



BERKS COUNTY *agricultural land* PRESERVATION BOARD

Berks County Agricultural Center
1238 County Welfare Road, Suite 260
Leesport, PA 19533
(610) 378-1844 Fax (610) 378-7983
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 February 26, 2026, 5:30 p.m. MINUTES

A regularly scheduled meeting of the Berks County Thursday, February 26, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.

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

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.

Dave Phillips called the meeting to order at 5:38 p.m.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS — None.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the January 28, 2026, meeting. (L. Swartley, M. Firestine)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES

- A. Burkard-Sell stated that since the dispersal of the Board materials, dockets under letter I, dockets #2002, #2401, #2402, and #2411 are scheduled for March 6th and March 18th.
- Under letter K, docket #2403 is the farm that had the objection from an adjoining landowner, and as a result that farm did not go to the February State Board meeting. The state sent the adjoining landowner a letter, asking him to provide proof that his right-of-way is on the farm, and without any provided proof, the farm will be put on the April State Board meeting schedule.

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board of the discussion regarding docket #2503. An offer was made at the beginning of December, and despite contact with staff, landowners have not returned any signed documents but are unable to proceed due to bank issues. Landowners do not want to withdraw but also do not wish to proceed.
- A. Burkard-Sell Board asks that Board authorize staff to send the landowner a certified letter stating that staff will have to officially withdraw them, due to them being unable to proceed.

Motion: A motion was made to have staff send a certified letter to landowners and give them a deadline of 30 days from date of received letter. (S. Mohn, M. Firestine)

Discussion: C. Myers discussed being their former neighbor, advising that they have health issues, and that surrounding farmland is preserved. Discussion was also held about landowners paying a discounted rate due to financial issues.

Vote: Motion carried.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. State Funding Update

- A. Burkard-Sell stated that the \$1,053,669.00 of County certified funds was matched by the State at \$2,583,154.49 for a total of \$3,636,823.49.
- A. Burkard-Sell noted that some Counties did not spend all their fund and had those funds reallocated back in 2026.

B. Applicant Attraction

- C. Myers discussed a sheet he put together detailing ways to increase the number of applicants to the preservation program.
- Ideas listed on the sheet included a follow-up letter to Marion and Greenwich township landowners that were sent a letter in spring and fall of 2025.
- M. Firestine suggested sending a postcard style follow-up, reminding selected landowners about the preservation program.
- The Board agreed to table further discussion until after the Ranking

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

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board of prior discussion of a subdivision plan that had been submitted for a preserved farm that did not meet the 50% agriculture production requirement at the time of preservation. There was no conservation plan in place at the time that the farm was reviewed and submitted to the State Board
- A. Burkard-Sell noted that the State was asked for their opinion, and the State responded that they look at the Board's approval as their guide to approve a subdivision, and that as long as there were areas that could be available for agricultural production, an argument could be made that it met the minimum criteria.
- A. Burkard-Sell noted that the farm is already preserved, and that process cannot be reversed, but the landowners could attempt to put some areas of the land back into agricultural production.

- M. Firestine asked what the staff's recommendation would be, and A. Burkard-Sell stated that it would be to allow it, to encourage them to put the land back into agricultural production.
- A. Burkard-Sell noted that the landowners purchased this farm with the assumption that it met minimum criteria for preservation.

Motion: A motion was made for the Board to take the staff's recommendation and approve the subdivision with the recommendation that the landowners put more land back into agricultural production. (S. Mohn, M. Firestine)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Conveyance Report

- A. Burkard-Sell noted that under letter A there were 3 farms that transferred in compliance. Settlement #250.0, and settlement #266.0 transferred twice, both times in compliance.
- Under letter B, dockets #448.0 and #338.0 were missing the deed of easement at the time of submission. A. Burkard-Sell requested that the Board authorize the sending of a letter to each landowner with a deadline to have their deed corrected, before the Board has to issue a violation. She advised that 30 days is a sufficient length of time, since these are both ongoing issues.

Motion: A motion was made for the Board to authorize staff to send a letter to each landowner with a 30-day deadline for corrective deed to be submitted. (S. Mohn, M. Firestine)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

B. Annual Monitoring Report

- A. Burkard-Sell noted that this report is sent to the State every year.
- 424 parcels were inspected this year, a total of 39,999 acres.
- 376 were inspected in compliance, 45 had recommendations, 3 had serious resource concerns identified, 2 had ongoing issues related to curtilage expansion, and 1 has an on-going violation being addressed by the legal department.
- 78 deed reviews were conducted on 63 parcels.

C. Modification Request — L.P.821.0 — Replace Existing Residential Structure

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board that every easement is entitled to replace, add on, or modify the existing residence within the curtilage.
- Landowner is requesting to replace an existing modular home within the curtilage for an employee who lives on the farm. Replacement is going to be a new modular home, 66'x30'.

Motion: A motion was made to approve the replacement of the existing residential structure. (L. Swartley, M. Firestine)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

- A. Landowner Request - No Action Required — Easement Modifications – L.P.57.0 Sattazahn — Ag Structure – 50’ x 96’ pole barn for equipment storage, Township zoning permit provided
- B. Landowner Request - No Action Required — Easement Modifications – L.P.593 Slaymaker - 40’ x 100’ pole barn for equipment/hay/beekeeping supply storage, Township zoning approval provided
- C. Landowner Request - No Action Required — Easement Modifications – L.P.54.2 Heckman — Ag Structure – 40’ x 80’ pole barn for livestock housing, Township zoning approval provided
- D. Growing Berks 1-Year Review with Commissioners
- A. Burkard-Sell and K. Fies are providing a 1-year review of the Growing Berks Ag Study at the Commissioner’s Meeting on March 19, 2026.
- E. Ranking Timeline
- A. Burkard-Sell let the Board know they are working on the ranking and are on track for the March Board meeting.
- F. 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. C. Myers provided the Board with an image of the hat that is being handed out to the first 2,000 guests. He also provided a sheet about the night at the Phillies stadium, and what will be provided.

- June 10th and 11th is Ag in the Classroom.
- A. Burkard-Sell also reminded the Board that their statement of financial interests are due to the Chief Clerk by April 1, 2026.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

RESUMPTION OF REGULAR MEETING

Motion: A motion was made to acknowledge the conservation plans of dockets #2506, #2521, and settlements #444, #530, #790, #471, and #729. (L. Swartley, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:10 PM. (M. Firestine, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Painter
Office Support IV