



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

Berks County Agricultural Center
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www.berkspa.gov/departments/agriculture

County Commissioners:

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Michael S. Rivera
Dante Santoni, Jr.

Board Members:

Gregg Eshelman, Chair
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Ex Officio:

Robert C. Ziegenfus, Ph.D.

Solicitor:

Mark R. Sprow, Esq.

Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board Meeting June 25, 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, May 28, 2025, at 5:30 p.m.

Board members present: Gregg Eshelman, Kim McGrath, Morgan Firestine, Dave Phillips, and Jeremy Meck.

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

In attendance: None.

Public: None.

Gregg Eshelman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:39 p.m.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS — None.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the June 25, 2025, meeting, as amended. (D. Phillips, K. McGrath)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES

- A. Burkard-Sell noted no changes since distribution. Under letter E, docket #2310 settlement is scheduled for July 11.
- There were 3 farms presented at June State Board meeting: letter D, docket #1623, letter G docket #0607, and letter J, docket #2406. A. Burkard-Sell also noted that it was docket #2406 is the farm that took us over 80,000 acres.
- A. Burkard-Sell stated that there are 6 potential farms for the August State Board meeting.

- There are 3 farms for Executive Session: dockets #2507, #2512, #2515.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. 80,000 Acre Milestone Celebration Recap

- R. Painter read a letter from C. Myers stating his regret that he did not make the banquet or the meeting, but that also expressed his admiration for board members and staff in making the event happen.
- G. Eshelman stated that he enjoyed the banquet, and that he thought it came together perfectly.
- Various board members also thanked the staff for their hard work.
- K. Fies apologized for not getting the thank you letter together for this meeting.

B. 2025 LESA Ranking Selection Update

- A. Burkard-Sell let the Board know that since the last meeting, staff was able to select one additional farm, going down to #24. Staff is still waiting on a response from that landowner.

C. Reese Subdivision — Update on State Review

- K. Fies recapped the situation for the Board: preliminary approval was granted on 2-acre subdivision, but house had to be built first, on land in Lower Heidelberg.
- K. Fies stated that at a State Board presentation of a subdivision, she was corrected, a 2-acre empty lot can be subdivided from an eased parcel, while retaining the right to an additional structure that must be built by a family member, employee, or landowner.
- K. Fies stated that A. Burkard-Sell is going to prepare a letter to the State about the issue.
- K. Fies let the board know that Mr. Reese has some publicized legal issues and unsure if plans will move forward. Currently, all issues with land and landowner are on hold until that case is resolved.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Conveyance Report

- M. Shah stated that all 4 properties under letter A transferred in compliance.
- M. Shah let Board know that the property under letter B, settlement #322.0 had until the end of the month to contact the department. The other property under letter B, settlement #541.0 is in the process of being corrected.
- Under D, all settlements have been resolved.

B. House Bill 1584 Review

- A. Burkard-Sell stated that the proposed bill allows for two things: the preservation of land less than 10 acres that is adjacent to already preserved land, to be added to an already preserved farm. And it allows the annexation of less than 10 acres from one preserved farm to another.

- Bill does not allow annexation for the additional residence; that right would stay with the additional farm.
- Bill is not clear as to whether landowner needs to donate or apply and have land ranked.
- A. Burkard-Sell stated that bill is written as shall be adopted as written, meaning that the County's Board would be required to adopt the new language. There is no desire to change that, as it gives additional rights to farmers, and it will be applied across the state rather than letting counties make their own choices.
- G. Eshelman asked about the unique crop language in the bill. A. Burkard-Sell explained that a lot of County boards set a list as to what a crop unique to the area is. Berks County does not have a list.

Motion: A motion was made to support House Bill 1584 as written. (J. Meck, K. McGrath)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

A. Upcoming Events

- K. Fies wanted to thank the Board for their involvement in the celebration.
- K. Fies stated that the staff will be doing thank you letters for all involved, including sponsors, Secretary Redding, the Reading Phillies, and others.
- K. Fies attended the first day of Ag in the Classroom, and stated that Ashley, Clyde, and Sam worked hard on getting the locations and information together for all the teachers.
- K. Fies talked about a letter received from the public about the digester for Kurtland Farms, and about A. Burkard-Sell sitting in on a Chester County Ag Land Pres Board meeting to listen to a presentation from Vanguard.
- K. Fies stated that staff was still waiting on State to release basic guidelines on digesters.
- Farm Fest is September 6th.
- Superintendent's Day is in November, and Ag Center to host students to discuss careers in agriculture with other agencies in the Ag Center during the same month.
- Career Fair and tire collection are also in November.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion: A motion was made to approve offering the cap of \$2,800 an acre to dockets #2507, 2512, and #2515. (J. Meck, M. Firestine)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 6:43 PM. (K. McGrath, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Painter
Office Support IV