

**MINUTES**  
**ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
**June 15, 2020**

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:00 AM. Directors J. Wright and P. Ruskiewicz joined remotely, along with A. Armlin-Sorgen (NRCS), H. Persoon (FSA), K. Edelman-Reyes (OC Law Dept.) and E. Schellenberg (CCE). Director P. DeBlock along with K. Sumner, T. Ferry and C. DeGrootd (OCSWCD) were present at the office.

**2020-6-1 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to approve May's Board Meeting Minutes as written. All in favor.**

**ACTIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS** – None.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

- The bank statements and collateral agreements are available for review at the District office.
- Roland O'Dell's provisional appointment was received from the Orange County Human Resources Department.
- The District received an update from the New York Association of Conservation Districts.
- The District Directors sent a letter to County of Orange Executive Steve Neuhaus requesting that the County expedite our 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter appropriation.

**FINANCIAL REPORTS** – were reviewed. The Dedicated Fund Summary was briefly discussed. The Unobligated balance is lower than usual. The state is not processing payments right now and we have no information when they may start up again, and the County has our appropriation on hold.

**BILLS FOR BOARD APPROVAL** – The list of bills was reviewed by the Board. Number three on the list is a bill from Hudson River Tractor for \$276 44. The District received an updated bill from them this morning with a couple more parts on it. So the amount is revised to \$302 90. Number two on the bills to be paid is Selective, the District's insurance company, in the amount of \$4,672.63. The District called Selective to see if we could split this into two payments and are waiting to hear back.

**2020-6-2 DeBlock made the Motion, Ruskiewicz seconded, to pay bills including the increase to the Hudson River Tractor Bill. All in favor.**

**Grant Update Reports** – There has been no activity to report on the ag grants.

**STAFF REPORTS**

Written staff reports were presented for Board review. Sumner mentioned that Ferry continues to coordinate with Ron O'Dell on the no-till program. The program has always been challenging in terms of keeping the equipment moving, maintained and repaired and that seems to have been even more of an issue this year. So having Ron on staff, moving and staying on top of all those issues with the equipment has really been a benefit. Discussion followed on having R. O'Dell modify the no till planters by attaching some brackets on the main frame that would allow us to add tractor weights to weight down the planter when the ground gets hard or you have a lot of surface trash or both. The cost per planter is estimated at \$300.00.

**2020-6-3 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to have Ron O'Dell attach some brackets to the no-till planters that would allow us to add tractor weights to weight down the planters at an estimated cost of \$300.00 per planter. All in favor.**

**K. Sumner (SWCD)** - Green Farmland wanted to know if they could postpone the start date of the project until September so that they could plant their field. Sumner reminded them that they had already signed an agreement to rent that area to us this year, and that they were welcome to submit a request for payment on that rental fee. They did not submit such a request, but they did ask Sumner to stake the limits of the soil receiving area in the field, which he did. Subsequently, he noticed that they worked up the field beyond the limits of where he had put in the flags. He does not know whether or not they've planted that area yet, but he is keeping his eye on it. And if they do plant into the area where we were supposed to spread soil, then we are going have to have a discussion with them. Sumner had spoken recently to County surveyor Tom Barry about helping with

surveying needs for the phase three project and Tom thought they'd be able to. Tom called Sumner and said that they could actually go out and do the survey right away. Sumner met with them on Friday, and he believes they're out there surveying today. Everyone agreed it would have been nice if they could have surveyed months ago, right after the tree clearing was done, when there was no ground vegetation. Now it's not going to be ideal conditions for surveying. Sumner said that they're going to focus on the area where we expect to do construction this year.

The Ag NPS Grant Round 26 Proposal which has 12 farms included in it, was submitted last Thursday. The District lobbied for support letters on this one. Many agencies signed on in support of the proposal, but it was disappointing to see that there was a number of our partners who didn't sign. It gives the District an opportunity to see who's willing to give us some support so that we can have a better chance of getting funding for our county farms.

## **INTERAGENCY REPORTS**

**K. Edelman-Reyes (OC Law)** - Reyes discussed the cuts to County agencies. Everything depends on how quickly things in the County can be re-opened ex: sales tax revenues and tourism. The faster the County can get to phase four, and the more broad phase four looks, the better we'll be. Things like Lego Land has been pushed to 2021 and Woodbury Commons has been closed since the middle of March. Edelman-Reyes added that the District takes a very small amount of money from the County budget and in return does an incredible amount of work and is incredibly efficient with the money that is granted.

**E. Schellenberg (CCE)** - A lot of the same conundrums and uncertainties apply to CCE as well. Most of CCE's traditional in-classroom style programming is on-hold indefinitely. They had to cancel the remaining class work for this semester for the storm water series and had to process all the refunds for it. Schellenberg mentioned he is busy working on research projects, one of which is the gas sampling project he did with Ethan Grundberg last year. He said that CCE received a generous grant and work has started.

Schellenberg is part of the Empire State pollen native pollinator survey which he is doing at the park and two other sites, basically looking at soil types and their impact on vegetation and thereby their impact on pollinator support. They are also looking at options via zoom to hold the stormwater classes, to maybe split them up into two to three sessions over the course of a couple days.

The rain water harvesting system was briefly discussed. CCE had a WAHA made by Water Harvesting Solutions (WHS) donated to them. WHS, among other things, makes rainwater harvesting cisterns. They're out of bio blocks and have a processing skid that basically takes in the rainwater off of their barn roof and puts it through UV light, processes it, filters it and then puts it into an underground buried cistern. They applied for and won a grant for green infrastructure practices and soon are going to move the system to the park. He said that this system will supply a good chunk of all of their water needs such as flushing water in the bathrooms, livestock watering and grounds keeping.

**Armlin-Sorgen NRCS** – NRCS finished up ranking the 2020 EQIP and they're in for pre-approval. They are currently taking applications for the 2021 EQIP. Armlin-Sorgen mentioned that they are also taking applications until June 26<sup>th</sup> for the urban initiative through AMA.

**H. Persoon (FSA)** - FSA has been busy working with producers remotely, via phone, internet and in person either on farm visits or remotely outside their office. Paula and Amanda been busy with the traditional acreage reporting this year, they've almost completed the onions and have been working on the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. Enrollments started on March 26<sup>th</sup> and run until August 28<sup>th</sup>. To date, their office has dispersed over \$476,000.00 to producers, the majority has gone to dairy and livestock, some to vegetable farms. This reflects about 80% of the total eligible monies that were allocated for this program to our nation's producers. Persoon mentioned that F. Barber has publicized this program through two webinars that he's conducted, as well as participated in as a guest on Maire Ullrich's farm talk radio show within the first week of the program's rollout. FSA offices statewide in some areas are allowing more staff to work in the office under limited conditions. Middletown FSA is still going to be operating the same for a while yet. Persoon said that with phase two being rolled out and more restaurants being opened up, they are starting to see an uptick in beef prices and a rebound from dairy.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

Wallkill Flood Project Phase 3, Area 1 Update – Two contracts, one between Pine Island Turf Nursery and the SWCD that will allow for the reimbursement of Pine Island Turf Nursery after they pay the contractor, and a second contract between Pine Island Turf Nursery and the contractor were sent to Pine Island Turf Nursery. They were signed and sent back. Discussion followed on whether or not to move forward with the construction contract. It was decided that since the County said they were going to release the District's 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter appropriation, the Board moved to proceed.

**2020-6-4 DeBlock made the Motion, Ruskiewicz seconded, to proceed with the Phase 3 Area 1 Project and to enter into the contract with Pine Island Turf Nursery. All in favor.**

**NYS Retirement Update** - Forms were sent to New York State Retirement. We have confirmation that they received them. DeGroot is pursuing setting up her simple employee plan.

**Carbon Farming Project Update** – Last Monday's meeting was cancelled. There's been no movement on signing the contract between Dutchess Soil & Water and New York State so the project is in a full holding pattern.

**District Board Appointments** – The District has no new information with regard to Board appointments from last month. DeBlock mentioned that she had received an email from Harry Porr saying that he would discuss issues regarding the Farm Bureau appointment with Steve Neuhaus and that they would not be making any decision about that Farm Bureau spot until everything is straightened out. No action taken.

**Office Procedures** – SWCD received information from USDA about their office reopening plan that they are beginning to implement. Some of the upstate counties are ahead of us and have already entered into what USDA is calling their phase one. They're phasing plan is very slow and conservative and it's going to be a long time before they're going to be back to allowing unscheduled public visits to offices. The Orange County Field Office has not been approved for this phase one yet. The District will continue to do its best to understand USDA's requirements and guidance and comply with them and follow the lead of the other USDA agency staff.

**Tire Project Update** – The District received a reimbursement check in the amount of \$500.00 that was owed to us by Casings. Ochs Orchard still has some tires that need to be removed but the District and the owner of Ochs are unwilling to work any further with Casings. Ochs has been exploring some other options for tire removal and was told that if he submits a proposal to the District it would be discussed with the Directors, as the District had previously offered him a 50/50 cost-share on the removal.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Proposed 2021 Budget** – Sumner reviewed the proposed 2021 budget with the Directors. The Professional Services line was decreased from \$52,000 in the adopted 2020 budget down to \$25,000 in the 2021 budget. Money that would have gone for no-till equipment repair and maintenance is now going to be covered as a staff salary. So that \$25,000 would reflect hired professional services, engineers, to sign off on plans that we do or to do designs that are that are beyond our capability. There is no increase requested for staff salary for 2021.

**2020-6-5 Wright made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to adopt the proposed 2021 budget. All in favor.**

The next **MEETING** is scheduled for **Monday, July 20, 2020 at 9:00 AM.**

**2020-6-6 The Meeting adjourns at 10:20 AM on a Motion by Wright, seconded by DeBlock. All in favor.**

Minutes Prepared By:

Christine DeGroot, Secretary to the Board

### **C. DeGroot Board Meeting**

#### **Activities May 15, 2020 – June 11, 2020**

- We have currently earned \$239 cash awards with the new credit cards.
- Typed last month's Board Meeting transcript. We used an online transcription service called Otter (with assistance from the District Manager of Hamilton County SWCD). Last month's minutes went over what the free service allows (40 minutes of transcription), so we upgraded to the premium service which is \$9.99/month and allows up to 4 hours of transcription. This was paid for on the District's rewards credit card and will be reflected on next month's credit card statement. This service can be cancelled once we start meeting in person again.
- I finished the District's 2019 Annual Report that highlighted some of the projects completed by the District in 2019. This report was sent out to the media, OC Legislators, Town Clerks, State Office, Town Supervisors, posted on facebook and our website. Both Cornell Coop. Ext. and the County of Orange sent it out via their email lists for us.
- The notarized NYS Retirement paperwork was sent in, certified mail and we have confirmation it was received.
- DeGroot's SEP plan paperwork was finished, sent in and confirmed received.
- Looked into where the AEM Year 15 Claim for Payment for \$25,300 and the AEM Year 16 CFP for \$53,600 were at. I was told although both were on April's list to be paid to us, they were told not to process any payments yet.
- Worked on the District Workload Measures page for the County.
- Assisted with the District's 2021 proposed budget paperwork.

## June Activity Summary for TF

- Working on AEM plans, doing Tier 2 visits with farms that are comfortable doing them. Working on some Tier 3A plans as well.
- Spent time working on the Round 26 proposal, compiling documents/merging PDFs to prepare to upload the proposal.
- Spent a few days pulling Japanese Knotweed at our W. Main trees for tribs site. Streambank, along the road and the top of the slope is clear for the time being. Farther away from the stream could use pulled still.
- Continuing to coordinate with Ron on no-till moves and repairs as they come up.
  - Had a few repairs/issues come up with the corn planters.

## June, 2020 Board Meeting Report

### Old Business

- a) **Walkill Flood Control Projects Update** - Bench Phase 3 proposals were discussed at May meeting. As discussed, CEC Excavating was notified that they were the low bidder. After discussion with the owner, I developed a draft contract between CEC and the farm sponsor – Pine Island Turf Nursery. CEC has reviewed the draft and finds it acceptable. I have not supplied the draft to PITN yet, I decided to wait until we are more confident that funding will permit doing the project this year. I did apprise them of the proposal results. As discussed also last month, the contract is currently structured to only complete Area 1 and to exclude the tree planting component. I negotiated several additional changes with CEC based on the separation of the two areas. For example, CEC proposed moving the logs from both areas to take better advantage of hiring in a skidder, and I agreed that this made sense.

CEC is very anxious to firm up the contract, since he has other job offers for the summer and does not want to lose them if we are unable to commit to funding the project.

It is my recommendation to the Board that we not commit to the contract until we have better assurance of receipt of two funding sources – the County appropriation and NYS AEM payments. Loss of either of these primary revenue sources for 2020 would in my opinion make funding of the project unviable. By way of a letter from the Board and verbal inquiry by Ruszkiewicz, we have requested an update on the status of our County funding – emphasizing the impact on the Phase 3 project.

Spoke to Metzger's staffer in Albany. No indication that the SAM grant will be withdrawn, but also no indication of when we will see a contract.

CRF 5 results still not officially available (funding for Bench Phase 4). Note that I included it in the proposed 2021 budget.

Nothing new to report on Celery Ledge project.

- b) **NYS RETIREMENT** - Paperwork completed and returned to NYSLRS for Ferry. DeGroodt is pursuing setting up her SEP.
- c) **Carbon Farming Project** still on hold. No movement on signing of contract between Dutchess SWCD and NYS.
- d) I have no new information with regard to **Board appointments** from last month.

- e) **OFFICE PROCEDURES** - USDA has an office re-opening plan they are beginning to implement. A number of upstate offices have re-opened under USDA's 'Phase 1' requirements. The plan still carries considerable restrictions. Offices will still not be re-opening to the public for quite a while. The most recent plan details do clearly state 'no Board meetings' until USDA's 'Phase 3' has been achieved. I propose that we continue the procedures we have been following until we receive notice that the Middletown office has been approved for USDA 'Phase 1' re-opening, at which time we will make sure we understand the USDA Phase 1 requirements.
  
- f) **Tire Project Update** – Received overdue \$500 overpayment from Casing's. Ochs called, he is exploring options other than Casing's to dispose of the remainder of his tires. I told him if he provided me with a cost/proposal, I would bring it up to the Board.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- g) **Year 16 AEM** – Contract received, Claim for Payment of 25% submitted over a month ago. No indication when the 25% advance, or the final payment from 2019 AEM contract for that matter, will be processed.

#### New Business

- a) **DRAFT 2021 BUDGET** – Materials were sent out last week for review by Directors and staff. Memo from County Executive states departments should submit a budget that is 'as frugal as possible'. See my notes for more explanation on the approach I used for 2021 Proposed Budget and Projected 2020 Budget. There should be a motion to accept and submit the Budget either as presented or as modified at our June meeting since the Budget is due back at the County by 7/1.

#### KS Staff Report – Other items to note over the last month

A well-'attended' phone meeting took place on the Moodna/Route 32 erosion site, including the Town, Village, County DPW, County Planning and Princeton Hydro who looked at the site as part of an earlier study. While there was interest in pursuing solutions, there has been no commitment of funding from any of the stakeholders other than \$2,000 from the Moodna Coalition (we are holding this EBP money on behalf of the Coalition). PH provided a proposal to do a 'conceptual design' for \$5,500. I contacted Cornwall's consulting engineers to see if they were interested in submitting a proposal, but have not received one yet.

I continued attempting to provide requested documents to close-out three AG NPS grant contracts that expired at the end of 2019.

I received a call from P3 Bench landowner Brozdowski after sending certified letter as suggested last month. They have no problem with the project.

I was contacted by Green Farmland, Bench Phase 3 landowner, who asked if we could postpone start of project until September so they could plant the field where soil from the project is to be spread. I told them this didn't work for our scheduling, but reminded them that we agreed to pay them rent on the proposed soil receiving areas and indicated they could submit a request for the rental fee. They have not made that request yet, but they asked me to stake the limits of the soil receiving area in the field which I did.

I corresponded with County Surveyor Tom Berry about Bench Phase 3. He believes they will be able to assist us, which will avoid expense of private sector surveyor.

I did additional Round 26 Ag NPS work, support letters requested from WRWA and AFPB. Expect to upload by E-O-D Thursday 6/11.

I'd like to discuss mods to Corn Planters quickly.