherries R Da Berries
5. Ingham County – Arend Trust
6. Ottawa County – Klein
7. Grand Traverse County – Cherries R Da Berries II
8. Macomb – Falker
9. Macomb – Kulman
10. Kent – Sieracki
11. Kent – Kruithoff
12. Barry – Carpenter
13. Lapeer - Ankley

Member Kohring recused herself of any discussion regarding the Webster Township Base Lake application due to a conflict of interest involving the Huron River Project.

Elizabeth provided the Board with a suggestion of awarding one parcel per program.

There was discussion about “firsts” for local programs. Elizabeth announced it would be a “first” for all grant recipients, except for Washtenaw County. Member Jarosz stated he is more interested in creating contiguous blocks of preserved land rather than preserving lone parcels for program “firsts”. The Board agreed there needs to be discussion about “core values” and priorities relating to program “firsts” and supporting contiguous blocks of preserved land.

Elizabeth added the Board does have discretionary points they are able to award.

Member Bourdages stated out of abundance of caution he did help establish the Grand Traverse program and helped the owners of Cherries R Da Berries put easements in place.

Member Kohring requested Elizabeth to explain what the discretionary points are. Elizabeth explained the discretionary points are available to use outside of the scoring criteria if the Board determines lower scoring programs should receive funding based on the “core values”. In past cycles, the Board selected projects as “demonstration projects” in areas which did not have as much alternative funding. Staff recommends granting funds to one parcel per program per cycle.

Member Shine asked if the scores could be challenged. Elizabeth responded, yes. She also stated it basically came down to thoughtful, complete applications. Member Shine also asked if there could be

legal action taken against the Board if discretionary points are used instead of top scores. Rich Harlow stated according to the way the law is written, the Board may move things around based on the “core values”. Member Bourdages read part of the policies and procedures for the Board stating, “grants will be awarded based on the following criteria...how the application fits with the Core Values of the Agricultural Preservation Fund Board.”

- **Motion:** Member DeCock motioned to swap the Webster Township – Stillwood application with the Ottawa application, moving Webster Township – Stillwood from 3<sup>rd</sup> position to 6<sup>th</sup> position and Ottawa to 3<sup>rd</sup> position.
- **Supported** by Chairman Bednarski and Member Kohring.
- **Amended Motion:** Member DeCock amended his motion to move Webster Township – Stillwood Farm application from 3<sup>rd</sup> position to 6<sup>th</sup> position and Ottawa to 5<sup>th</sup> position.

Member Shine asked if the Board must define what the basis for discretionary points. Member Bourdages replied the Board does have the ability to make decisions to increase impact by region, especially if there is a disproportionate amount of points being allocated to one county. Member Bourdages added, at a quick glance, Ottawa County is the third highest scoring parcel with a strong program score as well.

Both Members Jarosz and Shine agree that no discretionary points should be used to deviate from awarding funds to the 5 top scoring applications.

Mark Swartz stated the numbers give the default scores. He reiterated that the purpose of the Ag Board is to guide new programs; that we are better off in the long run to help bolster program support.

Members Kohring and Bourdages asked if the Ottawa County application has any matching funds. Becky Huttenga stated there is a 25% match from the landowner and the rest was requested from the Fund.

- **Vote:** Chairman Bednarski called a vote on Member DeCock’s amended motion.
  - 4 ayes, 2 nays
- **Amended Motion carried.** Webster Township – Stillwood Farm will be moved to 6<sup>th</sup> position and Ottawa County will be moved to 5<sup>th</sup> position.

Elizabeth noted Ottawa County will be offered \$4,864 less than asking. Becky Huttenga stated Ottawa County will accept that.

Member Kohring expressed her appreciation to Elizabeth for doing all the scoring as it is not easy. Elizabeth replied she was generous with scoring and if the program provided either verbal or written documentation, she was understanding.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chairman Bednarski welcomed the public guests to comment at this time.

Vern Kulman, a landowner from Macomb County, provided his interpretation of how the Board should use their discretionary points. He pointed out the very close grand total scores between three of the applications and recommended the Board use their discretionary points to decide between these close scores, not to move programs out of awarded grant positions. Vern asked how Macomb received 3 training points. Elizabeth answered Vern's question. Vern stated he was involved in the last cycle in 2008 and this year, due to the available funding again, he has seen interest grow.

Barry Lonik, from the Webster Township program, commented he is disappointed, and would like to be notified in advance if only one parcel per program will be accepted as there is a lot of work that goes into these applications.

Jeff Schroeder, from the Macomb County program, stated that through the application process, he questioned what the highest best use value was but without actually doing the appraisals we find that to be a struggle. He asked if there was any way to make this easier for the next round in the future. What if owners lowball then increase?

Matt Channing, from the Kent County program, stated he appreciated the discussion about awarding funding to lower scoring programs.

Paul Wing, a landowner from Barry County, stated he is disappointed with the results of Barry County's application and that the land in Barry County is quality farmland and the Board should consider that as well.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Member DeCock suggested the Board consider putting something together to support "first time" programs and only allowing one parcel per program. Member Kohring agreed with Member DeCock's suggestions for helping "first time" programs as well as allowing only one parcel per program until the Board gets clear guidance.

- **Motion:** Member Kohring motioned to have staff bring recommendations regarding points for first time programs.
- **Supported** by Member Bourdages and Chairman Bednarski. Member Bourdages added, there needs to be much more discussion about the benefits of directing money to sustainable businesses to protect farmland or else we will be protecting "willy-nilly" parcels here and there. Member Bourdages also spoke on behalf of the hard work that Barry County has put into this and that the land is important. He agrees with Member Kohring who stated no new program would ever get established if there is not "first time" program help. There are conflicting new program needs and dollar needs, and the Board should discuss how to weigh all these factors.
- **Vote:** Chairman Bednarski called a vote on Member Kohring's motion.
  - 4 ayes, 2 nays
- **Motion carried.** Staff will provide findings and recommendation to the Board regarding a system for new/first time programs at the next Board meeting.

02-13-2020

- Member Shine suggested looking at carving out funding for new programs and reserving the remaining funds for the established programs to compete. He also noted some programs missed out on quite a few points due to lack of MAEAP participation, NRCS conservation plans and Ag Economic plans.

Member DeCock asked what happens to the funds if the appraisal comes in high or low. Elizabeth answered, if the appraisal is high, we cannot give any more, if low, we can provide Ottawa with more funds, depending on the timing of closings.

Paul Wing asked if there is any federal money available, such as the federal funds used in the 2007 grant cycle. Elizabeth answered that the federal funding was a one-time occurrence.

Sue Wing asked if the scoring system will be the same for the next application cycle. Elizabeth answered that the Board is discussing tweaking some things for the next cycle.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

- Staff will provide findings and recommendation to the Board regarding a system for new/first time programs at the next Board meeting.
- Staff will report appraisal and title work funding information to the Board.
- Staff will schedule next Board meeting.

#### **ADJOURN**

Chairman Bednarski adjourned the meeting at 2:25 pm.