

**MINUTES**  
**ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
**January 19, 2021**

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:03 AM. Directors J. Wright, P. Ruskiewicz, G. Constable and P. DeBlock along with K. Sumner, T. Ferry and C. DeGrootd (SWCD) joined remotely.

**2021-1-1 DeBlock made the Motion, Ruskiewicz seconded, to approve December's Board Meeting Minutes as written. 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 Wright's notice of re-appointment from the Orange County Legislature. Ruskiewicz will confirm this with the County as well as confirm a second Legislator appointment.
- The District was copied on a letter to the Orange County legislative clerk regarding the ag district update process.

**FINANCIAL REPORTS** – By the end of 2020 the District used all of the unobligated funds and a little over \$6,000.00 was used out of the Contingency Fund.

**BILLS FOR BOARD APPROVAL** – DeBlock asked why the District's credit card bill was so high. Sumner replied that some of the items on the bill were supplies that the District purchased for Pine Island Turf Nursery for the Carbon Farming project and that we'll be getting reimbursed for most of that.

**2021-1-2 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to accept the Bills to be Paid. All in favor.**

There was a brief discussion regarding a new computer for Sumner, the cost of which would be taken from the District's Equipment Replacement Fund.

**2021-1-3 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to approve spending up to \$1,000.00 on a new laptop for Sumner. All in favor**

Ferry mentioned to the Board that his laptop computer is no longer working and may need to be replaced. Discussion followed. **2021-1-4 DeBlock made the Motion, Constable seconded, to approve spending up to \$1,000.00 on a new laptop for Ferry. All in favor.**

**Grant Update Reports** – Sumner told the Board that a lot of the District's grants are in a holding pattern because of the Covid situation. However, there are a couple of projects that are moving forward.

**AEM Round 16** - The District is moving forward on the one proposed change that the Board approved last month since Windfall Farm signed the letter relinquishing their funds. We're in the process of making the changes with our State Committee to get Brian Brown in Warwick substituted and the design process is moving forward quickly. He's retained an engineer and is getting estimates from pole barn contractors. We are waiting on a commitment from Udderly Fresh Farm in Washingtonville to see if they want to move forward. Ferry reached out to them but did not hear back. We sent them a letter and gave them until last Friday to either commit to the project or relinquish the funds and as far as we know, that letter did not come back. It was suggested that the District send another letter to Udderly Fresh Farms via certified mail. Revisions are being made to the first draft design that Sumner sent to Edgewick goat farm in Cornwall. Sumner said that an engineer will be needed on this project.

**STAFF REPORTS**

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

**C. DeGroot (SWCD)** – DeGroot's staff report was attached to the Draft Minutes. DeGroot mentioned that she is looking into getting price quotes from IT companies so that the District staff will have remote access to the server if working from home.

DeGroot is interested in several of the classes being offered virtually in March at the Water Quality Symposium. Classes are \$10 each.

**2021-1-5 Wright made the Motion, Ruszkiewicz seconded, to approve DeGroot attending the virtual classes offered at the Water Quality Symposium in March 2021. All in favor.**

Sumner added that DeGroot has been working on the District's 2020 Treasurer's Report and it will require the Treasurer's signature.

**Office Procedures** – The USDA Service Center is back to the most recently put in place, statewide USDA policy where NRCS is allowed to have one employee in the office at a time and FSA is allowed to have two. They didn't specify what they wanted Soil and Water to do other than to minimize our time in the office. The District is now on a rotation, where one out of the three employees will work from home every workday as an effort to ensure that reasonable precautions are being followed.

Sumner was on a statewide managers' call last Thursday and Covid Leave was discussed. He said the consensus was that in New York, you're pretty much required to provide two weeks sick leave the first time somebody has a Covid related absence from the office and that they don't have to charge it to their leave balance. Discussion followed.

The District is required to prepare an Emergency Management Plan for the office. It encompasses Covid, but it's also supposed to encompass other potential emergency situations. At some point we will require Board approval on our plan.

The District looked into whether or not we would qualify and get assistance from the Payroll Protection Program. We found out that we are not eligible because there is a provision in state law that says that Soil and Water Districts are not allowed to borrow money since technically that program is a loan.

**T. Ferry (SWCD)** – Other than what was emailed prior to the Board Meeting, Ferry mentioned he was also interested in taking courses at the Water Quality Symposium.

Sumner said that Ferry noted on his report that Ferry is working on becoming a Certified Crop Advisor, which is something that's been discussed for a while. Since there are a lot of webinars and test preparation classes over the next couple of months, Sumner and Ferry decided to develop a more aggressive schedule for Ferry.

## **INTERAGENCY REPORTS**

**P. DeBlock (FSA)** - DeBlock mentioned that some of the black dirt farmers have called the FSA office regarding a quality loss program. She said that Amanda from her office is going to look more into it. If Orange County was designated a disaster county for one reason or another, then possibly people can apply for quality loss on some of their crops.

There may be a CFAP 3 coming out to correct some of the changes from the CFAP 1 and 2. 1) You're now eligible if you are a contract grower for chickens and pigs. 2) For CFAP 2 they are now including sod. 3) If you had crop insurance, something about the yields, you may be able to get more money on that.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

**Phase 3 Bench Project** – The project area that was completed in October was flooded for a second time. Our goal is to complete the tree planting portion of the Phase 3 Area 1 project this spring – ideally in April if conditions permit.

The cost for the Area 1 bench tree planting component from CEC Excavating, who was the low bidder on the project last year, is \$32,000.00. The lower river bank planting component cost was \$18,430.00. The total for these two items is \$50,430.00. The current balance of our 2020 'Part C' dedicated fund is \$54,275.00. We also received our 2021 'Part B' award in the amount of \$6,000.000. Other new revenues may become available to support this work, such as 2021 Part C and the portion of our County appropriation budgeted for Walkill Flood work, but these are not 'in hand' yet. The contractor needs to give the nursery about 6 weeks notice to secure the plant materials, so Sumner will be asking the Board to make a decision on contracting for the Phase 3 Area 1 planting work at the February Board meeting. We are now in the last phase of the permitted work. So one would assume that the DEC would not approve us proceeding into with phase four, until all the tree planting was done from phase three. If that goes forward, potentially, we could be in a position to cut trees this fall and start constructing phase four in 2022.

**SAM Grant** –There is still no firm information on when to expect the award/contract. We have been in contact with Senator Martuccci's office to ask for assistance in determining the status of the award. Because the Phase 3 Area 2 project is expected to take as much as 3-4 months to complete, it will challenge our ability to complete this project in 2021 if we don't have some kind of firm schedule on the SAM award soon. The closer we get to summer without a commitment, the more likely that the low bid contractor will need to line up other work.

**Ag NPS Grant Round 26** – The ranked list was approved by the State Committee in early 2020 but we do not have any updates.

Sumner said that he will be providing an update to the Ag Board at their next meeting. The flood work that we're doing is one of the priority projects in the county's updated farmland protection plan. He prepared a written report with photographs and distributed it last week to the Ag & Farmland Protection Board mailing list.

The District completed the Pine Island Turf Nursery control drainage project last year. The only thing left to do there is to backfill the trench where the main collector pipe is. All of the laterals are in and everything is hooked up, including the water control structure. It was a cold, snowy day when that work was done. So we decided to wait until conditions were a little better to backfill the trench. But Sumner was very pleased that it was completed and the owner seems excited about experimenting with this system and using it more in the future if he likes it.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Election of Officers - 2021-1-6 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to retain John Wright as Chairman/Assistant Treasurer. All in favor.**

**2021-1-7 Wright made the Motion, Constable seconded, to retain Paula DeBlock as Treasurer and to nominate DeBlock as Vice-Chairwoman. All in favor.**

**Review of Office Policies** – No changes from year 2020.

**Leave Summaries** - The Board reviewed the leave summaries as presented in the meeting materials.

The next **MEETING** is scheduled for **Tuesday, February 16 at 9:00 AM.**

**2021-1-8 The meeting was Adjourned at 10:19 AM on a Motion by Ruskiewicz, seconded by Constable. All in favor.**

Minutes Prepared By:

Christine DeGroot, Secretary to the Board