



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

**Present:** Matt Baumgardner, Pete Fellers, Don Gardner (via phone), Dorothy McIntyre, Ken Newman, Jeff Powers, Joy Powers, Lindsay Tomlinson (via phone), Pam Willoughby (via phone)

**Absent:** Sam Gardner, Ronnie Gross, Chuck Grove

**Staff Present:** Scott Baker, Traci Blido, Amanda Kaufman (via phone)

**Staff Absent:** None

**Transcriber:** Julia Peters

**Guests:** Charla Bansley - County Supervisor District 3; Mark Gwin - Planning Commissioner District 1; John Graham - Graham Bass Farm; Mickey Johnson - County Supervisor District 1; Erika McFaden - Bedford Farmers' Market Manager; Robert Propes - Solar Project Manager, Urban Grid; Jon Puvak - Attorney; Leroy, Brenda, and Sarah Saunders - Bedford County Landowners; Edgar Tuck - County Supervisor District 2

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**(1) APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the October 7, 2020 agenda. There were no objections.

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

**Adopted unanimously**

**(2) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - August 5, 2020**

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the August 5, 2020 meeting minutes.

A motion and a second by were made to approve the August 5, 2020 meeting minutes, as presented.

**Adopted unanimously**

**(3) ADMINISTRATION REPORT**

No report.

**(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT**

Mrs. Blido reported that approximately 100 applications were received for the Back to Business grant. Everyone has been very appreciative of these \$5,000 grants. They have been able to help small businesses including restaurants, retail shops, salons, sole proprietors, small start-up manufacturing, travel agencies, and wineries. Half of the money allocated by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) has been spent. She will be asking them at their next meeting for a second round of these grants using the balance of the approved available funds, to help more companies with larger enterprises and more employees.

Mrs. Blido also reported that unemployment is currently 6.4% in Bedford County. There were 890 continued claims, which was down from the high of 2,500 continued claims in April. Last week, there were 27 people with brand new claims who were out of work for the first time.

Regarding broadband, Comcast will be sending in their final round of receipts using the \$3.5 million grant funds from their Tobacco Commission grant. Comcast was able to serve 8,000 homes with high speed Internet, exceeding the minimum 7,000 homes it promised.

Judson Smith is the new 911 Director. He is from Surry County and is a volunteer fire fighter. Jordan Mitchell was appointed as the new Director of Community Development.

Mrs. Blido also reported there is still money left in the EDA PPE grant. This grant provides up to \$300 to help businesses with expenses for their disinfecting supplies and PPE equipment.

**(5) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT**

Mr. Baker said the stream fenceline cost share program rolled out in the summer has 18 applications and 12 have completed their purchases. It is an ongoing program so applications will be taken for the rest of the fiscal year. Bedford County and the Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District have provided the financial support for this program.

The USDA has a second round of Coronavirus financial assistance for farmers. The additional help is available even if a farmer had signed up for the first round of this funding. Contact the local farm service agency which can help with the application process.

The feeder calf sale held on September 18, 2020 went very well. Half of the calves were in the barn and half were sold in the field with a total of 749 sold. This cattle brought on average \$110 more per head than if they were sold right off the cow at weaning 60 days earlier. The sale generated \$83,000 in additional income for the producers that participated.

Mr. Baker had been contacted by a pork processor in eastern North Carolina who is re-exploring an opportunity to encourage more people to raise pigs naturally and he could process them and turn them into high value pork products. Certain stipulations exist for how the pigs would need to be raised, fed, and managed. It would not have to be organic but it would have to be natural. If anyone is interested or knows of someone interested, contact Mr. Baker who can make the connection to this processor.

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

Mr. Baumgardner said the Farm Bureau had its virtual meeting last night and elected new delegates for the Farm Bureau Board, James Young, Stuart Byrd, and Josh Webster. One topic discussed was fake meat with the clarification that if the meat is not from an animal it will not be promoted in Bedford County.

## **(7) COMMITTEE REPORTS**

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

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

Nothing new to report.

#### **2. County Fair Update**

Ms. Powers said the committee is planning for the 2021 fair. A meeting will be held soon, either virtually or in-person, to regroup and strategize.

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

Ms. Powers noted that 4-H and FFA look different this year. With both organizations there are hoops that must be jumped to maintain safety but some participation is allowed either virtually or in-person. Two State 4-H contests have been held. At the State Livestock Contest, Andrew Tuck finished 7th overall, Emma Jackson finished 10th overall and Charlie Moser finished 14th overall with all three being named Virginia 4-H All-stars. Unfortunately, the national contest was cancelled this year and the students were not given another year of eligibility.

Bedford took 1st place in the State 4-H Livestock Skill-a-thon. Andrew Tuck finished 1st, Charlie Moser finished 3rd, and Emma Jackson finished 4th. There will be a virtual livestock judging contest tomorrow out of Montana. Although there is no travel for 4-H or FFA out of state, the students have opted to travel on their own to a contest in Indiana.

A few students from Bedford 4-H and Liberty FFA participated in the Virginia State Fair and did extremely well.

Josh Powers was named as a National Proficiency Finalist for FFA in the Agriculture Education Division. Only four people are selected as finalists in the entire country so it is a very prestigious award. He will find out if he won at the virtual national FFA convention.

Ms. Powers said she received an email from a concerned parent who asked that the Ag Board be made aware that there are discrepancies between schools regarding vocational education/agricultural programs. She knows that Ms. Tomlinson and other ag teachers are doing everything possible to provide opportunities for students. Seniors are being put in freshman classes at Staunton River High School (SRHS) while other students who attend BSTC are not allowed to take ag classes but students at Liberty are allowed. However, if a student attends Governor's School at SRHS, he/she can take Ag and other electives. This discrepancy affects an FFA senior who will be pursuing an agriculture degree in college. This student will have an opportunity to take an ag class next semester but at this time cannot get anyone to agree to allow her to do so. Her parent has spoken with some of the school board members who had no answer or justification either. The number of ag teachers at SRHS has dropped for the first time in three to four years from 2.5 to 2 although there are students that have not been able to get into their classes.

Supervisor Tuck noted that SML Christian Academy was able to charter an FFA chapter this year and they have one full-time ag teacher as well.

Chairman Powers stated that the school situation concerns him because this student can make straight A's and has opportunities, but learning now is in one classroom all day with a teacher who is not interested in any subjects important to the student, who is now getting C's because she is not getting what she needs. The school system needs to find alternatives and counselors need to be advised.

**b. Marketing & Production**

**1. Farmers' Market Update**

Ms. McIntyre said she requested sales numbers from her vendors up to the end of September. Cumulative sales totaled \$391,000 at the Forest market. The breakdown showed 91% was for food products of meat and vegetables. She averaged 28 to 40 vendors with 50% of the vendors from Bedford County. Vendors continue to wear masks. Over 900 pounds of produce was donated to the Society of St. Andrew which then goes to soup kitchens in the County and Town. Outdoor markets will be held this year once a month at the library.

Mrs. McFaden's goal for the Bedford Market this year was just to grow it and make it a place where vendors wanted to come. The market had between 20 to 25 vendors this year, which allows them to branch out and provide two holiday markets, one in November and one in

December. November 14 will be the first one at the Pavilion. The average attendance at the market was 450 people since it opened in May. Applefest will be held this Friday with Gross' Orchard having a sale of apples for \$1.00 per pound. There will be a cider press at the market and Virginia Cooperative Extension will do some programs for the kids. There will also be a raffle. Growing the market has allowed more things and this next season will have an added market day on Saturday. A business meeting will be held in two weeks with the vendors for an exchange of information and sharing ideas.

## **2. Coyote Lottery Update**

Dr. Gardner said legislation is on President Trump's desk called America's Conservation Enhancement Act. When this bill is signed, producers will have an avenue for federal payments when they lose livestock to wolves, bears, vultures, and ravens. There will also be a mechanism provided for producers to get rid of vultures and ravens when they attack livestock.

Mrs. Blido said Dr. Gardner sent an email noting that there will not be a coyote lottery this year.

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

Nothing new to report.

### **(8) GUEST PRESENTATION - ROBERT PROPES, URBAN GRID (SOLAR PROJECT)**

Mrs. Blido introduced Rob Propes, the Solar Project Manager with Urban Grid. He is joined by Jon Puvak who is an attorney helping with the land use process. Mr. Propes explained what the company Urban Grid does as a leading developer of solar power. He also explained some of the economic and community benefits that solar projects can provide. He noted that a revenue share with the County would provide significant dollars and a solar project would also help create jobs. It would be a diversification opportunity for the landowner and could bring some predictability to income as well. Mr. Saunders said the main advantage to him is to be able to keep land in the family for future generations since the solar company is leasing his land. Mr. Propes and Mr. Puvak answered questions asked by the attendees and various points were discussed. Consensus from the Ag Board members advised that concerns of farmers should be addressed in the legislative process for any ordinance addressing solar farm projects. The Ag Board will provide information to the BOS so they can act. Points will be compiled and Ag Board members will respond to the points. Recommendations and concerns will then be provided to the BOS.

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

Chairman Powers, Ms. Powers, and Mr. Baker drafted a Letter to the Editor that was run in the Bedford Bulletin.

The next Ag Board meeting will be December 2, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. It will be the Christmas meeting so members can bring a snack to enjoy.

A reminder was made to use correct email addresses.

Supervisor Tuck was approached by a logger about the General Assembly passing a bill that gives jurisdictions the option to exempt forest harvesting equipment like farming equipment. He noted that Bedford County currently does not do this. He asked the Ag Board members whether forest harvesting equipment should be included. Chairman Powers asked for any opinions or comments.

A motion and a second were made to promote and support a tax exemption for the logging community's forest harvesting equipment.

**Adopted unanimously**

**(10) ADJOURNMENT**

9:17 p.m.