



Meeting Minutes
Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board
December 2, 2020 – 7:30 p.m.

Present: Pete Fellers, Sam Gardner (via phone), Dorothy McIntyre (via phone), Ken Newman, Jeff Powers, Joy Powers, Lindsay Tomlinson, Ronnie Gross, Chuck Grove.

Absent: Matt Baumgardner, Don Gardner, Pam Willoughby

Staff Present: Traci Blido

Staff Absent: Scott Baker

Transcriber: Julia Peters

Guests: Mickey Johnson - County Supervisor District 1, Josh Powers, Emma Jackson

(1) APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the December 2, 2020 agenda. There were no objections.

A motion and a second were made to approve the December 2, 2020 agenda, as presented.

Adopted unanimously

(2) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - October 7, 2020

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the October 7, 2020 meeting minutes.

Chairman Powers asked County Supervisor Mickey Johnson to give an update regarding where the solar farm is heading. Mr. Johnson said that it was not on the agenda for the BOS meeting but County Supervisor Davis added it to the agenda and had some property owners and stakeholders speak in favor of the solar farm. When it came up as an Agenda Item, Supervisor Davis withdrew his addition to the Agenda, so it was not discussed. It now goes to the Planning Commission for their consideration but he expects they will approve it. It is his opinion that if

the landowners agree with it and it is not hurting anyone else, then it has to be given consideration. Mrs. Blido said the Planning Commission will make a recommendation and send it back to the Board of Supervisors. Chairman Powers stated he received a call from Chairman Sharp who was concerned about the Ag community and whether they did not want the solar farm. They had the Ag Board's notes and the packet but it was not brought up and he had not looked at the information the Ag Board sent. Obviously, the Ag Board wants it if it is well restricted and worthwhile for the landowners and the County. The Planning Commission has the Ag Board's information when they are considering it and have been told to contact the Ag Board if there are any questions. Chairman Powers also noted that when Mr. Saunders spoke about the solar farm and saw it as the only way to preserve his farm, it shed a different light on things. The solar farm in question is in Huddleston and will be on the Saunders' and Wagners' land but there are a couple others being proposed at this time.

A motion and a second by were made to approve the October 7, 2020 meeting minutes, as presented.

Adopted unanimously

(3) ADMINISTRATION REPORT

Mrs. Blido stated that the Annual Festival of Trees has kicked off at the Welcome Center and encouraged everyone to stop by there. They also have a food truck parked there a couple days per week.

(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Mrs. Blido reported that the Back to Business Grant Program was extended until December 8, 2020 because every day they find out people are unaware of the grants, even though they have spread the word as much as possible. They will not be able to spend all the funds in the program and some of it will have to be returned. It is a \$1 million fund but only half of it has been given out. One stipulation for qualifying was the business had to show a 20% loss in 2020. Lucky and surprising for Bedford County, there were not a large amount of businesses that had that much hardship. Entertainment, hairdressers, nail salons, restaurants were obviously hurt by Covid, but other businesses fared better. She was glad they could help these small businesses and in Phase 2 of the program, they could help companies such as Bison Printing, Blue Ridge Optics, Parkland Direct, and SE&M, among others. There was also money available to assist the ag community with a meat processing grant, for those that do VDACS approved poultry processing on the farm. Eco-Friendly Foods was able to expand and buy some needed equipment using the grant funds and four small processor farms benefited as well.

(5) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT

Nothing to report.

(6) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU/YOUNG FARMERS REPORT

Mr. Sam Gardner reported that they are trying to get the Gardner Brothers company as well as some support from the Farm Bureau for a field day and getting a fence built for the animals at Liberty High School. He deferred to Lindsay Tomlinson to provide further information.

Mrs. Tomlinson said they had been given a little land to use behind the middle school and have been working on a fencing plan for it with some of the students applying for grants this past summer. They were able to obtain about \$4,000 for the fencing. They also obtained a new greenhouse from the County and received another grant to furnish the greenhouse for about the same amount. The students also decided to do a Fall service project to benefit the community which led to the Chicken Project. They received another grant for \$1,500 for this project and raised 61 chickens and donated them to Bedford Christian Ministries to give away. It was an awesome experience for the kids that could be done outside and they felt they were really helping the community. Eco-Friendly Foods gave them a discount for the processing of the chickens and the Farm Bureau women helped pay for the processing costs. They have been brainstorming some fencing solutions and have asked the Farm Bureau for help to offset the costs involved. Hopefully, the alumni group can host a fencing education day on the new school farmland and have the Gardner Brothers give a presentation. They would like to have this day sometime in January and invite any Ag Board members and those in the community who would like to come as well.

(7) COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Education & Events

1. Upcoming Events

Ms. Powers said 4-H and FFA are still doing things at different levels. Teachers and students are stepping up and getting creative in order to continue to do things during Covid. The latest Covid restrictions have Virginia Tech limiting attendance at both indoor and outdoor events to 25 people, so they are working on navigating the type of events that can still be held. The livestock club has been strong but some club members are not interested in only livestock or traveling all over the country and the teachers are brainstorming to give opportunities to all the members. The Bedford Livestock Club will be adapting to better serve the community and become the Bedford 4-H Agricultural Club. They hope to provide some opportunities for younger members with some smaller animal projects.

Some virtual contests are still being held. Emma Jackson, Charlie Moser, Andrew Tuck, and Brooke Adkins competed in a virtual contest from Montana and won. Although 4-H and FFA students cannot travel due to Covid, some unaffiliated youth activities have occurred and some kids took a trip to Indiana where they attended a judging contest. They all did very well there and placed in multiple categories. All five of the seniors have received calls regarding scholarship

opportunities to judge in college. Some students will be attending an unaffiliated judging contest in Georgia next week. Safety precautions are being taken.

2. County Fair Update

Ms. Powers reported that right now, they are waiting to see what happens with Covid before planning for next year's fair.

3. School Ag Programs Update

Ms. Tomlinson said she is excited to work with Ms. Powers on the new 4-H club. It will cater to kids with all interests in agriculture which is very important. The fruit is in for the fundraiser if anyone is interested in buying. They are also selling poinsettias to help a local grower. They are finishing up with the Fall service project. The kids are currently working on the "reverse" Bedford Christmas Parade which will be held on Saturday, December 5, 2020. The greenhouse is almost done and is large enough for them to grow a little bit of everything. The Central Virginia Livestock Show (CVLS) is still on schedule for May but tentatively. They hope to make adjustments as required and are moving forward as best as can be expected.

Emma Jackson reported that at Staunton River High School, they just completed their fruit sale. Due to Covid, they had to make adjustments and held an online sale of fruit. The fruit orders could then be shipped directly to the customers.

Emma Jackson and Josh Powers both spoke to the Ag Board members about their future plans and ambitions.

b. Marketing & Production

1. Farmers' Market Update

Ms. McIntyre reported that her winter market went to once a month on Nov 21, 2020 at the same location so they could spread out. They had great weather, great attendance, and about 40 vendors participated. There were four vendors selling turkeys this year and over 75 turkeys were sold. The next market is December 12, 2020 with over 40 vendors and a waitlist.

2. Coyote Lottery Update

Nothing to report.

c. Land Protection & Conservation

Nothing new to report.

(8) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Chairman Powers said that the 2021 calendar of meetings will reflect an Ag Board meeting every month but tentatively. Currently, the meetings will remain every other month but if things change due to the evolving nature of the Covid pandemic, the Ag Board may return to monthly meetings.

A motion and a second were made to accept the 2021 calendar as presented.

Adopted unanimously.

Chairman Powers noted that Sweet Briar College will be starting an ag program. He believes they will be offering credit courses in horticulture, seeds, and conservation which is a step in the right direction.

Beth Bays, a former Ag Board member, puts together the Christmas hay bale displays and this year she did a Charlie Brown one which has been publicized all over the country.

(9) ADJOURNMENT

8:03 p.m.