



BERKS COUNTY *agricultural land* **PRESERVATION BOARD**

Berks County Agricultural Center
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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
David L. Phillips, Vice Chair
James R. Coker

Morgan A. Firestine
Kimberly J. McGrath
Jeremy R. Meck

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 March 26, 2025, 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, March 26, 2025, at 5:30 p.m.

Board members present: Gregg Eshelman, Dave Phillips, Clyde Myers, Louise Swartley, Steve Mohn, and Jeremy Meck.

Staff present: Amanda Burkard-Sell, Deputy Director, Mary Shah, Agriculture Program Manager, and Rachel Painter, Office Support IV.

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

Public: Maggie Hansen.

Gregg Eshelman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS – Maggie Hansen introduced herself, a private citizen from Sinking Spring, stating that she came to observe.

- Agenda needed to be amended due to request for the addition to existing residence had been under Departmental Report and it should have been New Business. In addition, a landowner request for construction of additional residence was added, received prior to meeting deadline, but missed on spreadsheet.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the amended agenda for the March 26, 2025 meeting.

Discussion: Amended agenda must be put on website within 24 hours.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- No changes needed to be made to the February minutes.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the February 26, 2025, meeting, as amended. (D. Phillips, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES

- Under letter B, docket #2103, settlement has been scheduled for April 1.
- Under letter D, docket #0811, 2106 settlements were held in March.
- Under letter I, docket #2105, landowner has requested to withdraw, as they are not able to get a subordination agreement at this time. Landowner does want to remain on the list and be ranked in subsequent years.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. BCCD Award Nominations

- A. Burkard-Sell discussed the Berks County Conservation District's annual award ceremony.
- Staff has offered some suggestions for nominations, as well as Berks County Planning commission.
- The staff has selected Sherry Fuhrmann for the Educator category, for her work with Tilden Elementary School, due to her work with National Ag Week.
- For the Farmer category, the staff selected the Kopicz family. Need more info from Clyde.
- For Student/Environmental Organization category, Schuylkill Valley FFA got their charter last year and Brandywine Heights got theirs this year, and both are building FFA programs to advance understanding of Ag industry and potential career pathways.
- For the Conservation Individual selected Bret Edwards, an avid proponent and attendee of the Tire Collection event in November of 2024. Bret has his own YouTube channel, where he collects trash and scrap metal to recycle and hopes to inspire people to do the same.
- A. Burkard-Sell Planning Commission came up with Bethany Ayers-Fisher, with City of Reading and Climate Core, Tulpehocken Watershed Association, Michael Griffith with Berks Nature, Berks County Planning Commission, Adelle Schade with Total Learning Experience at Alvernia, recent easement owners with Berks Nature, Boy Scouts at Hawk Mountain, Nick Johnson, Ashley Showers with the Conservation District, Imagine Berks, Placemaking Funds, Natural Lands Trust, and Tami Shimp and Kim Murphy with Berks Nature.
- Jeremy Meck suggested the addition of Joe Rosenbaum as a Farmer nomination for his work on the Conservation District Board.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the nominations of the staff picks for the BCCD Award Nominations, with the addition of Joe Rosenbaum. (D. Phillips, L. Swartley)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Conveyance Report

- A. Burkard-Sell noted that under letter A, settlements #538.0, #580.0 transferred in compliance.

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- Under letter B, settlements #322.0, #749.1 and #749.2 are still in the process of being corrected, and M. Sprow has sent out a follow-up communication, deed has been drafted but needs to be recorded and signed.
- Also under letter B, settlements #199.0, #49.0, and #50.0, and #633.0 are in process of correction.

B. Annual Monitoring Report

- A. Burkard-Sell asked that this be moved to the April board meeting.

C. 2025 LESA Ranking — Initial Selection

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board there were 62 applications, and funds were left over from the 2024 selection due to withdrawals at the end of the year, and it was decided to roll those funds into the 2025 selection.
- Ranking goes down to number 15, which would leave a balance of \$151,042.58.
- Board does not go into a deficit because funding amounts will change based on surveyed acreage, and the acreage on the ranking order is taxed acreage.

Motion: A motion was made to send a selection letter to the first 15 farms. (D. Phillips, J. Coker)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: A motion was made to continue down selection spreadsheet in the case of farms in the first 15 withdrawing. (D. Phillips, J. Coker)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

D. Landowner Request — Approval Required

Easement Modification — LP.466.0 A. Weaver — Addition to existing residence within curtilage.

- A. Burkard-Sell reiterated that a renovation or modification for the existing residential structure is permitted if it is within the curtilage of the existing structure and does not affect ag production or ag viability of the property.
- The request is to remove a porch and replace area with 224 square foot addition for a laundry, restroom, and office space.
- This request is within existing curtilage, so it does meet terms of the easement.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the addition to existence residence within curtilage. (L. Swartley, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

E. Landowner Request — Approval Required

Easement Modification — LP.630.0 K Weaver — Construction of allowed additional residential structure.

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board that every easement is permitted one additional residential structure for landowner, immediate family member, or employee of farm.

- Curtilage can occupy no more than 2 acres, and the location must not harm the economic viability of the farm.
- In order for the residence to count as a replacement to an existing residence, it must fit within the existing curtilage. If the landowner cannot, or chooses not to, put that residence within the existing curtilage, even if they knock the first house down, it still counts as their replacement structure.
- A Burkard-Sell stated that the current farmer is building a home for his son, who will take ownership of farm, and is choosing not to locate new home in existing curtilage, and because of that, it'll be considered their additional residence.
- A. Burkard-Sell asked that the Board approve the request for the construction of the additional residence as it meets the terms of the easement but ask that in the letter to the landowner that he be required to submit a detailed drawing if required by Township so that the size, scope, and location are as submitted to the Board.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the construction of this additional residence. (J. Coker, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

- A. Landowner Request — For documentation — Easement modification — LP.466.0 Weaver — Ag Structure 3 broiler houses and manure storage
 - A. Burkard-Sell let the Board know that because construction of an ag structure is an allowed activity, it does not require Board approval and just gets documented.
- B. Statement of Financial Interest
 - A. Burkard-Sell asked that the Board submit their statement of financial interest as soon as possible to the staff, or the Chief Clerk.
- C. Upcoming Events
 - A, Burkard-Sell and S. Mohn told the Board about last week's National Ag Day activities at the Ag Center and Old Dry Road Farm.
 - A. Burkard-Sell spoke about the Ag in the Classroom, on June 25th and 26th for teachers, being handled by Clyde, Ashley, and Sam.
 - M. Shah spoke about the pop-up Farmer's Market at the Heritage Center on September 6th.

VII. CITIZEN COMMENT / BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR – Maggie Hansen asked the Board about how farmers are being impacted with the changes from the government, and she wondered if Berks County farmers were having any issues with buying feed and not being reimbursed. J. Meck stated that he has not see any issues, that there has been emergency relief crop insurance, because of the drought, and that he sees programs such as the FSA are still rolling, and that as a farmer, he hasn't seen any big problems.

VIII. 80,000 ACRE CELEBRATION

B. 80,000 Acre Milestone Celebration Update

- S. Mohn stated that he sent everything into the company that provided the jars and that they accepted the tax documentation. Final quote \$1,557.82 for 200 pieces of the plain glass, with wooden lid. S. Mohn will use his credit card and be reimbursed by B.A.R.N.
- S. Mohn also explained that the lid is \$5 to engrave from Bailey's Wood Products, and everything should come in under budget.
- M. Shah explained that they are thinking about using small pretzels from Unique to fill the jars.
- D. Phillips stated that the menu for the banquet will be tossed salad, roast beef, baked stuffed chicken, parsley potatoes, buttered corn, and French-style green beans with mushrooms and almonds. He also got them to drop the price to \$20 per person, all inclusive. The caterer will also be providing iced tea and lemonade.
- S. Mohn stated that David and Doug Sattazahn of Zahncroft Dairy would be willing to donate 400 Clover Farms drinks. S. Mohn asked if we should ask them to provide milk, since the caterer is providing drinks.
- C. Myers stated that he picked up the tickets for the banquet and the general admission tickets, and that the staff will be somehow put a mark on the general admission tickets so those holders can come back for cake and ice cream.
- J. Meck stated that the Farm Bureau will have live mules inside.
- R. Painter advised the Board about the committed donations, and whether checks have been received and/or deposited. Committed is \$31,000, and deposited is \$19,000.
- R. Painter also showed the Board the breakdown of each of the aspects of the banquet broken down to individual cost.
- A. Burkard-Sell brought up the idea of having billboards to celebrate 80,000 acres, and to invite people to the ballgame, and asked the Board if that is something they would be interested in. Staff will investigate the cost and report back.
- A. Burkard-Sell also explained that any purchases using county funds must go through the county purchasing system; purchasing the billboards may be a way to utilize county funds.
- The invitation list was discussed, having past Board members and staff, current Board members and staff. G. Eshelman brought up the current Board members also having a plus one, and A. Burkard-Sell advised that additional guests would reduce the number of farmers that could attend.
- J. Meck discussed having some large farm equipment on display but had not yet secured a dealer.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion: A motion was made to have staff make inquiries into the previously approved request on Settlement #236 (Kurtz) as to any and all changes to the originally submitted information. (D. Phillips, J. Coker)

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Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 PM. (J. Meck, D. Phillips)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Painter
Office Support IV