



Meeting Minutes
Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board
December 3, 2014 – 7:00 p.m.

Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board:

:Present:

Jeffrey Powers, Ken Palmer, Chuck Grove, Pam Willoughby, Spencer Tinsley, Daniel Layman, Ken Newman, Matt Baumgardner

:Absent: W.P. Johnson, Sam Gardner, Ronnie Gross, Pete Fellers

Staff Present: Scott Baker, Mark Reeter, Jessica Hupp

Staff Absent: Traci Blido

Guests: John Graham, Ryan Ford

(1) Approval of Agenda

Jeff Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the December 3, 2014 agenda.

A motion and a second were made to approve the December 3, 2014 agenda, as presented.

Adopted Unanimously.

(2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – November 5, 2014

Mr. Powers asked for a review of the November 5, 2014 meeting minutes.

Mr. Baker stated there needed to be a correction to move Elaine Ingram to Section C under Upcoming Ag Events, and the Bedford Ag Expo date to March 14, 2015.

A motion and a second were made to approve the meeting minutes of November 5, 2014, as amended.

Adopted unanimously.

(3) County Administrator's Report

Mr. Reeter reported that he had missed the past few meetings due to the absence of a Deputy County Administrator. Mr. Reeter stated he would soon be moving into budget season, which may cause him to miss further Ag Board meetings.

Mr. Reeter reported the county has hired a new Director of Community Development, Greg Zody, a new Human Resources Director, Dawn Fields, and a new Tourism Director, Jerry Craig. Two positions are still open, including County Building Official and the Deputy County Administrator. The county is taking applications for Deputy County Administrator until the end of January and hopes to have a good applicant pool by that time.

The Board of Supervisors will hold its last meeting of the year this Monday and plan to meet with the Broadband Advisory group with recommendations for improving and increasing availability of broadband throughout the county. The board is also looking to have another retreat coming up in January.

(4) Economic Development Director's Report

Ms. Hupp reported that Traci was with the Director of Economic Development for Mid-Atlantic Broadband Co-op, Sarah Johnson, who is visiting the region from California to see the various business assets our region has to offer. Mrs. Johnson manages the Go SoVA project, which recommends Southern Virginia communities to businesses looking to relocate.

Mrs. Blido will be meeting with the Board of Supervisors next Monday along with the Broadband Advisory group to discuss filling in the "last mile" of broadband in the county.

Ms. Hupp reported that the Regional Economic Developers from Region 2000 will be hosting a Christmas luncheon for the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) on December 18, to thank them for all their help and to keep our region top of mind.

Ms. Hupp reported that the substation went live last week, providing power throughout the entire New London Business and Technology Center. The EDA is hoping this helps to attract new businesses to the park.

Ms. Hupp reported that Trident Seafoods will be hosting a career fair on January 9, 2015 at their facility in Bedford to help find jobs for their employees who will lose their current positions upon the company's closure in January. If there are any companies looking to fill manufacturing jobs that would like to attend, they can contact our office for more information.

(5) Cooperative Extension Report

Mr. Baker reported that the breakfast meeting with Secretary Haymore went very well. Mr. Baker stated that Bedford should be proud that Secretary Haymore called out Traci Blido for her efforts to help the Agriculture industry in the county.

Mr. Baker reported that the first project related to the Regional Agriculture and Forestry Strategic Plan is working towards a regional agriculture and forestry website. The group has prepared a proposal for a matching grant to develop that website, and he will keep the board updated on its progress.

As a follow-up to the Beef Cattle Grading workshop they held last month, Springlake Stockyard will be hosting another workshop focused on grazing and forage-based beef on January 22. There is an option for those who attend to come to the farm on the following Saturday to see what's going on there. There are snow dates for inclement weather for the following week.

Mr. Baker reported that the Ag Board had a work session with the Board of Supervisors, and there was a large agreement to support the strategic plan with the opportunity to modify over time as changes come to the economy. All counties at this point have moved the project forward.

(6) 4-H & FFA Report

Joy Powers stated that both 4-H and FFA have started off their new years with a new slate of officers and will begin accepting new membership. So far this year, they have received a high number of Cloverbud members (ages 5-8) and have created special programs for that age group. A county-wide Cloverbud group has formed that isn't livestock specific, but is based on the other side of the county.

Ms. Powers reported that Liberty High school students have continued working with their school's farm and even took some of its animals to the State Fair this year. There have been growing numbers at Staunton River High School and Liberty High School.

Staunton River High School has a new ag teacher, Heather McAndrew, who is looking to add horticulture and wildlife classes to the curriculum next year in order to diversify the program. Staunton River is also looking at getting a greenhouse and a small barn set up to have a working classroom.

There is a county-wide FFA alumni group being formed, to help incorporate the JF area and a new group formed at SRHS, known as the Agriculture Education Advisory Committee which includes Ms. Powers, Susan Gardner, Sam Gardner, and others. The group is geared toward improving agriculture education in the county. Joy also reminded the board that many FFA and 4-H students will be in both parades this weekend, and to be on the lookout for them.

(7) Bedford County Farm Bureau Young Farmers Report

W.P. was at a convention and Mr. Powers stated he would bring a report next month.

(8) Guest Speaker: Ryan Ford, The Organic Butcher

Mr. Ford stated he was from Charlottesville and recently purchased the old Dinner Bell processing plant in Lynchburg at the beginning of the year. Renovations have begun and they have been making great progress. Mr. Ford stated they are hoping it will be open and operational by Spring.

Mr. Ford stated that the old Dinner Bell property has been processing meat on-site for at least 100 years, and the building itself has grown over the years with it. To his knowledge, it is the

largest meat processing facility in the state. Mr. Ford reported that he was in the retail meat business for 12 years and has worked with almost every slaughterhouse in Virginia. He believes the Dinner Bell facility has the capacity to do more volume in processing than all other meat processing plants in Virginia combined. Mr. Ford is the third owner in the last 67 years, and stated the facility presents unbelievable possibilities to process meat like it did in the past. He reported when considering the regionalized food systems trend, his company can fill the void that currently exists in our area. He stated that in order to turn a profit in the meat processing business, you have to be bigger than the small guys, and have scale to it (because of transportation, distribution, and marketing).

Mr. Ford stated that his company is trying to get out the message that the Dinner Bell facility is an unbelievable asset that is not being utilized here in the middle of Virginia. Their plans to renovate it to its previous glory will place another 30-40 years of life into the facility. Their business plan, in addition to processing, is to start a Virginia-branded meat company. As it gets closer to opening, they plan to engage more with the community on what products they are looking for, as well as pricing, and volumes.

Mr. Graham asked for clarification on distribution, to which Mr. Ford responded that they are looking to distribute within Virginia and in the mid-Atlantic region. Mr. Ford explained that it would be USDA inspected, and able to process beef, pork, lamb, and goat. They are also renovating the smokehouse, but do not plan to open a store front. Ideally, they would like to find local retailers in town to sell the products they've processed.

Mr. Palmer asked how large of a geographic area they are looking to receive supplies from, to which Mr. Ford said he would like to say the entire Commonwealth of Virginia. The company would like to try to become an alternative to commodity marketing. Mr. Ford stated he would like to have a variety of beef, from heavy grain fed, beer hops finished, to completely grass-fed, and any kind of unique product that can't be bought in a supermarket. The board asked what his projected harvest number on a given day might be, to which Mr. Ford stated they hope to process 300 hogs a day, or 75-100 head of cattle a day, not simultaneously on the same days.

(9) Committee Reports
a. Education & Events
(1) Ag Complex

Mr. Palmer reported he has scheduled a meeting with Curry Martin, who has volunteered his place to have an agriculture fair at sometime next year. Mr. Martin told Mr. Palmer that a good amount of fair rides get parked on his land after the Salem Fair ends.

Mr. Palmer reiterated that they are looking for a multi-purpose facility for an ag complex that can be used for a fair and other public uses, like a graduation venue.

Mr. Palmer reported that the Ag Expo subcommittee will be meeting soon at the Farm Bureau office to discuss the upcoming event in March.

(2) Upcoming Events

a. Coyote Lottery

Mr. Baker reported that 46 coyotes have been submitted as of the end of last week. That amounts to about 10 coyotes a week so far, which will probably exceed our numbers from any previous year.

b. Ag Conference Expo

Mr. Baker reported that the subcommittee has met one time so far and drafted many ideas for the theme of agricultural safety. The subcommittee will meet again next week, but so far the date and location has been set, and most major logistics have been completed.

c. Practical Beekeeping for Beginners

Mr. Baker stated there is a very active beekeepers association in this area and wanted to make sure that the board was aware of the event. Everyone in agriculture can benefit from beekeeping.

d. 2015 Virginia Agritourism Conference

Mr. Baker reported that the Virginia Agritourism Conference is a two-day state-wide event in March up in the valley and that when he gets more information on the event he'll be sure to share it with the board.

b. Marketing & Production

(1) Farmers Markets

Mr. Baker reported that the Forest Farmers' Market has holiday and winter markets, one coming up this Saturday. Mr. Baker reported there was also a group that has been getting together to better the Bedford Farmers' Market and to plan for the next season.

c. Land Protection & Conservation

Mr. Fellers was not in attendance, but reported to Mr. Powers he had no new reports.

(8) Other Business

a. Ag STEM Careers Program

Mr. Powers stated that Mr. Gardner wanted the STEM program to be brought up so that the board could do a little research on the topic before the next board meeting. Mr. Baker clarified

there was an article Mr. Gardner was referring to that showed a great opportunity for young people studying science, technology, engineering, and math, in the field of agriculture.

(9) Informational Items

Mr. Baumgardner reported that Franklin County is having a meeting on the 19th focusing on hot water and dairy farming. Anyone interested should call the Franklin County extension office.

Mr. Graham reported that he received a call from an agriculture teacher in Rockbridge County who got a grant for a turnkey aquaponic system and needed assistance with setting it up. Mr. Graham was impressed with the system at the middle school because it was on the same level as Liberty High School's program. Mr. Graham stated that maybe sustaining interest in agriculture starts at the middle school level. Middle school ag curriculum exposure may help to peak student interest earlier on in education.

Mr. Powers stated we have a very successful ag department in our high schools, but many other counties start their ag curriculums in the sixth grade. He stated we are lucky to have a great 4-H program so that many kids know the basics before starting high school classes.

Mr. Powers also stated that he had heard the seventh grade exploratory program for ag students in middle school wasn't up to par and that Bedford County really needs to educate our school system on how to best tackle agricultural curriculum.

Mr. Powers thanked everyone for their thoughts and concerns for his father and their family.

(10) Adjournment

8:00 p.m.