



BERKS COUNTY *agricultural land* PRESERVATION BOARD

Berks County Agricultural Center
1238 County Welfare Road, Suite 260
Leesport, PA 19533
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www.berkspa.gov/departments/agriculture

County Commissioners:

Christian Y. Leinbach, Chair
Michael S. Rivera
Dante Santoni, Jr.

Board Members:

Gregg Eshelman, Chair
Jeremy R. Meck, Vice Chair
James R. Coker

Morgan A. Firestine
Kimberly J. McGrath
Dave Phillips

Steven C. Mohn
Clyde A. B. Myers
Louise A. Swartley

Ex Officio:

Robert C. Ziegenfus, Ph.D.

Solicitor:

Mark R. Sprow, Esq.

Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board Meeting January 28, 2026, 5:30 p.m. MINUTES

A regularly scheduled meeting of the Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board was held at the Berks County Agricultural Center on Wednesday, January 28, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.

Board members present: Gregg Eshelman, Steve Mohn, Clyde Myers, Jeremy Meck, Morgan Firestine, and Jim Coker.

Staff present: Amanda Burkard-Sell, Deputy Director, Rachel Painter, Office Support IV, Emily Goense, Agriculture Program Coordinator.

In attendance: Mark Sprow, Esq. Special Counsel for the Board.

Public: None.

Gregg Eshelman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS — None.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the November 19, 2025, meeting. (J. Meck, S. Mohn)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES

- A. Burkard-Sell stated nothing major has changed since the status was sent out with the board meeting notice.
- Under letter E, docket #2309 was initially scheduled for Monday (date), but due to inclement weather was rescheduled for Friday (date) in the same week.
- Letter J, dockets #1305, #2409, and #2410 were approved at the December State Board meeting.

- A. Burkard-Sell stated that there is an on-going issue with docket #2403 that was supposed to go to February State Board meeting but there was a complaint made by an adjoining neighbor regarding the department's survey and right of way.
- A. Burkard-Sell stated that the adjoining landowner needs to provide the Board with proof that he has an ownership interest in this right-of-way. She also stated that the State will allow this to be held up for one Board meeting, but not any longer than that without some type of proof.
- Docket #2503, an offer made but landowner has not responded and has not returned their signed offer. Landowners were given an extension, and staff will make contact one more time but if no resolution is reached by the February Board Meeting, the Board will be asked to give them a period of time and then officially withdraw them from selection.
- There is one appraisal to review in Executive Session.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. Report on Certification of County Funding for 2026

- A. Burkard-Sell stated that the certification went to the Commissioner's meeting and then to the State before the deadline of January 31st. Certification was \$1,000,000 plus Clean and Green Rollback penalties, which were \$53,169, plus a donation of \$500 from the end of 2025. The total amount certified was \$1,053,669. This amount will go to the State, and the total allocation from the State will be announced at the BCALP February board meeting.

B. Municipal Letter 3rd Round

- A. Burkard-Sell asked that this be tabled due to reduced staffing levels with Mary Shah's absence.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Announcement of BCALP Chair

- G. Eshelman read a letter from Commissioner Leinbach reinstating him as Chair for one more year.

B. Announcement of Re-Appointment of Board Members

- A. Burkard-Sell announced the re-appointment of M. Firestine and D. Phillips.

C. Election of the 2026 BCALP Vice Chair

Motion: A motion was made to nominate Steven Mohn as the Vice Chair of the Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board. (J. Coker, J. Meck)

Discussion: S. Mohn declined the nomination.

- J. Meck asked what duties were associated with being Vice Chair, and A. Burkard-Sell explained that he would take over the meeting duties should Chair not be present and sign agreements if the Chair is not present.

Motion: A motion was made to nominate J. Meck as the Vice Chair of the Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board. (G. Eshelman, J. Coker)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

Motion: A motion was made to close the nominations for Vice Chair.

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried

Jeremy Meck is the Vice Chair for 2026.

D. Setting of the 2026 Agricultural Conservation Easement Cap

- A. Burkard-Sell stated that the range of appraised easement values was \$2,785 to \$3,345, and the average was \$3,072.
- A. Burkard-Sell explained the other statistics on the worksheet presented to the Board, explaining that the State does not track appraisal values, but they do track the average purchase price, which was \$4,145.
- A. Burkard-Sell also stated that no county has changed their cap since the previous year; Lancaster has been in talks to raise their cap but has not done so yet.
- Discussion was had about the cap of other counties.

Motion: A motion was made to keep the cap at \$2,800 per acre for 2026. (J. Coker, M. Firestine)

Discussion: Discussion was had about the optics of raising the cap, and the effect of being able to preserve less farms if the cap was raised, as well as there being a limited number of farms, and the fact that the taxes landowners pay will increase as well, and whether bumping the cap to \$3,000 will make a difference.

Roll Call Vote: M. Firestine, no. J. Coker, yes. C. Myers, yes. S. Mohn, yes. J. Meck, yes. G. Eshelman, no. Motion carried 4 to 2.

E. Setting of the 2026 Agricultural Conservation Easement Cap Interest Rate

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board that they are required to set the easement purchase interest rate for installment payments every year.
- The Board does not currently get interest from those payments, and though historically the Board has not offered any interest, it needs to be set by the Board every year.

Motion: A motion was made to keep easement purchase interest rate for installment payments at zero. (S. Mohn, J. Coker)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

F. Conveyance Report

- A. Burkard-Sell noted there were some updates since the report was sent out to the Board members.
- Under letter A, 15 settlements transferred in compliance, with deed of easement attached as required.
- Under letter B, settlements #448.0 and #338.0 are being worked on by attorneys for corrective deed.
- Under letter D, settlement #340.0 had been recorded incorrectly but has since been resolved.

G. PENNVEST Request — Womelsdorf/Robesonia Joint Authority — Water Tank Renovation

- Rehabilitation of existing 1.5-million-gallon storage tank by the Womelsdorf-Robesonia Joint Authority.
- A. Burkard-Sell stated that the existing tank is aging, and the rehabilitation will allow continued use of existing tank. No waste will be generated, and any overflow will be directed onto ground surface and controlled to prevent erosion.
- There is no impact on agriculture in the area, and no additional land is to be acquired.

Motion: A motion was made to recommend the proposed PENNVEST project for the Womelsdorf-Robesonia Joint Authority water storage tank rehabilitation. (?, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

H. PENNVEST Request — Upper Hanover Authority — Water main replacement along Route 29

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board that they are responsible for reviewing any applications and making any comment on their impact on agriculture.
- Project is a water main replacement along Route 29 and Water Street, replacing 13,00 linear feet of the original cast iron water main which was constructed in the late 1800s.
- There is no impact on agriculture in the area, and no additional land is to be acquired.

Motion: A motion was made to recommend the proposed PENNVEST project for the Upper Hanover Authority water main replacement along Route 29. (J. Meck, M. Firestine)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

I. Modification Request — L.P.471.0 — Rural Enterprise Request

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board that they review all rural enterprise requests, and that all rural enterprises must be conducted in existing structures and must be incidental to the farming operation.
- Request is for the rental of storage space of an existing 50'x80' pole barn for third-party storage of agricultural equipment. No municipal approval is required.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the rural enterprise request of L.P.471.0. (J. Meck, S. Mohn)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

J. Modification Request — L.P.758.0 — Addition to Existing Residential Structure

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board that an existing residence can be renovated, modified, added on to, as long as it does not increase the curtilage.
- Landowners provided drawings and municipal permit.
- They are putting on 24'x24' multistory addition, as well as a 45'x36' attached garage.
- Landowners noted that they put in a new septic system outside the curtilage due to the topography inside the curtilage; it was not feasible to place the new septic system there.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the addition to existing residential structure request of L.P.758.0. (J. Meck, S. Mohn)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

K. Modification Request — L.P.277.0 — General Subdivision

- A. Burkard-Sell stated that this is the final subdivision request, and that the concept review was present and approved at the June 2024 Board meeting.
- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board farms are allowed to subdivide into 2 parcels, with a minimum of 52 acres that meet all of the minimum requirements.
- The reason for subdivision is that landowners want to pass farm onto the next generation and are working on municipal approvals.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the general subdivision of L.P.277.0. (J. Coker, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

L. Modification Request — L.P.526.0 — General Subdivision

- A. Burkard-Sell let the Board know that the parcel proposed for subdivision does not meet the 50% agricultural production requirement and did not meet it at the time of settlement. Therefore it would not be possible to submit a request where both parcels met the minimum requirements for agricultural production.

- A. Burkard-Sell noted there is the ability in the guidelines for the Board to approve a subdivision that is outside of the criteria on a case-by-case basis. She also noted that it is not certain that the State will grant its approval. She noted that she left a voicemail for Stephanie Zimmerman, who is the director of the Bureau of Farmland Preservation to gauge her opinion
- A. Burkard-Sell's recommendation is to acknowledge request of the subdivision and to bring this issue back to the February Board meeting, once more information is acquired.
- M. Firestine inquired as to whether the Board can require the landowner to provide additional information, and A. Burkard-Sell answered in the affirmative.
- A. Burkard-Sell noted that though this farm does not meet the minimum requirements, the preservation status does not change.

Motion: A motion was made to acknowledge receipt of the subdivision request and to table until the State opinion is received. (J. Meck, M. Firestine)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

V. NEW BUSINESS

- Landowner Request - No Action Required — Easement Modifications – LP. 538.0 Lucas Deturk – Poultry Facility
- Landowner Request - No Action Required — Easement Modifications – LP.527.0 James & Sarah Miller – Pole Barn
- Landowner Request - No Action Required — Easement Modifications – LP.821.0 Elizabeth Moore – Heifer Facility
- Landowner Request - No Action Required — Easement Modifications – LP. 442.0 Harlan & Elaine Burkholder – Pole Barn
- Statements of Financial Interest
 - A. Burkard-Sell asked that Board members turn their statements in by April 1, 2026.
- Upcoming Events
 - March 16 through 20 is Ag Literacy Week, where volunteers read an agriculturally significant book to K through 2nd grade, and the book this year is *Cows Can Moo, Can You? All About Farms* by Dr. Seuss. A. Burkard-Sell noted that if Board members are interested in reading, they can contact R. Painter at the office to be signed up.
 - March 17th is National Ag Day, and this year's event is in conjunction with America 250 PA Berks, and the event is a Pennsylvania German Barn Star Tour with Patrick Dunmoyer of Kutztown University and includes lunch and a bus tour.
 - March 26th, the staff are helping co-host a Farm Transition Workshop with PA Farmlink at the Berks County Agricultural Center, where speakers will talk about farm succession, and long-term care options. Registration is \$10, but the fee is returned upon arriving at the workshop.

- June 13th is the Farm Market Fest, being held at the Oley Fairgrounds.
- June 16th is All About Ag at the Reading Phillies stadium.
- June 10th and 11th is Ag in the Classroom.
- M. Firestine announced that Farm City Day is taking place June 6th and 7th.

VII. CITIZEN COMMENT / BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR — None.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

RESUMPTION OF REGULAR MEETING

Motion: A motion was made to approve offering the cap of \$2,800 an acre to docket #2521 (J. Coker, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:09 PM. (M. Firestine, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Painter
Office Support IV