



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

Berks County Agricultural Center
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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 April 30, 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, April 30, 2025, at 5:30 p.m.

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

Staff present: Kim Fies, Executive Director, 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: Joseph ‘Skip’ de Garay, Meghan de Garay, Christian Parrish, Carrie and Doug Elliot, Christine Wildonger.

Gregg Eshelman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

- The members of public in attendance spoke at length about the Kurtland Farms biodigester and why they are against it.
- S. de Garay explained his background in waste haulage, and also explained that all the permits have been withdrawn from Caernarvon Township and the DEP.
- Issues mentioned with the biodigester were the smell, the effect the digestate will have on the environment, truck traffic, and property values of surrounding homes.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- J. Coker noted that he was left off the list of attendees, and M. Firestine noted that S. Mohn’s last name was misspelled. R. Painter noted both corrections will be made.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the March 26, 2025, meeting, as amended. (J. Coker, S. Mohn)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES

- A. Burkard-Sell noted under letter B, docket #2103 went to settlement on April 1, 2025.
- Under letter E, in process of settlements being scheduled, dockets #2306 and #0822 are already scheduled, remaining docket #2310 waiting on right-of-way to be recorded.
- Letter G, docket #0156 will not be going to June State Board meeting, they are recording right-of-way through property and that will not meet June deadline, will possibly go to August meeting.
- Letter I, docket #2406 is the 80,000th acre farm, to be recommended at June state board meeting.
- Under L, there are 10 farms proceeding from the first selection.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. 80,000 Acre Milestone Celebration Update

- K. Fies let Board know that invitations went out to landowners and VIPs, and the staff is getting responses back.
- S. Mohn has jars and lids in his possession and will be taking them apart to give lid to Bailey's Wood Products.
- Staff is looking at 3 billboards promoting the 80,000-acre baseball game.
- Department is providing funding for cup giveaway, design agreed upon.
- Ice cream, cupcakes, and cakes being donated.
- Press release for Reading Phils released next week and video in process of being filmed.
- Board members who are not using both tickets discussed "donating" their tickets to be used.
- J. Meck discussed the insurance needed for the farm equipment to sit in parking lot overnight, and staff discussed looking at that through B.A.R.N.
- C. Myers let Board know that there are two former Dairy Princesses to sing the National Anthem.

B. 2025 LESA Ranking Selection Update

- A. Burkard-Sell stated that the first 15 farms were selected, but 5 have withdrawn and will be ranked again in 2026.
- The withdrawal allowed staff to select another 7 farms and staff are awaiting responses from those farms.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Conveyance Report

- M. Shah let Board know that the first 6 in compliance.
- James and Karen Holcombe annexed residential parcel that was not part of their preserved farm but next to it, also subdivided that plus a small part of the preserved farm, which was a requirement to be able to subdivide.

- M. Shah has been in touch with all farms under letter B, in process of being fixed and re-recorded.
- Settlement #633.0 had a corrected deed recorded.
- A. Burkard-Sell added that corrective deeds for settlements #749.1 and #749.2 were signed, but not recorded yet.

B. Annual Monitoring Report

- K. Fies told Board that 292 inspections were done in 2024.
- A. Griesemer is now doing scheduling for inspections; all reporting is more automated.
- K. Fies said staff should be inspecting 500 farms a year on average.
- Staff is still using professional judgement on how and when they are inspecting.
- 46 parcels changed hands in 2023.
- 286 parcels were inspected in 2023.

C. Landowner Request — Requires Board Action

Easement Modifications — L.P.591.0 Brubaker — Addition to existing residential structure

- K. Fies stated that the addition is within curtilage, recommendation to approve.
- Curtilage agreed and signed in 2021.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the addition to the existing residential structure. (K. McGrath, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

D. Landowner Request — Requires Board Action

Easement Modifications — L.P.309.0 Bennetch — Addition to existing residential structure

- 14x15.5-foot addition to structure with a 12x12 deck.
- The request is within curtilage, recommendation to approve.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the addition to the existing residential structure (L. Swartley, K. McGrath)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

E. Landowner Request — Requires Board Action

Easement Modifications — L.P.46.0 Miller — Construction of second residential structure

- Landowner is choosing to construct their allowed additional residential structure within existing curtilage. Since they are not removing existing house, it is considered the additional residential structure.
- No subdivision: landowner is building a single-level home for himself and his wife, with son moving into existing residential structure.

Motion: A motion was made to approve construction of second residential structure. (J. Meck, J. Coker)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

- A. Landowner Request — As-built for documentation — Easement Modification — L.P.329.0 Lehman Families — Constructed Silo As Built
- B. Landowner Request — For documentation — Easement Modification — L.P.574.0 Christman — Ag Structure — Hog Shed Replacement with pole building for equipment storage
- C. Landowner Request — For documentation — Easement Modification — L.P.834 Beitler — Ag Structure — Removal of small shed/construction of larger equipment shed
- D. Upcoming Events
 - K. Fies stated that nameplates were discussed, but not wanted.
 - Ag in the Classroom is mentioned, as being in June.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

RESUMPTION OF REGULAR MEETING

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:50 PM. (J. Meck, L. Swartley)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Painter
Office Support IV