



## Meeting Minutes

**Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board  
Peaks Conference Room at Falling Creek  
1257 County Farm Rd., Bedford, VA 24523**

**February 3, 2021 – 7:00 p.m.**

**Present:** Matt Baumgardner, Pete Fellers, Sam Gardner, Chuck Grove, Dorothy McIntyre (by phone), Ken Newman, Jeff Powers, Lindsay Tomlinson, Pam Willoughby (by phone)

**Absent:** Don Gardner, Ronnie Gross, Joy Powers

**Staff Present:** Scott Baker, Traci Blido

**Staff Absent:** None

**Transcriber:** Julia Peters

**Guests:** Mickey Johnson - County Supervisor District 1

---

### **(1) ORGANIZATION**

#### **a. Election of Officers**

Mr. Powers stated that 2021 officers needed to be elected. He opened the floor for nominations of officers.

A motion and a second were made to nominate Jeff Powers as Chairman of the Ag Board for 2021.

**Adopted unanimously**

A motion and a second were made to nominate Don Gardner as Vice Chairman of the Ag Board for 2021.

**Adopted unanimously**

A motion and a second were made to nominate Pam Willoughby as Secretary of the Ag Board for 2021.

**Adopted unanimously**

**(2) APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the February 3, 2021 agenda. There were no objections.

A motion and a second were made to approve the February 3, 2021 agenda, as presented.

**Adopted unanimously**

**(3) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - December 2, 2020**

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the December 2, 2020 meeting minutes.

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

**Adopted unanimously**

**(4) ADMINISTRATION REPORT**

Amanda Kaufman, Deputy County Administrator, submitted a written report that Mrs. Blido read to the meeting attendees. The report noted the solar farm ordinance continues to be researched and reviewed by the Planning Commission. A final recommendation from the Planning Commission is expected by May, at which time it will go back to the Board of Supervisors. Mrs. Blido added that she received a phone call this week regarding another solar farm project and they are watching to see what happens with this issue in Bedford County. Ms. Kaufman also reported that the local Covid-19 vaccine effort is continually evolving. There is work being done regionally to coordinate the efforts and specifics will be forthcoming as information is made available. The local health director sets the priority sequence for eligible groups and the director has determined that the Bedford County residents eligible to receive vaccines next are school employees. Vaccinations for this group will begin next week. It is important to keep in mind that the volume of vaccines provided to this health district is very limited, with only 3,000 vaccines available per week. At the County organization level, staff in eligible positions in the Nursing Home, Department of Social Services, and Sheriff's Office have been offered the vaccine. Other County employees will fall somewhere within the future sequencing to be determined at a later date by the local health director. Information will be shared once public vaccination clinics are available. At this time, the best source for residents who have questions about the vaccine is the Virginia Department of Health website: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/>. Mrs. Blido reported that County Administrator Robert Hiss is hoping to use the County gym for vaccination clinics and he is working to obtain volunteers to

register people and assist at the clinics. If anyone is interested in volunteering for these future events, they can contact Human Resources, or Ms. Bailey, or Mrs. Blido.

Chairman Powers said he spoke to Board of Supervisors (BOS) Chairman Sharp about the issue of solar farms and the BOS are concerned and want to look out for the ag community, which is why they have relied so heavily on the Ag Board and want its opinion. He also spoke with a Planning Commission member saying that the solar farm projects will need to have limits and guidelines which will not happen overnight. There is no guarantee that if the Planning Commission comes back with recommendations, that the BOS will agree. He has reached out and said if there are any other questions, an Ag Board member should be contacted for his/her opinion. He also wants to ensure that whenever these solar farms have reached the end of their lifespan that they are removed from the land appropriately. Supervisor Mickey Johnson said his concerns are the reclamation of the land and the disposal of equipment once it has reached its end because the equipment is not easily disposable. Discussion followed regarding the solar farm proposal and its location. Chairman Powers asked Ag Board members to share any pictures or information they find about raising the solar panels high enough to allow cattle grazing underneath. He thinks these types of solar farm projects would be more feasible in the County and would ease farmers' minds. The issue will be revisited in the April Ag Board meeting when more may be known from the Planning Commission and the BOS.

#### **(5) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT**

Mrs. Blido reported that the EDA is participating in four SWOT Teams within the County. The teams are composed of two members each from the BOS, EDA and Planning Commission to look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the New London Business and Technology Center, Bedford Center for Business, Montvale Center for Commerce, and the Smith Mountain Lake (SML) area. Negotiations are taking place regarding the shell building and Mrs. Blido hopes she will have more to report at the next Ag Board meeting. The Teva facility is under contract. It has been difficult to show professional site selectors the building and there is a long due diligence process when a pharmaceutical space is decommissioned, so they are watching to see what will take place and more is forthcoming once more is known. She is also watching the General Assembly because there is a new agricultural program for incentives sponsored by Roanoke's Sam Rasoul and she will bring more information to future meetings.

#### **(6) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT**

Mr. Baker reported that the first co-mingled cattle sale was held in the middle of January. It was a weaned and vaccinated sale with a total of 738 head of cattle. It was a successful sale and these sales continue to be a positive economic benefit for producers. Some virtual programming has been held and a master cattleman's course will be done virtually in March and April. They are

actively planning for the livestock show and hopefully, it will be held in-person on April 30 and May 1.

Farm safety information was sent out. Bedford County's Dr. Amy Johnson was involved so Ag Board members may find the information interesting. Mr. Baker and Mrs. Blido were approached by the Advancement Foundation, a non-profit organization out of Roanoke that handles the Gauntlet Business Competition. They wanted to know if there would be interest in an ag-business incubator in the region. It would be a shared space concept to provide ag-interested entrepreneurs a place to come together with tech expertise. The project is in the formation stage but the Advancement Foundation wants to apply for a feasibility study grant through GO Virginia to see if there is a need in the region. Mr. Baker and Mrs. Blido provided them with a letter of support for the grant. If the Advancement Foundation receives the grant, they will come to the Ag Board for input. Mrs. Blido will be attending a GO Virginia meeting on Friday and will bring back further information.

#### **(7) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU/YOUNG FARMERS REPORT**

Mr. Baumgardner reported that a virtual meeting was held last night. The Farm Bureau is promoting a survey targeting farmers regarding the fencing-out of creeks to reduce the waste flowing into the Chesapeake Bay. In 2020, mandatory fencing of creeks was put off for five years. If data shows that the load into the Bay has gone down, then the fencing of creeks will remain voluntary. However, if results show an increase in waste in the Bay, legislators will mandate that every farmer in the State of Virginia will fence-out their creeks. Every acre that has already been fenced needs to be counted to reduce this load so that in 2025 it doesn't become mandated. The Farm Bureau considers this a serious issue and is asking farmers to please complete the survey if they are contacted. Mr. Baker said it is a multi-agency effort with the soil and water districts and DCR involved, and they want to better capture the total amount of conservation that Virginia farmers have already done to show better progress; so when 2025 is reached, they will be over the hump. If not, the threat is the stream exclusion mandate will be implemented. There has been talk of applying only to farms on the Bay but things change and to be on the cautious side, they want any action already taken to be reported. Mr. Baumgardner noted that North Carolina has already mandated the fencing-out of creeks, so if a neighboring state is doing so, it can come to Virginia very easily.

#### **(8) COMMITTEE REPORTS**

##### **a. Education & Events**

##### **1. Upcoming Events**

Ms. Tomlinson said 4-H and FAA are doing well. 4-H meetings will be allowed to be larger-sized now but still at half-capacity. Liberty lost an ag teacher but the position was quickly filled. The new teacher, Hunter Wimmer, is from Bedford County, a graduate from Staunton River and

Ferrum College. There were a good number of applicants for the job, which was unusual in the middle of a school year in January.

With the help from the Farm Bureau and Gardner's Land and Agricultural Fencing, the Land Lab behind Liberty Middle School is now fenced. It is approximately seven acres and the plan is to use it for livestock and crops. The fence project started the week after Christmas. Mrs. Blido will have Ms. Bailey write a small press release about the Land Lab. The fence project will teach good fencing methods to students each semester. A community outdoor day was developed and coordinated by the alumni group and the Gardners. It was well attended and very productive, educating adult participants in the proper techniques of building fencing and using different fence wiring and posts and board fencing, with various demonstrations. A wire tying competition was also held. Mrs. Blido will contact Ms. Bailey about writing a short article with Ms. Tomlinson for the Bedford Bulletin about this event.

Students are also preparing for the Central Virginia Livestock Show (CVLS).

## **2. County Fair Update**

Nothing new was reported.

## **3. School Ag Programs Update**

Students and teachers are doing well and continue to adapt to Covid-19 restrictions and requirements.

### **b. Marketing & Production**

#### **1. Farmers' Market Update**

Ms. McIntyre reported that her outside markets are doing well. November was a very strong market with December being strong as well and January about the same as December. The February market is coming up next week and seems to be getting much attention from the vendors so they are hoping for a strong market as well. She has secured some SNAP incentive money from the Bedford Health Foundation which has been very supportive. More vendors have signed up early for the upcoming full season. The state organization, the Virginia Farmers' Market Managers Association is trying to get Bill 2302 passed to make farmers' markets deemed essential. During the early days of Covid-19, many farmers' markets were not deemed essential and could not open up.

Mrs. McFaden from the Bedford Farmers' Market is working with the business, The Well, which just opened in downtown Bedford. She will have markets on the first and third Saturdays of the month in the upstairs area of The Well. She will also be taking a Market Manager's certification course.

### **c. Land Protection & Conservation**

Mr. Fellers said it is the slowest General Assembly he has seen. They are thinking about easements going through the court system. If that is approved, easements will get recorded and then they will become public information. Channel 7 did a piece about Bedford's New London Airport. There was a procedural hearing in court but no determinations made or judgments passed.

### **(9) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS**

Chairman Powers said that 130 feet of Marie Gobble Levine's farm fence was torn down along Route 24 and she received no notification from the State Trooper that handled the accident. She had livestock and horses in that field. After completing new fencing along that stretch on Route 24, another car went through the fence again and they were not notified again. It is a farmer's nightmare to think about livestock getting out especially on such a busy highway. They requested for many years that VDOT install some guardrails but were told that not enough people have been killed along there, which is not a good response. They average four or more accidents over this embankment every year. She has expressed much frustration about the situation. Discussion followed regarding safety along this area of road and Chairman Powers suggested the Ag Board pass a resolution to be sent to the BOS.

A motion and a second were made to recommend to the BOS that a guardrail be installed along the discussed portion of Route 24 for safety reasons.

#### **Adopted Unanimously**

Mr. Baumgardner suggested that a letter be sent to the state legislative representatives as well since it is a safety issue and VDOT and State Police are involved.

Covid-19 funds that were expanded are on hold but the sign-up is not, so farmers are encouraged to sign-up now. Current eligible commodities are vegetables, nursery crops, cut flowers, and aquaculture. The sign-up for this year's hay insurance ends on February 15.

Chairman Powers and Mr. Baker will reach out to the Sheriff's office again regarding at-large cattle and educating 911 dispatchers and EMT's on contacting farmers who own the property where accidents occur and damage fences. Discussion followed about who should be responsible for notifying the property owner's when damage has occurred.

Chairman Powers stated that the annual report for the Ag Board is now due. He was unable to give last year's report due to the Covid-19 lockdown, so he will address both last year's and this year's reports. He will send out a draft and ask for input from the Ag Board members before this year's report deadline.

Bedford had three students on the state livestock judging team which has not happened before and they finished second in the nation in their big contest. Virginia swept the first three spots with their judging in the competition.

Supervisor Johnson reported that there were two rulings today on the Liberty/New London Airport which dealt with procedural issues involving the suit. It was ruled that a private citizen can file a brief in support of his/her position. It was also ruled that Liberty's motion challenging the County's answer was denied and the case will proceed on the merits on a date to be determined later.

He also reported that a bill was passed requiring a \$5.00 fee be paid in order to access rivers in Virginia. The BOS passed a Resolution at their last meeting refuting this and asked for the fee to be withdrawn. In Bedford County, Hales Ford Bridge and Bay Roc Marina would be affected.

Bedford County has 388 acres that are part of Explore Park. The VRFA has a 99 year lease on that land and is five years into the lease. Roanoke County has subleased that lease from VRFA. Roanoke County staff gave a presentation to the BOS and asked Bedford County if they want to be involved in developing Explore Park. There are several options regarding the County's involvement in the venture and Roanoke County has about \$9 or \$10 million already invested in the park. There are opportunities possible and the BOS wants to learn about the options in being a part of this development.

The County filed a suit against the broadband contractor, Blue Ridge Towers. The deadlines were not met and the contract is in default which has put Bedford County in a precarious situation with the Tobacco Commission and with other funding sources. The case is now in the attorneys' hands and is moving forward.

Discussion followed regarding the Explore Park development and making educated decisions by knowing and considering all options.

**(10) ADJOURNMENT**

8:30 p.m.