

GREENE COUNTY FARMLAND PRESERVATION BOARD
MINUTES
JUNE 16, 2010

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chairman Shipman at 6:10 p.m. at the Mezzanine Conference Room, 19 South Washington Street, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania. Those present were Dave Shipman, Vice Chairman; Rick Thistlethwaite, Treasurer; Charlie Day, Director; Archie Trader, Director; Jim Willis, Director; and Lisa Snider, District Manager, Greene County Conservation District.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no Public Comments.

III. REPORTS FROM COOPERATING AGENCIES AND GUESTS

There were none.

IV. DISCUSSION OF STAFF REPORTS

Lisa noted that she attended the Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation's Annual Meeting in May where the main topic of discussion was natural gas well drilling. She gathered information regarding proposed legislation, tax implications, etc., and distributed it to the Directors with their meeting packets.

Also discussed at the annual meeting, was the ability to withdraw from an easement after 25 years have passed. Currently, there is a provision which allows a farmer one chance to get out of an easement. It is being proposed that the law will be changed to eliminate this provision.

Mr. Trader asked if there was any discussion regarding the budget for the program. Lisa said that they did talk about possibly cutting funding that the Conservation District receives for salaries and the administration of the program.

Lisa also reported that Laurel Rush has been working on the Willis application and she will be contacting him to clarify a few items. The Gapen Agricultural Security Area (ASA) was reviewed by the Planning Commission and is on track to be added to the Greene Township Agricultural Security Area (ASA). It is uncertain where the Halstead application was in the process. Laurel was uncertain as to whether Greene Township received it. More information regarding this will be updated at the next meeting.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On a motion by Jim Willis, the Minutes of the April 21st meeting were approved as mailed. Charlie Day seconded. (Motion Passed)

VI. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Financial Report (attached) was mailed with the meeting notices. Treasurer Thistlethwaite reported the grand total to be \$96,794.00 (funds that can be used for Easements) and highlighted the \$3,874.25 that will be set aside in a checking account. The deadline for encumbering funds was also discussed. Lisa explained that the \$37,373.00, 2009 funding, would need to be used on the purchase of an easement by December 31, 2010. **A motion was made by Jim Willis to accept the Treasurer's Report and Charlie Day seconded. (Motion Passed).**

Questions continued regarding the state allocation and whether the allocations for 2009 and 2010 can be used for the Milesky Easement. Lisa thought that the deadline for expenditure started when the application was accepted. Mr. Trader requested that this matter be looked into.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence to be discussed.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

Petery Easement Funding Request and GCCD Reimbursement - At a previous meeting, the Greene County Conservation District voted to loan the Greene County Farmland Preservation Board \$5,000.00 for program administration. Since the Petery's did not accept the Easement offer, the money spent for surveys, legal work, etc., will not be recovered from the state and ways to repay the loan were discussed. Lisa noted that they had previously discussed writing to companies working in the area to request donations for operating funds. **A motion was made by Charlie Day to allow Lisa to mail out letters, with Chairman Cree's signature, to companies working in the area requesting donations. Jim Willis seconded. (Motion Passed)**

Tax Break Information – Lisa noted that she had mailed information for the board's review. She explained that school district and local tax breaks/freezes would be a possibility to entice landowners to enter into Agricultural Easements. **After a brief discussion, this matter was tabled.**

Greene County Farmland Preservation Board – Checking Account Update – Lisa reported that she had all the required signatures to open the account, however, Donna Huffman of the Controller's Office has since retired and a new card will be needed. Consequently, County Controller Dave Balint and Carol Gooden, First Deputy Controller, will be the two county signatures on the account. The signatures of Chairman Cree and Treasurer Thistlethwaite will also be needed.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

Future Funding for the Program – This item was discussed under Old Business.

By-Law Updates – The revision of the by-laws was the next item discussed. Thoughts were that changes could be made to target developable areas that would qualify for the program. Lisa said that perhaps the "Ranking System" could be revised to allow for areas with more potential for development to be protected. She said that the criteria that is currently being used for ranking is

the Prime Farmland Soils Map. However, the discussion explored the possibility of working with the Planning Commission and the municipalities to revise the map to target growth areas. She also said that the “Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, A Guide to Farmland Preservation” include information regarding this and read an excerpt from the guidelines that stated “the County Board shall in consultation with the County Planning Commission to prepare and adopt a map identifying the important agricultural areas of the county.” “The scale of the map shall include such things that can be used to locate specific land proposed for easement purchase”. Another suggestion that was made was to try to educate the landowner before the application process. This would ensure that they understand that the offer is based on the appraisal and if the land is not suitable for development, they may not receive what they expect. Mr. Trader suggested that a Committee be appointed to discuss this matter.

After discussion, it was the board’s wish to have Lisa contact Doug Wolfgang, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Farmland Preservation, to obtain further information regarding the by-laws. **A motion was made by Rick Thistlethwaite to have Lisa make this contact. Charlie Day seconded. (Motion Passed)**

Greene County Fair – As discussed at the last meeting, Lisa distributed examples that Laurel had prepared for distribution at the fair. It includes a description of the program and the Agricultural Security Areas (ASA’s). She also plans to add an outline of the county. She noted that she has talked to Laurel regarding gearing the Greene County Conservation District’s display toward the Farmland Preservation Program and being present at the fair to promote the program. The Board members agreed that the brochures were sufficient for distribution.

Milesky Easement Purchases - Lisa reported that Mr. Milesky has a total of 552 acres and has offered 3 parcels for a total of 275 acres for Easement in Center Township. She said that originally, he planned to offer the whole farm, but after speaking to the staff, he decided to include only a portion of the property. The board was concerned as to whether they would have enough funding to purchase the entire 275 acres and they discussed putting smaller parcels under Easement. Lisa said that when they spoke to him, they did not estimate a value, but they did explain to him that there may not be enough money to purchase the entire easement. It was also noted that most of the land suitable for development is located in a floodplain and therefore, cannot

be developed. They looked at the size of each parcel (approximately 11, 112, 116 acres). They continued the discussion and found a discrepancy in the acreage included on the map and the 275 acres. They also discussed possibly inviting Mr. Milesky to the next meeting to explain the funding situation. It was then decided to wait until we were certain of our funding allocation before we invite him to a meeting.

X. The next Regular Meeting will be July 21st at 6:00 p.m. Lisa asked the board to please notify the office if someone is unable to attend.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was declared adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Transcribed from Meeting Tape By,

Rebecca K. Salosky
Fiscal Officer