



Meeting Minutes

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

October 6, 2021 – 7:30 p.m.

Present: Pete Fellers, Don Gardner , Ken Newman, Jeff Powers, Dorothy McIntyre, Matt Baumgardner, Chuck Grove, Joy Powers, Ethan Tanner

Absent: Sam Gardner, Lindsay Tomlinson, Pam Willoughby

Staff Present: Scott Baker, Pam Bailey, Robert Hiss (by Zoom)

Staff Absent: None

Transcriber: Julia Peters

Guests: John Graham, Mickey Johnson, W.P. Johnson, Erika McFaden, Carlton and Viola Skinnell, Beck Stanley, Wayne Turner

(1) CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

(2) WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Powers introduced the new member of the Ag Board, Ethan Tanner. Mr. Tanner represents District 5 in Bedford County, replacing former Ag Board member Ronnie Gross.

(3) APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the October 6, 2021 agenda. He requested adding a presentation with the meeting guests about crop damage due to deer. There were no objections.

A motion and a second were made to approve the October 6, 2021 agenda, as amended.

Adopted unanimously

(4) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - September 1, 2021

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the September 1, 2021 meeting minutes. Mrs. McIntyre noted a correction was needed to the Forest Farmers' Market report. The Saturday outdoor winter hours of operation begin at 9:00 am, not 8:00 a.m. as written.

A motion and a second were made to approve the September 1, 2021 meeting minutes, as amended.

Adopted unanimously

(5) ADMINISTRATION REPORT

Mr. Hiss announced Pam Bailey as the new Director of the EDA and how admirably she performed in her interim tenure after Mrs. Blido's departure for another position. He reported that the Board of Supervisors (BOS) authorized staff to submit an application for a broadband grant through the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI). It is a comprehensive grant application and the County has partnered with three different internet service providers, ZiTel, Shentel, and Riverstreet for this expansion of broadband. The goal is to provide universal internet coverage throughout the entire County. Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds are being used for the expansion. It is a \$61.5 million grant with a goal of servicing 20,000 customers. Notice of the awarding of the grant is not expected until Christmas. If the County is awarded the grant, it will have two years to complete the project. He thanked the Ag Board for their letter of support for the grant which was included in the application. He said the Planning Commission is still reviewing the solar ordinance and continues to study the issue. Erosion problems are a concern. He hopes for a recommendation by the end of the calendar year. He also noted that the County is updating its comprehensive plan. A series of meetings are taking place throughout the community for comments and questions from citizens. There is a link to view a Community Development Comprehensive Plan Survey on the County's website. He encouraged meeting attendees to complete the survey so their comments and opinions can be heard. Mr. Hiss reminded attendees about the discussion at a previous meeting regarding the drop off of large (over 24 inches) tractor tires at the landfill. The Solid Waste Department researched the issue and the subject was discussed with the Public Works Committee. The recommendation to the BOS was not to expand the current size of tires for acceptance. The Solid Waste Department is subsidized already and accepting and disposing of larger tires would cause the County to lose

money. Mr. Hiss also explained that Zoom calls were used to conduct government business during the COVID pandemic when the Governor established a State of Emergency. Once the State of Emergency was discontinued, local governments had to return to operating under normal conditions, which limits Zoom calls for attending official meetings to two calls per person per year.

Dr. Gardner reported that his farming operation suffered a great amount of deer damage this year. He contacted other farmers who also experienced crop damage from deer and they want to encourage deer hunters to harvest more does than bucks this year. Beginning in November the gun season increased from two weeks to four weeks to help alleviate the problem as well. The Game Department has the Earn a Buck program where a doe must be shot after a buck has been killed and before another buck can be taken. The hope is this will help bring down the doe population. Dr. Gardner introduced the guests that were in attendance who had experienced crop damage by deer and said the Bedford newspaper would run an article with pictures regarding the problem and encourage the hunters to kill more does rather than bucks. He noted it is a serious economic issue that is impacting all the crop farmers in the area.

Mr. and Mrs. Skinnell provided pictures showing the damage done to their orchard. The deer eat the buds on the trees and the bucks root, pulling up newly planted trees. Mr. Skinnell said the rules/legislation must change or farmers will cease to exist due to the high cost of the damage on their operations. Discussion followed regarding legislation, hunting deer, and meat processing issues. The Ag Board hopes to make a difference by appealing to the public and promoting hunters to harvest more does than bucks. During the last Farm Bureau meeting, a resolution was introduced to ask the Game Department to increase the Earn a Buck program from one doe to three.

(6) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Ms. Bailey reported the County is learning more about an AFID infrastructure grant and there will be a Zoom call this week to learn more about the program. Belvac has its CO and is now operational in shell building in the New London Business and Technology Center.

Bedford One career conversations will begin again on October 20 with Cintas. Due to COVID, tours are not possible yet, so the conversations take place through Zoom calls. She invited Ag Board members to contact her if they would like to talk with students about their operation and career pathways through these career conversations.

The Bedford Otter Bus is now running and is a great service within the Town. It has 16 stops including Elba's, the YMCA, Bedford Memorial Hospital, and Walmart and operates on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. As demand increases, they hope to add more days of operation. The Town is also conducting a hotel needs study.

A child care study is being conducted by the County for residences and businesses to determine the needs of parents and employers whose production may be impacted by lack of child care for their employees. The survey is located online at bedfordcountyva.gov on the community bulletin board and it is also on the EDA's Facebook page.

(7) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT

Mr. Baker reported on the Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund (AFID) Infrastructure Grant Program. The grant is \$25,000 and could cover a variety of projects for food hubs to farmers' markets. The locality must match with in-kind funds. The deadline for the first round is November 15. There will be a webinar on Friday and Mr. Baker will receive more information.

He has not received any updates on the drought declaration process yet.

The Tobacco Commission grant proposal has been submitted for a regional cost share program. The group of agents were asked to refine the proposal and add more economic information.

A second generation of army worms has not been seen in the County. Hopefully, the outbreak reported in last month's meeting was the only unfortunate cycle.

Another successful weaned and vaccinated cattle sale was held at Springlake Stockyard on September 17, 2021. A total of 830 head were sold and the overall premium was \$112 per head after costs. A meeting with Springlake staff will be held soon to discuss 2022 sales.

The 2022 Central Virginia Livestock Show is being planned and they hope for a normal sale this year.

(8) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU/YOUNG FARMERS REPORT

The regular meeting was held virtually with new resolutions presented to send to legislators.

(9) COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Education & Events

1. Upcoming Events

The Liberty FFA livestock team continues to represent Virginia well with competitions in Indianapolis and Nebraska. Both FFA's competed at the State Fair with 25-30 students participating. The National FFA Convention will have 20 students attend. Fruit sales are gearing up. Due to COVID, opportunities exist for the students but they are not back to a normal year yet.

2. County Fair Update

The Fair Board decided to postpone the fair due to rising COVID cases. Last week was a bad week for COVID with alarming numbers. Sanitizing properly and social distancing in large groups, especially with shuttling fairgoers from outlying parking areas, was too difficult to achieve safely to hold the fair. The hope is next year will be better.

3. School Ag Programs Update

Mr. Graham attended a state ag education event, a mini-conference with the intent to create ag fusion units for ag teachers to use in grades 6 through 12 in next year's classes. Twenty-one units that speak to aquaculture are being developed with a focus on fin fish food production. He conveyed it is a limitation because there are other aspects on aquaculture not discussed, such as oysters. This was the only opportunity for input by producers who are not participating in the course writing and therefore not working with content writers. Discussion followed regarding aquaculture.

b. Marketing & Production

1. Farmers' Market Updates

Mrs. McFaden said the Bedford Market has had a great season and will run until October 29. It has received over 500 people throughout the season, which is more than in the last two years. There has also been an increase in out-of-town and out-of-state visitors. The Youth market, in collaboration with the Extension Office and 4-H, has been the highlight. The youth market garnered local and national media attention. *Living in the Heart of Virginia* did a TV spot on it and the *Roanoke Times* printed an article. A call will go out soon for more producers of fruits and vegetables who can attend the market on a more regular basis. The market has also seen an increase of SNAP purchases, some of which is directly related to the use of the new Otter Bus. An Applefest will be held on the last market day with apples selling for \$1.00 per pound and an apple butter-making demo. There will also be food trucks and music. The market will then move into its holiday markets scheduled for both November 13 and December 11 with winter markets set for the second Saturday of each month thereafter. An end-of-season vendor meeting will be held and Ms. McFaden will keep the Ag Board posted about any changes for the 2022 season.. She noted that out of 300 markets participating in a contest, the Bedford Market was voted to be the third favorite market in Virginia and the eighth favorite in the Southeast.

Mrs. McIntyre reported that the Forest Market has done well with an increase in both customers and vendors. The SNAP purchases have tripled this year and these customers have been predominantly from the Forest locality. The market partners with the Society of St. Andrew to glean at the end of the season and this year 2,300 pounds of produce have been designated to the Society or to the Gate Industries who then distribute the produce to food insecure areas within the community. During National Farmers' Market Week, magnetic chip clips were given out to

market customers. The market will wrap up at the end of October and then it will enter its holiday and winter markets. Those markets will be held outside.

c. Land Protection & Conservation

Mr. Fellers said the Blue Ridge Conservancy in Roanoke celebrated its 25th anniversary.

(10) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Chairman Powers appreciated the many contributors that give input to the Ag Board and thanked them for their work. The possible meat processing operation discussed in previous meetings is still under discussion but there is no new information to announce at the moment.

Supervisor Johnson stated that Bill Thomasson passed away that past week which was a big loss for the community. He will miss his counsel.

Sam Williams received recognition from the BOS and presented him with a document which was read aloud by Supervisor Tuck.

(11) ADJOURNMENT

8:46 p.m.