



Meeting Minutes
Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board
September 2, 2015 – 7:30 p.m.

Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board:

:Present:

Jeffrey Powers, Ken Palmer, Ken Newman , Pete Fellers, Don Gardner, Pam Willoughby, Keith Tuck, Matt Baumgardner, W.P. Johnson, Chuck Grove

:Absent: Ronnie Gross, Spencer Tinsley

Staff Present: Scott Baker, Jerry Craig, Traci Blido, Jessica Hupp

Staff Absent: Carl Boggess

:Guest: John Graham, Brent Wills, Joy Powers

(1) Approval of Agenda

Jeff Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the September 2, 2015 agenda.

A motion and a second were made to approve the September 2, 2015 agenda, as presented.

Adopted Unanimously.

(2) Approval of Meeting Minutes – August 5, 2015

Mr. Powers asked for a review of the August 5, 2015 meeting minutes.

Mr. Baker stated a correction was needed under his extension report. The first sentence should say “four young people at the past 4-H camp”. Mr. Baker stated on the following page, in the top paragraph it should read Extension Forage Specialist instead of 4-H Agent Specialist.

Dr. Gardner stated under item 6 for the Elk’s Resolution it should read that it was voted down by the board of directors at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

A motion and a second were made to approve the meeting minutes of August 5, 2015, as amended.

Adopted unanimously.

(3) County Administrator's Report

Mr. Boggess was not in attendance.

(4) Economic Development Director's Report

Mrs. Blido reported that after the tragedy at Smith Mountain Lake this past week, she went to SML to talk to staff about plans for the interim. Vicki Gardner is still in ICU and lost a kidney and part of her colon. The doctors are saying, however, that she can recover so we will continue to keep her in our thoughts and prayers. Mrs. Blido stated that in lieu of flowers, Vicki would like everyone to buy tickets to the Smith Mountain Lake Wine Festival taking place September 26 and 27. This is the SML Chamber's biggest fundraiser of the year and tickets can be purchased at the Bedford Welcome Center.

Mrs. Blido reported she recently participated in a familiarization tour with Region 2000. The purpose of this tour was to give economic development directors of the region a better understanding of the type of assets we have within the region as a whole.

Mrs. Blido stated she is still planning the Southern Virginia Ag Marketing Professional's tour for September 29 through October 2 with VDACS. Pittsylvania and Bedford County are co-hosting this event, which already has 30 people signed up. Participants will be going on several different ag tours, including a trip to two of our own, Gardner Heifers and Royal Oak.

Mrs. Blido reported the Region 2000 Small Business Development Center will be doing a workshop with Google to show people how to get their businesses on the Google Map search. There will be three training courses available, with one being held at Bedford CVCC on September 28 from 8 – 9:30 a.m. There will be two additional workshops held October 19 and November 2.

Mrs. Blido stated that the broadband project is moving forward. They received approval from the Historical Society on the towers location and the special use permit will be submitted on Friday. Mid-Atlantic Broadband is aiming to have the tower completed by mid-January. Mr. Powers asked that Ms. Hupp add the Broadband Committee Chairman Allen Boaz to the agenda for the next meeting.

(5) Cooperative Extension Report

Mr. Baker reported that the sorghum crop walk that was held at Gardner Heifers was well attended, with a good mix of producers and industry people. He believed it was a good experience to see the sorghum varieties and how they can be a replacement for corn.

Mr. Baker reported that the regional feasibility study for a food aggregation facility was kicked off in mid-August. Consultants have begun getting out in the counties to meet with individuals

and groups. They will continue that work to find out the buying and production power of this area with an estimated completion date of January 2016.

Mr. Graham reported there will be an aquaculture open house on October 22 at Virginia State University. The open house mainly deals with pond raising of aquaculture species and will have aquaponic demonstrations as well. Anyone interested in getting into aquaponics can go and it will be held at the Randolph Farm outside VSU campus in Petersburg.

Mr. Powers stated that the Small Ruminants' Field Day at VSU will be held on September 18.

Mr. Baker reported he has started putting together a regional ag extension newsletter in order to combine this type of information. He has also considered putting the information on Google Drive so that anyone wanting to access this information can go to one website instead of constantly getting emails. He plans to add the ag board to the distribution list and states they can always opt out.

(6) Tourism Director's Report

Mr. Craig reported he has nothing new to report outside the County Fair for this month.

(7) Bedford County Farm Bureau Young Farmers Report

Mr. Johnson reported that the Farm Bureau is getting ready to elect all new members and officers. Mr. Johnson also reported that Freddie Wydner from Pittsylvania County has put together a grant for those interested in starting a vineyard business. Mr. Johnson has the contact information for those interested. Mr. Johnson explained it is Tobacco Commission money and that Freddie is being the grant administrator for the time being. Mr. Baker asked if this grant had been approved yet. Mr. Johnson stated they are looking to get a feel for how many people are interested and then will go forward for approval.

(8) Committee Reports

a. Education & Events

(1) Ag Complex

Mr. Palmer said no new news on the ag complex.

(2) Upcoming Events

- County Fair debrief

Ms. Joy Powers thanked everyone who came out to help and support the fair. She stated that going into the event they tried to be conservative on attendance goals and hoped for 6,000. They believe that 14,800 people actually attended the fair throughout the weekend. Dr. Gardner asked how they calculated attendance to which Ms. Powers responded they based it on a car count which included how many the upper and lower lots could hold, as well as the average amount of

people in each car. Ms. Powers stated the \$120,000 economic impact number is a reflection of what the amusement company and vendors sold at the fair itself. Mr. Palmer stated that he and his wife went to Applebee's and the waitress stated there were lines out the door every night that weekend.

Mr. Powers stated the tractor pull may have kept some away from the Fair, but Ms. Powers believes it may have just shifted attendance. Ms. Powers stated that Porter House Barbeque, who provided food at the ag expo, broke his record in sales on Saturday and actually doubled it.

Ms. Powers credited a big part of success to media coverage received from WSLS 10, WSET 13, and Fox 21/27. Many papers and magazines were also helpful including the News and Advance, Laker Media, Bedford Bulletin, Smith Mountain Eagle, and the Roanoke Times.

Ms. Powers stated that the budget provided at this point in time is an approximation, as they are waiting on certain bills to come in. However, the remaining balance is comforting. A lot of the funds raised were due to Cole Amusements which cut a check to the fair for \$9,000. When organizing the fair, Cole Amusements was purposely not added in the budget for a security blanket. Cole Amusements has already stated they would like to be at next year's fair.

Moving into the next phase, Ms. Powers believes it is time to start talking about applying for 501(c)3 status. Ms. Powers stated she found a few people that would like to work on that with her. Ms. Powers stated she is very appreciative of everything Farm Bureau did for them. Mr. Powers stated it is still a big part of the Ag Board, but no longer just the Ag Board's job.

Mr. Johnson stated he believes the fair needs to be its own entity and that in the 501(c)3 version the ag complex should be included. Then, when funds are available they will not be violating the original vision because the complex was never written in. Mr. Johnson also suggested to file the tax status before the end of the tax year. Dr. Gardner asked who was completing the legal work. Mr. Powers explained that the county cannot do it for them, but they have suggested other legal advisors who can.

Ms. Powers stated that the fair wouldn't have been able to happen without the groups listed on her report. Ms. Powers stated that the Smith Mountain Lake FFA sent 40 kids on Thursday and Friday to be the hands to set the fair up, which was immensely important.

Ms. Powers stated that the fair had a positive impact to citizens living nearby. Chief Jack Jones shared that a man living down the road was having chest pains so his wife saw the emergency vehicles at the fair and brought him there. EMT's ended up shocking him on the fair grounds and on the way to the hospital. She added that the doctor said if he had gotten medical attention just a few minutes later he probably wouldn't have made it.

Ms. Powers stated the fair committee will have a meeting soon to work through this year's feedback and to discuss what they envision for next year. The committee would like to stay as close to the same timeframe as possible.

Mr. Grove stated he would personally like to see Joy or the other important committee members be paid from the proceeds raised by the fair. Dr. Gardner stated that he believes that's an issue that the fair committee would need to discuss and decide. Mr. Powers stated that he can tell that the fair got the Board of Supervisors' attention as an economic driver to bring people into the County and that he believes there could be some movement to either purchase a piece of land or work on a piece of land the county already has that has been driven by the fair's success this weekend. Mr. Johnson suggested that if they take county real estate and build on it that it could become County run, which is why he suggests getting a 501(c)3.

Mr. Craig stated that he agrees with Mr. Johnson because you don't know what the turnover will be on the board in the next few years. But, he also noted the ball fields that are not on county land that the taxpayer paid for. If the County has a complex that can be used for many things he doesn't see the issue of the fair using it and being under county control. Ms. Powers stated the amount of work that went into the fair was well worth it, but when you start discussing real estate the \$15,000 is not yet enough. It would take several years to raise enough money to build a facility or purchase land, and it will also take more than one paid position. Mr. Powers stated that the home of the fair at least for the near future will be Glenwood.

Mr. Powers said they have three other people who have offered to allow the fair to take place on their land. Mr. Powers stated although he agrees with what Mr. Johnson has said, the county needs a fair grounds no matter what. Dr. Gardner asked about the \$1,000 allotted to parking staff. Mr. Powers stated they plan to donate money back to all the church volunteers who helped with parking.

Mrs. Blido suggested to remember to budget insurance next year if a 501(c)3 is created since it may no longer fall under the county's insurance.

b. Marketing & Production

(1) Farmers Markets

Mr. Graham reported it has been a tough month for produce due to heat and lack of water. The Bedford Farmers Market on Friday is now seeing cyclical attendance. The Forest Market is going strong. Mr. Graham stated as far as the market at the fair, everyone showed up with expectations of just being exposed because very few people from the south end of the county go to the county's regular markets. He believes many vendors expectations were exceeded. Mr. Graham stated there aren't a lot of producers that do direct marketing activity, and those that do are families of one or two people so their efforts can't be split between two market locations. Mr. Graham stated that if the fair was moved to September they could bring all vendors from every

market to the fair market without putting a burden on the markets normal crowd as it usually dies down around that time of the year.

Mr. Graham reminded the board that Bedford's Finest Fare will be held September 13 and tickets are still available. The event will be held in the Town Kitchen parking lot and proceeds will go to the Bower Center.

c. Land Protection & Conservation

Mr. Fellers had nothing new to report.

(9) Other Business

A. Biosolids update

Mr. Powers stated that in the past months we had a few Board of Supervisors ask about the use of biosolids in the county. Dr. Gardner stated the company that handles the product from Roanoke is expanding into Bedford, which has become an opportunity for those who have been waiting years for Synagro to work with them. Dr. Gardner stated he was able to visit with a number of the Board of Supervisors about the technical aspects of biosolids and they've been very appreciative of the information. Dr. Gardner stated they will continue to maintain a dialogue with the supervisors and others in the area on the subject.

(10) Informational Items

Mr. Powers stated the local soil and water conservation board election is coming up and stated the importance of the board to the ag community. He stated it is key to have good people on the board and that doesn't necessarily mean all farmers, but they should understand what the job entails. Mr. Powers pointed out that Scott Baker and Keith Tuck are both on the board.

Mr. Baker stated that for those who don't know, the soil and water conservation board, the number of directors is based on the number of jurisdictions that district serves. There are usually six, but currently there is only one jurisdiction because of the changing to town status, leaving them with five directors. One director is always appointed which is the ag extension agent and there are three new seats up for election. There are six people running for the three seats. The job of director is to oversee operations of a particular district. Some districts may employ staff as well.

Dr. Gardner stated from his understanding there are some candidates that have differing views of how assets are controlled by the committee and how they should be used. Personally, Dr. Gardner is very fiscally conservative and believes those types of issues should be directed to the top and not at the local level. In this election, he believes there is a possibility that if different people are elected they may decide some ag-related projects are a waste of money, which would

mean that Bedford would not be able to access best management practices funds. Dr. Gardner told ag board members to look into it, and see who deserves support and who doesn't.

Mr. Graham stated he has worked in those offices in the past and storm water directors don't have control of best management practices funds. Best management practices funds are given by the state and there is a checklist directors must use to rank different applications based on how they fit with the program. During his three years with the county, there had always been a problem not having enough money. However, they do receive a lot of money from other counties near the end of the year because those counties don't have people that want to participate. Mr. Graham stated that if someone is running under that guise, then they don't understand how the system works.

Dr. Gardner stated he has worked in 10 different counties and has been amazed at practices that have been approved that cost shares are available for. Even between Bedford and Forest the practices can be very different.

Mr. Graham responded that it has to do with the watershed of choice which is set by the state, and we don't have a watershed the state wants to spend money on. Over the past two years they have discussed needing more forestry money, but they can't get money from the state for forestry.

Mr. Johnson asked what the total cost share available was for the Peaks of Otter. Mr. Baker said it is typically around \$200,000. In the last year, they were able to access over \$1million in extra funds to deal with a backlog of \$6 million.

Mr. Grove stated that a few months ago a motion was tabled about the Central Virginia Livestock show and potential funding. Mr. Powers stated he would like it to be brought back at the next meeting. Mr. Powers stated they will discuss before the next meeting to come up with a game plan.

(11) Adjournment

8:52 p.m.