**MINUTES**

**ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**February 16, 2021**

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:04 AM. Directors J. Wright, P. Ruszkiewicz, K. Stegenga, P. DeBlock and G. Constable along with K. Sumner, T. Ferry and C. DeGroodt (SWCD) and A. Armlin-Sorgen (NRCS) and E. Schellenberg (CCE) joined remotely.

**2021-2-1 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to approve January’s Board Meeting Minutes as amended. All in favor.**

**ACTIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS –** There were no actions between meetings other than paying the District’s credit card bill which is listed on the bills to be paid.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

* The bank statements and collateral agreements are available for review at the District office.
* The District received the 2021 New York Association of Conservation Districts Annual Invoice for the amount of $1,500.00. Discussion followed. **2021-2-2 Wright made the Motion, Ruszkiewicz seconded, to Table the NYACD annual invoice. All in favor.**
* The New York Association of Conservation Districts Legislative Day booklet was discussed and is available for review at the office.
* The District received official notifications of John Wright’s notice of re-appointment on the SWCD Board and Kathy Stegenga’s notice of appointment on the SWCD Board from the Orange County Legislature.

**FINANCIAL REPORTS –** Sumner mentioned that the District received a check from the County of Orange covering the first two quarters of the District’s 2021 appropriation.

Sumner noted that under the “Dedicated Fund Summary”, as was decided at a prior Board Meeting, we applied the entire 15% reduction in our County appropriation to the amount that we normally earmark for the Wallkill Flood Project. Each time we get a payment from the County, we will assign the appropriate amount to the Wallkill Flood Project.

There was a brief Board discussion on “Receivables”. There are a few outstanding receivables for our Performance Measures, the Carbon Farming Project and one delinquent no-till user. This particular no-till user was mailed a “Request for a Fee Waiver” months ago and has not signed it and sent it back to us yet. The Board suggested sending him a reminder that if he does not sign it and send it back, he is responsible to pay the bill in full and will also have to pre-pay next year if he wants to use the equipment again.

**2021-2-3 Wright made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to file January’s Financial Report for audit review. All in favor.**

**BILLS FOR BOARD APPROVAL** – Sumner reviewed the bills for approval with the Board.

**2021-2-4 DeBlock made the Motion, Ruszkiewicz seconded, to accept the Bills to be Paid. All in favor.**

At last month’s Board Meeting the Board approved purchasing two new computers for Sumner and Ferry up to amount of $1,000/each. The District ended up purchasing three new laptops for $1,658.00. A copy of the bill was sent to the Board prior to the meeting.

**Grant Update Reports** – There was not a lot of activity to report.

**STAFF REPORTS**

Written staff reports were emailed to Board Members prior to the Meeting for review.

**C. DeGroodt (SWCD) –** DeGroodt’s staff report was attached to the Draft Minutes. DeGroodt and Sumner met with two IT companies at the office to see what the cost would be to update our computer equipment and allow us to have remote access to a server.

**T. Ferry (SWCD)** – Ferry’s staff report was attached to the Draft Minutes. Ferry has been taking training webinars for the Certified Crop Advisor exam, which he took last Wednesday. Results are pending.

Soil group worksheets have been coming in.

The District received a letter of no impact for the Phase 4 Bench project from the State Office of Historical Preservation.

Ferry has been working on the AEM Round 16 projects and we will hopefully get the 65% advances submitted soon. He is also working on getting the money switched over from two landowners that dropped out to the two new landowners.

Ferry mentioned that the District was able to get new ArcGIS licenses thanks to NRCS. ArcGIS is our mapping software that allows us to do a lot of the work here making soil maps for the soil group worksheets, etc.

**K. Sumner SWCD)** – Sumner attended the Office of the NYS Comptroller webinar. The District will continue with the way we do the Treasurer’s Report with no changes.

Sumner discussed computer upgrades in more detail. Sumner estimates that upgrades are going to end up costing the District less than $2,000.00. The IT person the District met with at the office last Saturday determined that the server that we have is not going to be able to work for remote access, so we're going to have to purchase a new server which will probably cost approximately $1,000.00, and also a new router and then a few hours of his time. Afterwards, we should have all our hardware updated to current standards.

**Office Procedures** – The District is still working on a rotation, where one out of the three employees will work from home every work day as an effort to ensure that reasonable precautions are being followed. Sumner is hopeful that there'll be continued improvements in this situation to where we could consider going back to the regular office staffing sometime within the next month or so.

**INTERAGENCY REPORTS**

**Armlin-Sorgen (NRCS) -** NRCS has been working on doing the assessments and ranking for the 2021 EQIP applications.

Staff had a training last week on the new highly erodible land tool that they have for GIS. Armlin-Sorgen is learning how to use ArcPro, which is a combination of Arcmap, Arcglobal and another Arc System. They are getting a new system and need a determination tool to do offsite wetland determinations for the Food Security Act.

**E. Schellenberg (CCE) -** Schellenberg mentioned that heis on an Open Spaces and Land Use committee withKate Schmidt. Schmidt asked Schellenberg to ask the District if she could get statewide Soil and Water District support for a new Community Preservation bill that’s being proposed to the New York State Senate. Senator Skoufis did not support an older version of this bill in the past. Sumner mentioned that the State Association of Conservation Districts has a fall meeting, and that's the time when someone could present a Resolution. Discussion followed. Sumner said that if Orange County wanted to put forth a Resolution proposal to the State Association, we could do that. He is not really sure what the most effective way would be to address this and thinks that if you're going to put a bill through it should be for all communities because it would be inefficient to do one at a time.

CCE is trying to pivot a lot of their programs to online. Schellenberg just finished up four out of five online Greenhouse School sessions. He is teaching a series of forestry sessions that are coming up soon.

CCE has been moving ahead with the rainwater harvesting system and may be able to break ground and have the system installed at the park this coming spring.

**P. DeBlock (FSA) -**  The CFAP 3 has been put on hold. She mentioned that it had opened up to sod.

Quality Loss Adjustment (QLA) update – DeBlock said the only quality loss year they can include is from year 2018. And that disaster declaration was for excess moisture for most of the growing season in 2018. So if someone had a quality loss that they can prove, some sort of test/verifiable third party test done on whatever commodity you had within 30 days of harvest, you could apply for this. There is only a certain amount of money in QLA that will get divided by however many applications they have.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**AEM Round 16** – The District assigned this project funding to some Moodna watershed farms, and two of those farms have withdrawn due to issues on the farm. Since they voluntarily relinquished their funding, Travis and Sumner are in the process of switching that funding over to two other farms -Brian Browne in Warwick and Freedom Hill Farm in Mount Hope. The District is poised to officially make that change once the Board approves the Resolution that's on the agenda today. Sumner sent the Board a ranking document for review prior to today’s meeting so they knew that we developed a procedure to compare the farms based on water quality benefits, and that procedure reinforces our choice of those two farms to make the substitution.

**2021-2-5 Wright made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to accept the AEM Round 16 Resolution. All in favor.**

Sumner told the Board that if Ferry passes the Certified Crop Advisor exam then that will make us eligible for an additional $20,000.00 a year in the AEM contract. That extra money could mean giving Ron O’Dell more hours to help us with other projects besides just the no-till equipment, or it could potentially involve hiring another part time person.

**Carbon Farming Project –** The District is waiting for reimbursement from Dutchess County SWCD. Discussion followed.

**Wallkill Flood Project –** Things are moving along with Phase 4. The archaeology report has been completed and accepted by SHPO. And as reflected by the last two bills we got from B&L, they are working on their part of it, including the endangered species report, wetland report and the draft project construction plan. Ferry and Sumner are jumping in wherever they can to fill in and get things done. The District’s goal is to be prepared to ask for a pre-application meeting with DEC in the April/May timeframe. Hopefully that will give us enough time to work through the permit process and be prepared to cut trees in the fall of this year in preparation for construction work in 2022. This is all dependent on the required funding falling into place.

**Climate Resilient Farming Grant** – The District is hopeful to get notice regarding our round five climate resilient farming grants proposal, which was designed to support the Phase 4 project.

**Phase 3, Area 2 Project –**  We will be using the SAM grant money for Phase 3, Area 2 if it comes in this summer. Sumner wanted to make the Board aware that Green Farmland contacted Sumner and asked about getting soil from this project. Sumner reminded the Board that the plan that was developed for this phase of the project, the cheapest and most practical means of dealing with the soil from this project, was going to be to build a temporary crossing on Pochuck Creek and then take the soil to farmland along Iris Road. The good material would go on land owned by Pine Island Turf Nursery, and we identified two or three places that we could go with the clay soil without having to build any new roads, or have dump trucks going out on public roadways. Sumner believes that Green Farmland thinks that since a lot of the project is on their land, that they're entitled to the soil. So Sumner suggested to them that they submit a proposal to us on exactly how much of the soil they want and where they would want it put. So far, they haven't submitted a proposal. Sumner doesn’t know if we're legally obligated in any way. Although the material is on land that they own, most of it is within an existing flood control easement, which places extensive authority with DEC on doing any work there required for flood mitigation.

**Phase 3, Area 1 Tree Planting Project** – The excavation and herbaceous plantings were completed last fall, but we still have to complete the tree planting component. As discussed last month, we have a low bid in-hand for completing that work in the amount of just over $50,000.00. We have enough in our leftover 2020 Performance Measures Part C Dedicated Fund to cover that. The contractor is going to want to start ordering trees soon because we're hoping to be able to get the plantings done in April. Sumner asked for Board approval to enter into a contract with Pine Island Turf Nursery for that amount of money. At which point, Pine Island Turf Nursery would actually hire and pay the contractor and we would reimburse them.

**2021-2-6 Ruszkiewicz made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to enter into a contract with Pine Island Turf Nursery in the amount of $50,000.00 for the Wallkill Flood Project/Phase 3, Area 1 Tree Planting project. All in favor.**

Sumner gave the Board an update on the Chester Agricultural Center, the nonprofit that purchased alot of the Chester muck lands. They’ve requested over forty soil group worksheets to try and get the agricultural assessment on their land. Unfortunately, they are a nonprofit that owns the land and they rent it to different farmers. The ag assessment program requires that if you're renting your land to someone else, that they have to independently qualify on land that they own. So even though the intent is there, and this land is all being used for agriculture, they're kind of constrained by the wording in the laws. It's an unfortunate situation because they're trying to do a good thing there, making land and shared services and equipment available to new farmers. A complicating factor there for determining soil class for agricultural assessment is the flood plant that's not performing as it was originally intended. There are three pumps there, and one of them is out of commission, another on its last legs. So that complicates trying to determine what the level of flood protection and drainage that land has. The County DPW has been trying to look for funding sources to upgrade the plant and Sumner thinks they have some preliminary design ideas that they want to put in place to make the plant up to date and more efficient. Sumner has been spending a fair amount of time trying to sort those issues out. And we'll get something to them before the March 1 deadline.

**NEW BUSINESS** – No new business.

The next **MEETING** is scheduled for **Monday, March 15 at 9:00 AM.**

**2021-2-7 The meeting was Adjourned at 10:12 AM on a Motion by DeBlock, seconded by Wright. All in favor.**

Minutes Prepared By:

Christine DeGroodt, Secretary to the Board