

FARMLAND PRESERVATION, INC.
MINUTES – OCTOBER 18, 2022

The regular meeting of the Lower Makefield Farmland Preservation, Inc. (Farmland) Board of Directors (Board) was held remotely on October 18, 2022. Mr. Blank called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Those present:

Farmland Preservation, Inc.: Michael Blank, President
Dennis Steadman, Vice President
George Heinze, Secretary
Dan Bankoske, Treasurer
Sean Carney, Member

Absent: James McCartney, Supervisor Liaison

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Mr. Heinze

Mr. Steadman moved, Mr. Blank seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the Minutes of September 20, 2022 as written.

TREASURER’S REPORT: Mr. Bankoske

There have been no additional expenditures since the last meeting. The investment strategy with Fidelity will be considered at the next meeting. Fidelity’s comments have been received, and they agree to continue with the same strategy, but the Board wants to discuss this as a Board; and that will be an Agenda item for the November meeting. Mr. Blank will put this on the Agenda for the next meeting on November 15, 2022.

DECISION ON WORTHINGTON EASEMENT REQUEST, 1491 HEATHER RIDGE DRIVE:

Mr. Bankoske

The owner of the property, Chance Worthington, of Worthington & Shagen Custom Builders, had approached the Board about putting an Easement in place to run water and sewer lines across Farmland property to connect their property to public water and sewer. A number of months ago they presented to the Board with a high-level construct; and last month, they presented a more detailed plan. The Board has had numerous discussions about this including an Executive Session meeting yesterday.

Mr. Blank moved and Mr. Bankoske seconded to decline the proposed easement request on Heather Ridge from Worthington Builders.

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Mr. Bankoske stated when this was discussed, there were many different opinions, and there was a lack of consensus among the Board. Mr. Carney stated he agrees that due diligence was done, and it was discussed at length; and it is correct that there was a lack of consensus. Mr. Steadman stated there were pros and cons, but he feels the overwhelming consideration was the potential long-term implications of having such easements on perpetually-preserved farmland that this Board and future Boards need to manage. He stated this Board was not willing to impose what could be restrictions on the property forever. The Board is tasked with managing the property in perpetuity which was a fundamental issue.

There was no one from the public wishing to speak on this matter.

Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Steadman stated the Farmland Preservation, Inc. Board is a non-profit entity; and this decision was made by the Board as a private entity owning the property. He stated this is different from a decision going before a Government entity such as the Zoning Hearing Board.

UPDATES

Makefield Brook: Missing I-295 Fence and permanent no trespassing signs near Pownal Drive: Mr. Steadman

The fence is still missing. The contractor who did the I-295 expansion took the fence down and has not been responsive to the Township's contact. Mr. Steadman will continue to follow up.

Three temporary no trespassing signs had been installed by Mr. Carney and Mr. Steadman a number of months ago. They seem to be working in deterring trespassing, dumping, etc. It had been approved to install more permanent signs, and these were installed two weeks ago by Mr. Carney. It is hoped that they will continue to deter trespassing.

Clearview: Open Utility Box: Mr. Steadman

There is a damaged utility box owned by the company that manages the radio tower adjacent to the property. The owner has received notice, but there has been no repair yet. It is well marked, and orange flags around it have been re-established.

Bridle Estates: Completion of Tree Removal: Mr. Heinze

Corcoran Landscaping has removed the dead/diseased trees. This work was included on a September 29 invoice, and it was paid on October 1.

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NEW ISSUES: LONGSHORE

Tree-Posting Warning Signs Taken Down: Mr. Carney, Mr. Steadman
Respect Our Trees signs had been posted as a reminder that things should not be stapled to the trees, but all of them are now gone other than the one near the entrance of Makefield Highlands which was found broken laying on the ground. This one sign has been put back into the ground. The rest of the area has been mowed flat so it seems that the signs were removed due to mowing of that strip. The Township should be contacted to ask the mowers if there was a reason why the signs were removed so that the signs can be retrieved as a lot of work went into the installation of these signs. Permission had been obtained from the Township to install the signs. These signs were along the bike path that goes from Dolington Road to the entrance of Longshore across from the Golf Course.

During the Pandemic some signs of support and stuffed animals had been stapled to those trees, which had eventually become a mess, and a fair amount of time was spent by Mr. Steadman pulling out numerous staples from the trees as that is very harmful to a living tree. The Respect Our Trees signs had been put up at that time. While this may have not been convenient for the mowers, Mr. Steadman had discussed this with the Township as to the best location for the signs and he had been advised by the Township Manager at that time to center them between the trees so that there would be adequate room for a mower to go around them. Mr. Steadman will contact the Township and discuss what can be done. The signs were obtained from the sign company that the Township uses, so they should be easily reproduced. The posts used were probably too lightweight. Mr. Steadman stated he would like the signs to be put back up after discussions with the Public Works Department as we would not want to impact their ability to keep that lawn cut on Farmland's behalf. He will reach out to the Township to discuss this.

Mr. Heinze asked if this had been an issue prior to the Pandemic; and Mr. Steadman stated while a few things had been posted prior to the Pandemic, it was not to the degree that was seen during the Pandemic. Mr. Blank stated he had filled two huge garbage bags full of the stuffed animals which were infested with bugs when they took them off those trees. There were multiple staples and multiple stuffed animals per tree. Mr. Heinze stated if it is not now a problem, possibly fewer signs could be reinstalled which could be spaced out more. There were three along Woodside and one as you turn the corner on Dolington. Mr. Steadman stated they could wait and see if there is an issue in the future; and if there are no more people posting things on the trees, the signs may not be needed. It was the consensus of the Board to wait and see if the signs are really needed.

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Follow-Up Needed with Jeff Hirko: Property Line: Mr. Blank, Mr. Carney

There had been discussion about demarcation of the property line since the Board did not want to install a fence there. It was decided not to give permission for use of the Farmland property, and it was decided that the line should be defined. While a fence would not be necessary, posts or something similar would be sufficient. Mr. Carney stated while he believes this should be done, he does not feel now is the right time as he knows that hunting is taking place in the area; and he will find out when hunting in that area will be over. When Board members were on site, it was evident that things were on the Farmland property; and they asked that they be removed. Mr. Steadman stated he feels four clear corner posts would be productive.

OTHER BUSINESS: All

Mr. Steadman stated the Red Tag Program for deer control allows for some out of season hunting of antlerless deer on agricultural parcels that are suffering economic damage from deer. That program ended the end of September. Farmland participates in that program at Longshore, Makefield Brook, Clearview, and Leedom. The Red Tags are given to approved hunters and unused tags have to be returned to the Game Commission. This season only five of twenty-three Red Tags were utilized, and the other eighteen will be returned.

A week ago, Mr. Steadman received four large packets of information from the Game Commission (one for each property) on changes to the Red Tag Program next year, which will be broken into two seasons – January to May and June to September. Mr. Steadman stated if it is too complicated, the Board should consider whether it is worthwhile it for Farmland to continue to participate in the Program. While it resulted in the harvesting of five antlerless deer, which contributes to reduced population, it is just a “drop in the bucket.” While there are deer in the area, off-season is not a good time of year to be hunting as it is difficult to get the deer in close for archery. The application will be due the beginning of January if the Board wishes to continue in this Program.

Mr. Blank asked if it is known who used the five tags, and Mr. Steadman stated all four properties are farmed by the Stewarts; and those hunters who go out frequently are the ones who use the tags. The deer are processed and in most cases, consumed by the hunter although there are programs for charitable donations as well. Mr. Steadman stated he volunteered to manage the Red Tag Program on behalf of Sam Stewart because it is the farmer making the Application and not the landowner. Tom McGowan is not interested in the program. Doug Wright’s property is not huntable as it is an open field. Bob Colavita manages the property that he leases himself.

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Ten tags had been given to BOWMA for the Leedom property, and they used three of the ten. Last year, they had a better success rate. A request has not yet been received from BOWMA to hunt the Farmland properties for the regular hunting season. Permission has not been given by Farmland to hunters other than BOWMA to use Leedom. Mr. Carney stated Bob Colavita has given permission to hunters to hunt Leedom for the portion that he rents. BOWMA hunters utilize the woods adjacent to that area. Mr. Blank asked if we should reach out to BOWMA, and Mr. Steadman stated he will reach out to them as to what their intentions are this year.

Mr. Carney stated there was a survey done at Susan Circle, and it was found that there were a number of trees that had been planted on the Farmland side. The residents at 1696 Susan Circle agreed to move the trees, and they have been moved onto the residents' property. Once the trees were moved Mr. Carney took out the 3' to 4' metal and wooden stakes with surveyor's tape on them. He drove 2' rebar stakes into the ground, painted the tops fluorescent orange, tagged them with surveyor's tape, and took pictures of them with the coordinates so that we can easily find them.

Mr. Carney stated in the next ten to fourteen days Corcoran Landscaping will be doing their fourth and final cut of the buffer areas for the 2022 season. After that is done, he asked the Board members to walk their farms, especially where there are known buffer issues; and at the next meeting he would like to have a discussion about prioritizing the ten winter days that are contracted with Corcoran. Mr. Carney stated he has asked Mr. Corcoran to look at the buffers as well, and Mr. Corcoran has already indicated two areas that need to be addressed as getting equipment in those areas is difficult and smaller trees and brush need to be dealt with. Mr. Carney stated Mr. Steadman had a project last year at Makefield Brook that did not get addressed because it was not high enough on the priority list; but it is a top priority for this year. There are six residences on that corner where Mr. Corcoran has indicated he is having difficulty with the machinery. The goal is to be able to use bigger machinery rather than the small mowers which require six to seven passes, and to be able to make two to three passes with the bigger machinery. Once the Board agrees on their list, it can be presented to Mr. Corcoran who could advise how many days that would take, and the projects can be prioritized.

Mr. Steadman asked if we should also be soliciting input from the tenants to see if there are areas that are a problem for the farmers. Mr. Carney agreed this could be done adding that over the last year branches that were overhanging or putting shade on the crop area were taken care of. Mr. Carney stated he feels those areas would be a high priority.

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He added he also would prioritize areas Mr. Corcoran has identified as well as area where the Board or the Township are receiving calls about. Mr. Carney stated he would also like to get feedback on what has already been done.

Mr. Steadman asked that the Board be advised when the final cutting is done, and Mr. Carney stated he was told that the last buffer cutting will be done in October. Recommendations would be prioritized as red - needs to be done this year, yellow is something to be done but not urgent, and green could be considered if there are extra days. Mr. Carney stated he feels that the farmers and Mr. Corcoran's requests would be red.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Mr. Blank

There was no one from the public wishing to speak at this time.

REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS: Mr. Heinze

1. Mr. Blank – Put on November Agenda discussion of the investment strategy.
2. Mr. Steadman – Reach out to the Township about the signs for the trees along Woodside in case they are needed to be reinstalled.
3. Mr. Blank, Mr. Carney – Follow-up with Jeff Hirko on the property line once deer season is over before going into the woods.
4. Mr. Steadman – Assess new Red Tag requirements and advise Board whether we should continue with that program.
5. All – Recommendations for winter buffer work with Board members assessing their properties after the fourth buffer cutting.
6. Mr. Steadman – Check with BOWMA on whether they intend to seek permission to hunt our properties during archery season this year.

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There being no further business, Mr. Heinze moved, Mr. Steadman seconded and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

George Heinze, Secretary