

MINUTES
ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
January 22, 2024

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:06 AM. Directors P. DeBlock, J. Wright, P. Ruszkiewicz, G. Constable and B. Cheney were present along with K. Sumner (SWCD), E. King (SWCD), M. Held (SWCD.)

2024-1-1 DeBlock made the Motion, Cheney seconded, to approve December's Board Meeting Minutes as written. All in favor.

ACTIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS – Some bills were paid and are listed on the Bills for Board Approval. Sumner updated the Board that the letter regarding the new soil health sign off policy requirements was signed by DeBlock and sent to the State Committee. The draft of said letter was preapproved by the Board prior to mailing. Sumner reported that the State Committee cancelled their January meeting, but that the letter was discussed at a January meeting of the district managers.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Bank statements, Account Analyses and collateral agreements were available for review.
- Letter from NYSCDEA Requesting Donation for the National Conservation Foundation Envirothon
- Membership Renewal Form from the National Watershed Coalition
- Invitation from CCE to the 35th Annual Dairy, Equine, Livestock Day & Trade Show
- Public Officials Liability Insurance Renewal Application
- Board of Ethics-Annual Statement of Financial Disclosure Form

Sumner discussed the various donation requestions from numerous organizations. The New York State Envirothon Committee is requesting a donation of \$3,000 from the District to support the National Conservation Foundation Envirothon annual gathering. Additionally, the District received a letter addressed to Wright from Suffolk County SWCD asking other counties to consider providing the \$3,000 donation for the Envirothon. Sumner felt that the wording used in the letter, specifically the use of 'apathetic,' to describe the counties that do not donate to the Envirothon upsets him. Wright remarked that he recognizes the benefit to donating, but that there has not been a lot of engagement from Orange County for a while. Wright credits this to the fact that the County does not have a large agricultural community. Sumner posed the question to the Board whether donating to the national Envirothon is the best use of their public education funds. Cheney wanted to know if there are any events that the District can participate in. In the meantime, Cheney will contact the Orange County Water Authority to find out if there are any available community events. The Board decided to table the decision to donate to the National Conservation Foundation Envirothon until the February Board Meeting.

Furthermore, the Board discussed the invitation from Cornell Cooperative Extension, CCE, to attend their Annual Dairy, Equine, Livestock Day & Trade Show. Sumner remarked that OSCWCD has not participated in quite some time since the attendees are primarily farmers that we already assist. For this reason, the District will not attend CCE's annual event. Sumner informed the Board that the questionnaire pertaining to our public official liability insurance was completed and submitted to our insurance agent. Additionally, Sumner noted that we received a letter

addressed to Wright from the County Board of Ethics that needs to be filed by 5/1/24 for the 2023 calendar year. Sumner stated that the District received a request from the National Association of Conservation Districts. Sumner explained that the District rarely makes contributions to the National Association of Conservation Districts, but rather instead the New York Association of Conservation Districts, NYACD. Sumner stated that we typically pay half the donation at the start of the year and pay the second half at the end of the year. The Board discussed whether to donate the full amount or half of the requested amount to the NYACD.

2024-1-2 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to contribute \$750 to the New York Association of Conservation Districts and pay the additional \$750 later in 2024. All in favor.

Sumner informed the Board of the award letter the District received at the end of November from the State that our AEM Round 18 action plan was approved in the amount of \$379,930. The AEM Round 18 is a two-year, non-competitive contract. Sumner noted that \$200,000 of the grant will be used for projects and the remainder is to be allotted to staff time.

FINANCIAL REPORTS

Sumner provided the Board with a separate attachment regarding the dedicated fund summary to better explain the recent activity. Sumner noted that more expenses were incurred on the Floodplain Bench Phase 4 South Project, Phase 4, beyond the supporting grant's available funding. Per Sumner, this was to be expected. The District's grant budget allotted \$250,000 of the local match towards the construction costs. The District used up the whole grant besides the remaining \$30,000 payment which has yet to be given. Sumner zeroed out several of the Performance Measure accounts from 2021 and 2022. These funds were used towards Phase 4 expenses. Sumner noted that the District used a portion of the 2023 Performance Measure, but there is still over \$100,00 left in that account. Sumner informed the Board that the District will be receiving, subject to approval, over \$200,000 for the 2024 Performance Measure. The Board is waiting for the \$30,000 from the Climate Resilient Farming Phase 5 grant. Additionally, the office paid out \$30,000 from the Carbon Farming Project for the Southway Compost Facility project and is awaiting reimbursement. Sumner stated that he sent numerous grants close out documents to Ben Luskin at the State Committee, but so far he has not heard from him. Overall, the District is doing well financially.

2024-1-3 DeBlock made the Motion, Cheney seconded, to file December's Financial Reports for audit review. All in favor.

BILLS FOR BOARD APPROVAL

King informed the Board of a correction made to number two on the Bills for Board Approval. King mistakenly wrote that the Hartford Insurance Company's payment was \$1,129.00 when it is \$1,290.00.

2024-1-4 DeBlock made the Motion, Ruszkiewicz seconded, to pay the bills as presented. With the correction noted above. All in favor. *Wright abstained from the vote since there a bill for his cover crop funding was amongst those listed.

Sumner mentioned to the Board that he and Wright recently discussed when it is appropriate for a Board member to abstain from voting. Sumner noted that abstaining can become unmanageable at times, especially in the cases of conflict of interests. Wright provided the Board with a letter from the Orange County Land Trust detailing occurrences where applications are not approved due to conflict of interests. Additionally, the letter suggested that Board members recuse themselves from the meeting during the proposed project's discussion. Cheney proposed that we review Orange County's Code of Ethics to learn what their approach is since the Board does not have their own. Additionally, Cheney suggested that in these instances, the bill in question should be listed separately and have the bills approved in two separate motions.

***DeBlock signed the Bills for Board Approval rather than Wright due to his proposed bill.**

GRANT REPORT UPDATE –Sumner told the Board the paid amount for the CRF 5 state cash was \$300,000. The District reimbursed the Pine Island Turf Nursery over \$553,000. Sumner noted that the District was down on the grant for \$250,000 to match the State money for construction costs. Sumner stated that the amount will go up more since we have a final reimbursement. However, we have provided the required local match to close out CRF5 and receive the final \$30,000 payment. Sumner acknowledged that the District was advised some time ago to review the various grant statuses with the Board routinely. Sumner informed the Board that the paid amounts on the grant report will be updated and ready for review at February’s meeting.

INTERAGENCY REPORTS

FSA: DeBlock had no updates to report to the Board.

NRCS: Sumner informed the Board that there is a new Natural Resource Specialist at NRCS.

There were no representatives from NYSS, CCE, or WCC present at the meeting.

STAFF REPORTS

Written staff reports were emailed to the Board prior to the meeting for review

M. Held (SWCD)- Held submitted her staff report via email to the Board prior to the meeting.

Held informed the Board that the last of the CRF6 cover crop payment was allotted for. The last farmer to receive funding from the grant was Jason Touw. Held noted that Touw needs soil testing done as well to satisfy his payment. Additionally, Held briefly discussed the contracts associated with the Ag Non- Point Source grant, AGNPS, which Sumner will discuss in further detail. AGNPS. Once they are signed by a Board member, Held will submit them to Ben Luskin to review.

E. King (SWCD)- King submitted her staff report via email to the Board prior to the meeting. King reported to the Board that PKF O’Connor Davies, an accounting firm, will be conducting the District’s annual audit during the first week of April 2024. Sumner noted that King worked diligently on addressing concerns Sumner had regarding his Medicare Part B Premium. Per the email conversation King had with a NYSHIP employee, since NYSHIP is Sumner’s primary insurance, Sumner does not need to pay for Medicare Part B. Sumner needs to speak with the Social Security Administration to officially unenroll himself from Medicare Part B and will keep the Board posted. Sumner does not intend on paying his most recent Medicare Part B Premium bill that he recently received since his coverage will ideally conclude soon.

K. Sumner (SWCD)- Sumner submitted his staff report via email to the Board prior to the meeting. Review “Old and New Business” for further information.

OLD & NEW BUSINESS

Floodplain Bench Phase 4 – Sumner noted that culverts need to be installed and roads need to be repaired at the Floodplain Bench Phase 4 project. Due to recent heavy precipitation, the Bench has been underwater at least five times. Sumner clarified that this does not mean the Bench is not working, but it will certainly impact the tree survival rate. Unfortunately, Sumner does not think that our tree survival rate will meet the DEC requirements. Sumner is hopeful that the county surveyors will be able to get the “As-Built” survey and Conservation Easement Limits Survey done so long as the weather permits. Sumner has been hesitant to finalize the Easement limits until road work is completed. Sumner reported that corn was harvested from the Phase 4 North area and soil samples were collected from deep soil testing pits prior to the snowfall.

Sumner briefed the Board on the progress of the construction plans and tree cutting request for proposals, RFP for Phase 4 North. The deadline for the tree cutting RFP is 3/31/24. Sumner noted that it is difficult to get in contact with the Phase 4 North landowner and farmer that rents the property. Sumner wants to confirm plans with everyone prior to issuing RFP for tree cutting. DeBlock volunteered to go with Sumner to speak with the landowner since she knows him. Sumner believes that the landowner currently wants to retain all the soil that is excavated to construct the floodplain bench. However, Sumner wants to propose a compromise with the following terms; 1.) Some of the soil would be spread on the fields, 2.) The contractor is allowed to sell a 1/3 of it to help keep the bid price low, and 3.) The landowner can stockpile the remaining soil. Sumner is unsure whether Walter wants to retain the title ownership or whether he wants to sell it. Sumner does not know how much the District would have to pay him for the land easement.

Sumner placed importance on looking at the bigger picture when it comes to the Bench project. Per Sumner, the Bench project will consume a great deal of his time in 2024. Sumner posed the question to the Board whether focus should be kept on extending the Bench further upstream or should the Board consider other projects? Sumner discussed the aforementioned question with the Bench project engineer last week. Sumner told the Board that if they intend on extending the bench past Phase 4 in the next year or so, then we should be starting studies, designs, and permit applications for that now. Sumner admitted that it is becoming unmanageable for him to handle the Phase 4 project and take the necessary actions for Phase 5 by himself.

Quaker Creek- Sumner provided the Board with an update on the farmers in the Black Dirt who want to modify Quaker Creek before surveys or designs are completed. In their attempt to address the recent flooding conditions, the farmers started excavating at the upstream end instead of the outlet which is what drainage experts recommend. The Board discussed the recent accident involving an excavator being submerged along Quaker Creek. The landowner, who rents this property to a farmer, was not made aware of this decision to dig out the Creek and put dirt on his fields. Although the landowner is upset by this, he will not pursue a civil suit. This occurrence confirmed Sumner's concerns that the farmers would rush the process without getting permission from the landowners. Sumner noted that if the farmers still plan on moving down to the Walkill River that they will encounter a long section of Quaker Creek that is a DEC wetland. Rob Schreibeis, from the County Executive office, spoke with the farmers who stated that they will continue the work on Quaker Creek, but asked that the County revive the Celery Avenue Ledge Lowering Project. Schreibeis assumed that when the farmers referred to the "County" they meant OCSWCD. Schreibeis suggested that the District take the money the County approved for the Bench project and allocate it towards the Ledge project. Sumner disagrees with this suggestion since the wheels are already in motion on the Bench project. Sumner further explained that we have active permits that would expire if we changed the plans. Additionally, the permits for the Ledge project have expired and would need to be refiled. Sumner noted that if the Ledge was lowered by four feet it would benefit Black Dirt lands even if it does not directly help the flooding of Quaker Creek. Sumner received an estimate of \$3,000 from our primary Project engineer at B&L to handle the renewal of the Ledge project permits, etc. Sumner advised that the Board factor in where the construction funding would come from for this project. The County allocated \$600k to the District in 2024's County Appropriation for the Bench project. Sumner would feel more confident in revitalizing this project if the County outwardly pledged their support and proposed a plan for funding. Sumner reminded the Board that the District was denied funding twice by the Climate Resilient Funding, CRF, program for the Ledge project a few years ago. Sumner recommended that if the District were to reapply to CRF then it would be wise to focus on how the Ledge project improves the resiliency of the farms in the Black Dirt, and hope that the increased funding in this grant offering would allow the project to 'make the cut'.

Furthermore, Sumner noted that siltation control, the volume of rocks that need to be removed, and weather conditions are all project variables that need to be considered. The weather conditions specifically affect the project cost and duration of the project. Sumner proposed that the contractors bid on a rate basis rather than an open bid to take some of the unknowns out of the RFP that would be likely to result in these bids. After speaking with a trusted

contractor, Sumner estimated that under perfect conditions the Ledge project could cost \$50k, but since perfect conditions cannot be guaranteed, half a million dollars is probably a more reasonable prediction of an actual bid. Per Sumner, with this project the contractor would need to factor in sediment control, permitting, the bare excavation aspect, and disgruntled neighbors. Cheney asked Sumner whether the District has the \$3,000 to fund the initial permit renewal to which Sumner confirmed that we do. Cheney advised that the District tell Schreibeis that there are possible funding options available, but they are not guaranteed. Per Cheney, Schreibeis should ask the County Executive's office whether they are willing to assign funds to our budget for the project. Sumner noted that the District is not subject to prevailing wages where the project primarily benefits private lands. Sumner has it in writing from an Ag & Markets attorney that if the project primarily benefits the private, not public, sector then it is not subject to prevailing wages. Cheney suggested that Sumner speak once more with Schreibeis and find out the likelihood of the County Executive's office supporting the construction costs. Cheney continued that once we know the County Executive's thoughts on the Ledge project then we can get the County Legislature support. Sumner agreed with Cheney's plan of action.

Summary of the Local Cost Share Program (LCSP)

Sumner indicated in the LCSP summary that funds were increased last year. A lot of projects that were charged to the LCSP pertained to cover crops, but the District also had the Zylstra Grazing Project and the Vreeland Barnyard Project. The District started the year with \$50,000 in the LCSP. In September, the Board allocated an additional \$10,000 to the LCSP which allowed the District to approve the O'Dell Dairy Farm & Wright Family Farm cover crop requests. The LCSP's balance at the end of 2023 was \$3,000.

Sumner informed the Board that the District maintains an 'open' sign up period, which means we will accept applications whenever an inquiry is made. The District has, in the past, released an 'Announcement of Funding Opportunities'. Sumner drafted a document titled Agricultural Conservation Project Financial Assistance Inquiry which summarizes the funding opportunities that are available to farmers and how the Board handles project applications. The Board came to an agreement that publishing the assistance inquiry on the District's website, Facebook page and the FSA newsletter satisfies the need to spread awareness. The Board considers funding requests relative to funding sources (for example, AEM Tier 4, AgNPS, CRF, LCSP) to maximize the number of requests that can be satisfied. Currently, there are three projects presented for Board approval. The applicants include Rick Minkus, Hoyt Farms, and Joseph Minkus. Sumner asked the Board if they are comfortable with approving these three projects without doing an actual open request for project proposals. Sumner's suggestion for the source of funding would be to take it out of the AEM Round 18 funding. Sumner stated that there is \$200,000 available for the projects. The preliminary cost estimates are as follows; \$25,000 for Richard Minkus, \$30,000 for Joseph Minkus, and \$60,000 for Hoyt Farms. Per Sumner, the AEM Round 18 contract started 1/1/24 and the deadline to choose which projects we will fund is 5/1/24. Once the Board decides how much funding to allocate to each project, the project still needs to be submitted to the State Committee. There they will determine the projects' basic eligibility.

Sumner reported that the Hoyt Farm project addresses 80 acres of cropland and pertains to Cropland Erosion Control/Water Management. Sumner noted that both Minkus projects are beef operations that are separate from their produce sales. Richard has fifty head of cattle and Joseph has 10 head of cattle. Both Minkus projects deal with Barnyard Water Management. Joseph wants to build a covered area for his herd which accounts for a large portion of the \$30,000. Richard's proposal entails pouring concrete to build an area outside the barn for the cattle to be. This would allow Richard to utilize the manure and easily add to his manure spreader. Typically, the funding is proposed to the farmers at a 75%/25% split. Sumner is skeptical that the \$30,000 would cover 75% of his project. Sumner suggested that we could tell Joe that the District can help him, but that we would cost share it at 50% rather than 75% to demonstrate that we have somewhat addressed the issue of the cost relative to the number of animals. Sumner stressed that the applicant needs to understand that their funding could be capped at 50% which leaves the remaining expenses to them. If the Board was agreeable to that in concept, then that would still leave us \$85,000 out of the AEM Round 18 funding to allocate to other potential projects. Sumner reminded the Board that there are additional funding opportunities coming up such as CRF Round 8 and the new round of AgNPS.

Additionally, Sumner reminded the Board of the possibility that the State Committee may reject their request to have Sumner grandfathered into the new soil health policy sign off policy. If that were the case, then the Board would need local funds to account for the cover crop payments. Despite Held's efforts to jump start her Certified Crop Advisor, CCA, certification, Sumner stated that it may be another year until she has it. The District may very well have to pay someone with CCA certification in the interim.

2024-1-5 Cheney made the motion to approve funding from relative funding sources for the following projects, Richard Minkus Barnyard Water Management up to 75% of total project cost not to exceed \$25,000, Joseph Minkus Barnyard Water Management project 50% of total project cost up to \$30,000, and Hoyt Farms Cropland Erosion Control Water Management at 75% of project cost up to \$60,000, seconded by Ruszkiewicz. All in favor.

Authorization of District Manager to Sign Contracts

Sumner stated that the Board can give signatory authority to him to sign contracts and official documents, but it must be renewed annually.

2024-1-6 Cheney made the motion to authorize the Conservation District Manager to sign contracts, Constable seconded. All in favor.

Election of Officers

2024-1-7 Ruszkiewicz made the motion to keep the Board members' positions the same, Constable seconded. All in favor.

2024-1-8 The Board made a unanimous decision to re-elect Wright as chairman of the Board. All in favor.

Wright thanked the Board for reelecting him as chairman and noted that you could not ask for better members to work alongside with. Sumner confirmed that he and Wright speak consistently at least twice in between meetings.

Approval of Staff to Attend the Water Quality Symposium in March

Sumner asked the Board to approve sending King and Held to the training opportunity, the Water Quality Symposium, coming up in March. Sumner informed the Board that the Employee's Association is providing two free coupons to each district which will cover expenses for the training and the hotel. The coupon does not cover mileage or food expenses.

2024-1-9 Ruszkiewicz made the motion to approve sending King and Held to the Water Quality Symposium in March, Cheney seconded. All in favor.

Reviewal of Policies

Sumner proposed that one policy in the District's procurement policy change. This policy indicates that the Office Manager has authority to sign checks. The Office Manger prior to King possessed this ability. Sumner proposed that the policy be updated to read that 'no employee besides the Conservation District Manager has the authority to sign checks.' Thus the Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, and Conservation District Manager maintain control and have oversight over all expenditures except those for petty cash.

2024-1-10 Ruszkiewicz made the motion to change the procurement policy to state that no employee besides the Conservation District Manager has the authority to sign checks, DeBlock seconded. All in favor.

Cheney asked Sumner how often the Board reviews and approves the District's policies. Sumner noted that we have not sent the whole list of policies out yet since there was the one proposed edit. Cheney stated that he would like to approve them yearly. Sumner agreed with Cheney and will distribute the policies to the Board members prior to

February's meeting. Sumner informed the Board that Albany wants the District to have a data breach policy if the system is hacked. Cheney suggested that Sumner confer with the new IT director at the County's office about a data breach policy. Sumner reached out to Daniel Muñoz who works for the County's IT department to see if the County had a data breach policy the District can adopt.

Approval of AgNPS Rd 29 Contracts for Various Farms

Sumner reminded the Board of the new proposed farmers and their corresponding projects for the AgNPS Rd 29 funding. The farmers include Mike O'Dell, Mike Miedema, Jody Moraski, and Robert Brady. Sumner acknowledged that Held detailed the projects in her monthly report. Sumner noted that the funding was already approved by the Board in the proposal stage. The contracts are presented today to finalize the plan between the farm and the office. Sumner requested that Wright sign the four contracts.

Review 2023 Staff Leave Summaries

Sumner provided the Board with the 2023 staff leave summaries for King, Held, and himself. These documents are presented to make the Board aware of any potential liability for a payout due to accumulated annual leave buildup. Sumner noted that the auditors always request to view these summaries. Sumner already initialed King's and Held's summaries. Sumner requested that one of the Board members initial his 2023 staff leave summary after review. Sumner informed the Board of the 240 hours carryover policy for annual leave. Per Sumner, there is no limit on sick leave, but no carryover policy for personal leave.

2024 Cost of Living Adjustment

Sumner noted that the Board discussed the cost of living adjustment, COL, during the budget request to the County. Sumner reported that on top of the \$600,000 that the District asked for the special project, the District requested an 8% increase in our base appropriation. Sumner asked the Board to decide whether they want to approve a COL adjustment for 2024 and if so how much.

2024-1-11 Cheney made the Motion, Constable seconded, to enter the executive session to discuss the salary relative of a particular person. All in favor

2024-1-12 On a motion by Cheney, seconded by DeBlock, the Board came out of Executive Session at 11:20AM. All in favor.

2024-1-13 DeBlock made the motion to grant a cost of living increase of 5% to all the salaries, seconded by Cheney. All in favor.

Sumner reported that he reviewed the equipment insurance renewals, removed what is no longer relevant, and updated the list. Sumner stated that there is a question of whether the District wants the insurance premium to be at the current value or replacement value. Sumner informed the Board that renewing the policy at current value would result in a premium increase of about \$100, but if we use the replacement value it increases the premium to a little over \$300. Sumner distributed the insurance premiums to the Board members. Sumner opined that he thought the extra \$300 was worth it to have the policy cover replacement value, and the Board agreed.

Next meeting date: February 26th

ADJOURNMENT

2023-1-14 Cheney made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:30AM, seconded by Ruszkiewicz. All in favor.

Emily King, Secretary to the Board

January, 2024

Wallkill Flood Projects –

Floodplain Bench Phase 4 South – Some farm road repair has been completed since last month's report, but culvert work and road repair nearer to the river continues to be delayed due to wet conditions.

The bench has been under water at least 5 times, with duration lasting typically 4-5 days. Although this is a highly unusual year, it appears that Phase 4 bench will flood considerably more frequently and for longer duration than downstream phases. This is not necessarily a concern in terms of flood mitigation functioning, but is expected to have a significant influence on tree survival and long-term vegetation composition.

Other remaining work on Phase 4 south includes final as-built survey of the bench (hopefully by County Surveyors), final billing, and Conservation Easement work.

Floodplain Bench Phase 4 North - Corn was harvested from Phase 4 North area, allowing us to complete soil test pits. Work on Phase 4 North Construction Plan and Tree Cutting RFP are in progress.

I am trying to arrange a meeting with the Phase 4 North landowner and farmer that rents the property. Discussions with these parties will be necessary before the feasibility of proceeding with construction this year can be determined.

I met with our B&L engineer to discuss 'where to go from here' on our Wallkill/Black dirt flood mitigation efforts. My goal is to meet with the Steering Committee in February or March, then to develop a 5-year plan with prioritized projects similar to what we did in 2013, taking into consideration performance of and feedback on completed projects. B&L is going to prepare an agreement that describes the main work tasks we anticipate needing their help on, including flood mitigation and other tasks. I will present this to the Board once we receive it.

I was contacted by Rob Schreibeis from CE office who indicates that the group of growers who are working on Quaker Creek are requesting that the County (Soil and Water?) revive the Celery Avenue Ledge Lowering project. I would like to discuss this request at the Board meeting.

Carbon Farming Project – Close out materials for DeBuck Controlled Drainage and Southway Compost Facility have been submitted to Ben at NYSSWCC, we are waiting for feedback on these materials so that a reimbursement request can be submitted to the contract holder (Dutchess County SWCD).

AEM Round 17 - Two Tier 4 Implementation projects were completed (Dean Ford Streambank Stabilization and O'Dell Manure Shed construction). Two were not completed (P. Ewanciw barnyard improvements, M. Hoyt barnyard improvements). Final Report preparation is in progress – due 2/28/24. The staff time budget for Round 17 was \$179,920. Of this amount, \$89,196 was earned. For much of the Round 17 contract lifespan, the technician position was vacant.

AEM Round 18 – I would like to discuss use of the \$200,00 Tier 4 funding in this contract at the Board meeting. I anticipate that a greater portion of the Round 18 staff time budget will be earned with the technician position filled and the Office Manager performing technical duties.

CRF Round 7 – Work Plan materials for all three projects has been submitted to NYSSWCC – awaiting contracts.

Review of Local Cost Share Program

.460S	2023 District's Local Cost-Share Program			\$50,000.00	
6/19/2023	\$12,519.84	12519.84	Hollow Hill Farm, LLC/Zylstra	Grazing System	
7/17/2023	\$4,269.27	16789.11	Hollow Hill Farm, LLC/Zylstra	Grazing System	
11/30/2923	\$7,210.87		Hollow Hill Farm, LLC/Zylstra	Grazing System	
12/18/2023	\$1,540.00		Brad Meres	cover crop	
10/24/2023	\$2,550.00		Possible Farms, LLC	cover crop	
10/24/2023	\$7,000.00		Tom Owens (Hillcrest Farms)	cover crop	
10/24/2023	\$490.00		Hoyt Farms	cover crop	
10/24/2023	\$980.00		Troy Vellenga	cover crop	
11/20/2023	\$2,100.00		R&G Farms	cover crop	
11/30/2023	\$7,210.87		Hollow Hill Farm, LLC/Zylstra	Grazing System	
9/14/2023	\$3,500.00		Vreeland	barnyard project	
					remaining balance
total	\$49,370.85				\$629.15
				**	\$10,000.00
				new balance	\$10,629.15
			remaining pending cover crop projects (1/3/2024)		
			odell	amt	\$7,000.00
			wright	amt	\$630.00
			balance if odell and wright are paid		
					\$2,999.15

**at september, 2023 bd mtg, 2023 LCSP fund increased by \$10,000 to \$60,000

2024 Project Funding Applications

We maintain an 'open' sign up period, accepting applications whenever an inquiry is made. We have, in the past, released an 'Announcement of Funding Opportunities'. We consider funding requests relative to funding sources (for example, AEM Tier 4, AgNPS, CRF, LCSP) in effort to maximize the number of requests that can be satisfied.

We currently have three project assistance requests in hand. They are:

Richard Minkus, Barnyard Water Management, preliminary funding request (75% of total project cost) - \$25,000

Joseph Minkus, Barnyard Water Management, preliminary funding request (75% of total project cost) - \$30,000 (we may have an update on this budget at the Board meeting)

Hoyt Farms, Cropland Erosion Control/Water Management, preliminary funding request (75% of total project costs) - \$60,000.

R. Minkus has 50 head of beef.

J. Minkus has 10 head of beef.

The Hoyt Farm project addresses 80 acres of cropland.

I suggest to the Board that they approve these three projects and assign them to the AEM Round 18 Tier 4 Implementation funding source. That contract provides \$200,000 for projects.

\$200,000 - \$115,000 would leave \$85,000 remaining to be allocated if these three projects are approved. As I previously mentioned, I would like to investigate allocating some of the RD 18 T4 funding to forested riparian buffer maintenance (Wallkill Floodplain Benches). We have until May of this year to notify NYSSWCC of the projects we want to fund through this contract.

I will present a DRAFT 'Project Funding Request' notice for discussion at the meeting.

Other

'Sign Offs' on Soil Health Practices – Letter was sent to NYSSWCC Chairman Dale Stein per discussion at last month's meeting. No reply yet. I also shared the letter with our State employee's association, where it was discussed at a Manager's meeting. This issue will affect other practices certifications in the CRF Round 6 contract beyond just cover crop,

Emily King

January 22, 2023

To the Board of Directors,

Prior to the New Year, I worked extensively on the CRF 5 and AEM 17 grant close outs. Not long after our last meeting, I received the proof of cancelled checks from M&T Bank that I ordered earlier in December. I promptly uploaded scans of the cancelled checks to the CRF5 folder on the ShareDrive. I followed the same approach for the cancelled checks relating to O'Dell's AEM Rd 17 project.

Furthermore, I pored over the previous year's disbursements and found their corresponding invoices for not only the grants, but for Part A report as well. I started to gather the information needed to send 1099s to farmers for 2023. I prepared everyone's W-2 forms and confirmed with a fellow office manager what sections needed to be filled out. I distributed the completed W-2 forms to the staff and mailed copies to O'Dell and DeGroodt.

I prepared the Plan of Work for Shuback Farms as part of the CRF 7 grant requirements. Once I received approval from Kevin and Ben Luskin, I uploaded them for reviewal on Share Point. Additionally, I uploaded the CRIS & SHPO documents needed for the Shuback Farms project to SharePoint. In addition to the monthly NYS Income Tax and FIT/FICA payments, I also prepared the 4th Quarter state and federal tax reports. Once Kevin reviewed them, I submitted them well before their deadlines.

Luckily, I was able to balance December's checkbook on the first try once again. Our time spent reconciling the disbursements and receipts has reduced significantly. I attribute this to my new bookkeeping practice and Kevin's proofreading.

In preparation for the New Year, I updated the activity codes, time sheets, and payroll sheets for all of 2024 so that it is readily available for the staff. I intend on consolidating files not only on the ShareDrive, but also those in the filing cabinets. I want to ensure that folders are labeled clearly and there is a discussion amongst staff regarding any proposed changes.

Additionally, I worked at length with Kevin Sumner on the 2023 Treasurer's Report. I made sure to create workbooks for every task so that I can refer to them and my detailed notes for future submissions/projects.

For several days, I spoke with various employees from Employee Benefits, NYSHIP, and Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield to obtain information on behalf of the staff. Thankfully, a representative from NYSHIP provided me with the correct information regarding Sue Cabrera's insurance premium rates and Kevin's Medicare Part B. My research showed that Kevin does not need to be enrolled in Medicare Part B since NYSHIP is his primary insurance. I am waiting to find out what the process is to suspend Kevin's Medicare Part B and will assist where I can. This exchange occurred via email so we will have documented proof should any troubles arise in the future.

Lastly, I filled out forms to register myself as a Health Benefits Administrator, HBA, and Kevin as a Data Access Officer, DAO, to work within the New York Benefits Eligibility and Accounting System. By immersing myself more into the NYSHIP program and other state agencies, I feel more confident now to be an HBA for the office. I took down the names and contact information of the helpful representatives I spoke with for future use. As always, please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns. Thank you for your time.

OCSWCD Technician Update

1/19/2023

Since the last board meeting, the office has been relatively quiet. While we are still looking/fighting the CCA situation, I have been putting some effort into studying for the tests associated with becoming a certified crop advisor during some of the downtime.

We've been taking soil group worksheet requests and churning those out quickly, with Kevin working mostly on the maps while I fill everything out on the worksheets. I am learning to navigate the county parcel data sites and amend soil classifications in regard to flood management.

We've been continuing work on closing out the grants that ended in 2023 and all the bean counting associated with those tasks. Furthermore, we have been working on the work plans and records keeping associated with the new rounds of grants coming into fruition. Below you will find updates on our state-funded grants that I have put the majority of my time into.

CRF Update:

Round 6: We finally laid eyes on Jason Touw's cover crop, which happens to be coming in well, so he is the last of the CRF6 group to receive payment for his 2023 cover crop. To recap:

- Alex Kocot: 118ac: \$8,260.00
 - Phil Johnson: 145ac: \$10,150.00
 - *Robert Stap: Did not plant*
 - Russell Smiley: 18ac: \$1,260.00
 - Jason Touw: 24ac: \$1,680.00
 - *Keith Stewart: Not covered*
 - *Matt Southway: Not covered*
- Grand(t) total for **2023 COVER CROP: \$21,350**

Soil Carbon Amendment (compost application) Payout:

- Keith Stewart: \$54.30

Grand(t) TOTAL PAYMENT: \$21,404.30

Round 7: Plans of work for our 3 farmers in Climate Resilient Farming Round 7 grant have been submitted. To recap, farmers Crist, Shuback, and Wright are involved in this grant. All projects related to Round 7 are being used for or relating to irrigation water management systems with expected costs between \$60,000-\$90,000.



Hudson Valley Carbon Farming Project

Drafts of closeout materials have been submitted to Ben Luskin for review for farmers DeBuck (controlled drainage -- Mary) and Southway.(manure/compost -- Kevin). Once those are approved, we will submit final closeout materials for these farmers.

Ag Non Point Source Update:

Round 29: All farmers have signed their LO/SWCD agreements and now require signatures from a board representative. As you'll see, the farmers involved with this grant are Mike Miedema, Jody Moraski, Robert Brady, and Mikey O'Dell. Cost breakdowns are included with their contracts.

AEM Update:

Round 17: The majority of materials have been gathered to close this grant out. We are in good shape to submit these before the deadline of Feb 29th.

Round 18: Just to restate the fact, we did receive an award letter back in November, attached. The total awarded to the district is: \$379,930.00. I have been working to update information within farmer files and provide the necessary paperwork for the potential tier 4 projects through AEM Round 18.



Soil and Water Conservation Committee

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

RICHARD A. BALL
Commissioner

DALE STEIN
Committee Chair

November 6, 2023

Mr. Kevin Sumner, District Manager
Orange County SWCD
225 Dolson Ave, Suite 103
Middletown, NY 10940

Dear Mr. Sumner:

On behalf of the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee, I am pleased to inform you that the Committee has awarded the Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District funding for their AEM Base Program Round 18 Action Plan in the amount of \$379,930.00.

This represents a significant opportunity for Districts to further partner with farmers toward the common goals of environmental conservation and farm viability according to local AEM Strategic Plans. The technical assistance, partnership/outreach, and implementation projects supported by the AEM Base Program will continue to put boots and projects on the ground for water quality, air quality, soil health, carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas mitigation, and farm resiliency.

Across the State, 53 Districts are now participating in the AEM Base Program, amounting to over \$19 million in support for their AEM Round 18 Action Plans. This total will fund over \$9.6 million in technical assistance with farmers and \$9.7 million for Tier 4 Cost-Share Implementation Track projects over the next two years. The contract period for Round 18 of the AEM Base Program starts on January 1, 2024, and runs through December 31, 2025.

Best wishes as you continue your progress with Agricultural Environmental Management.

Sincerely,

Dale Stein
Chairperson

cc: Commissioner Richard Ball
Deputy Commissioner Elizabeth Wolters
Michael Latham
Brian Steinmuller
Bethany Bzduch