

MINUTES
ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
March 15, 2021

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:03 AM. Directors J. Wright, P. Ruszkiewicz, K. Stegenga, P. DeBlock and G. Constable along with K. Sumner, T. Ferry and C. DeGroot (SWCD), A. Armlin-Sorgen (NRCS) and Thomas Corlett, District Director at the Office of NYS Senator Mike Martucci (District 42) joined remotely.

Thomas Corlett, District Director at the Office of New York State Senator Mike Martucci introduced himself.

2021-3-1 DeBlock made the Motion, Constable seconded, to approve February's Board Meeting Minutes. All in favor.

ACTIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS – There were no actions between meetings other than paying some bills which are 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 a letter from State Committee notifying us that we met all the Performance Measure requirements for receiving the Part C money in the amount of \$112,874.00.
- The District received a letter from Wendell, our engineer from Barton & Loguidice, regarding lifting the bench elevation by 1 foot. It will not have a significant reduction in flood conveyance and will have other benefits including reduced cost and better conditions for plant establishment.
- The District received an award letter from State Committee on the Climate Resilient Farming Grant proposal that was submitted in early 2020. Since the grant awards have been officially announced, the District will be developing and submitting Work Plan materials to the State Committee. This grant has a start date of February 22. Discussion followed.
- The District's proposal for Round 26 of the Ag Nonpoint Source Grant Program was not selected for funding. This is the seventh proposal in a row to that program from Orange County that has not been selected. The District has already sent letters out to the farms that were in that grant to notify them. Sumner has a draft letter that he would like to discuss with the Board regarding writing to all the elected state officials in Orange County, asking them if they can help us look into this issue, of the difficulty that we're having accessing these funding programs for farm grants. Discussion followed. **2021-3-2 Wright made the Motion, Stegenga seconded, to send a letter from the Soil and Water District Board to all of the elected Orange County State officials and the Ag Chairs regarding the Agricultural Conservation Funding in the Southeast New York requesting their assistance in addressing what we believe to be an inequity in NYS funding and services reaching farms in southeast New York and Orange County. All in favor.**
- The District sent out a Press Release regarding John Wright's District Director award.

FINANCIAL REPORTS – There was discussion **on the** SAM Grant. The District has an approved DASNY application and the contract was under development but we are still waiting on the money, which is needed in order to complete the bench project phase 3, area 2. If we can't lock in the contractor pretty soon we're going to lose him because he's holding his summer open for that project. There was discussion with the contractor on the possibility of a phase down project just to try to keep things moving. So, if we can't complete the whole phase 3, area 2, we may be able to subdivide that, depending on how much funding the District can come up with out of the budget. The District will need to commit a significant amount of our funding to match that Climate Resilient Farming Grant, which is for phase four of the flood project, but we're never going to get to phase four if we don't finish phase three.

2021-3-3 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to file February's Financial Report for audit review. All in favor.

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

2021-3-4 DeBlock made the Motion, Stegenaga seconded, to accept the Bills to be Paid. All in favor.

Grant Update Reports

AEM/AEM Round 16 Tier 4 (Implementation Projects) - Planning and design is progressing on all three projects. Browne has selected a pole barn contractor to start in April. There is one proposal in-hand for Edgwick Farm's project. Vreeland's plan/design is in progress. The District is anticipating Professional Engineer services from B&L. B&L has the draft plans and we are awaiting their review.

Hudson Valley Carbon Farming Project - The engineer that was hired to provide draft plans for the Southway compost facility has been unresponsive. The District is seeking roof structure proposals from others, including the metal building vendor that Vreeland is using.

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.

T. Ferry (SWCD) – Ferry's staff report was attached to the Draft Minutes.

K. Sumner (SWCD) – Sumner congratulated Ferry on successfully passing both of the Certified Crop Advisor exams. This makes the District eligible for requesting more money from the annual AEM contract.

Roland O'Dell, who is our part-time mechanic/no-till coordinator, will be cutting back on his work hours. Sumner said that he and Ferry can cover moving the equipment and taking care of simple maintenance and repairs issues for now. But mentioned it was really nice last year having a skilled mechanic to lean on, on more of a regular basis. Now if we pay anybody that's not an employee, as a subcontractor, they have to be insured, because it has to get reported on our annual insurance audit. There was discussion on whether or not it makes sense to consider going out to bid for somebody else that wants to store and fix the equipment. No action taken.

There are some health insurance questions where the District is starting to get more issues or liabilities with retirees, which is something that we haven't had a lot of experience with in the past, particularly with Medicare reimbursements. The District is researching to find out if there's any other options to not have that come directly out of our budget as a small agency since it is a heavy liability to keep carrying. No action taken.

INTERAGENCY REPORTS

Armlin-Sorgen (NRCS) - Armlin-Sorgen attended the Water Quality Symposium last week, which she found helpful. NRCS is working on ranking the 2021 EQIP applications. There were some issues with one of their software programs statewide, possibly nationwide, but she said it was resolved.

P. DeBlock (FSA) - The CFAP 3 is still on hold.

Dairy Margin Coverage Program (DMC) - A few weeks ago 25 farmers in this County were paid. They bought DMC coverage and were paid \$2.36 a hundred weight for the month of January.

Some local farmers are having cows get sick and die. One farmer has had a few cows tested at Cornell and they're claiming it's pneumonia. Discussion followed.

Corlett (District Director at Office of Senator Martucci) – Corlett had some additional information regarding the sick cows. It was found that it's not a virus or bacteria that's getting into the milk supplies. It is also thought to be contagious only within the farms where it's occurring, meaning that they've been able to track it to a vaccination issue at some of the farms. They're calling it a bovine respiratory, BRSTV type of pneumonia, that is getting into some of

the cattle. So the Cornell Cooperative vets, and the herd vets down here are working together to update the vaccination plans at the farms where it's occurring.

Corlett mentioned that it was good to hear that the District had been in the filing process and received an application number for the SAM grant.

OLD BUSINESS

Office Procedures - USDA recently threw out their old COVID policies and phasing plans and came up with a new plan. So based on their guidance we are in compliance with USDA and are following some common sense measures to go back to having all three District staff in the office rather than rotating one person out each day as we were doing previously. We're staying in communication with NRCS and FSA about those matters.

Last month, the Board approved the contracting for the tree planting on the Wallkill Flood Project phase three, area one that's still scheduled for April with CEC Excavating. A component of that planting was on the lower bank of the river. We may delay that part of the planting plan for later in the year because there's a good chance we won't have the low water conditions that we need in April to do that lower bank planting component. But we will be doing the main tree planting on the bench hopefully in April. The trees have been ordered.

Sumner mentioned the District Director award that John Wright won. The entire District Board endorsed that nomination, so they're aware of the accomplishments that were noted. The District was pleased that John was selected, and he was able to get on the virtual awards meeting last week to receive that award.

NYS Legislation - Both the House and the Senate have **Soil Health and Climate Resiliency** bills out. Sumner said he is still gathering information, but after reading the Senate bill, it appears to be favorable for farmers – hopefully providing more funding opportunities. He couldn't see any down side such as increased regulation. The Senate has also re-introduced a bill to increase regulation on streams. This bill in the same form was vetoed by the governor in a previous session. His sense is that most Districts and farm organizations oppose this bill. While the measure is well-intended, there are concerns about staffing to effectively accomplish the bill's goals as well as negative impacts on Districts' ability to efficiently accomplish stream management work. Discussion followed.

NEW BUSINESS – DeBlock mentioned that tomorrow night Mike Hosking's (a dairy farmer in Greenville) daughter, Wendy Hosking Volker, will be on Jeopardy.

The next **MEETING** is scheduled for **Monday, April 19, at 9:00 AM.**

2021-3-5 The meeting was Adjourned at 10:05 AM on a Motion by DeBlock, seconded by Wright. All in favor.

Minutes Prepared By:

Christine DeGroodt, Secretary to the Board

Report to Board KMS

March, 2021

Office Procedures – USDA has instituted new policies for Covid effective week of 3/7. We are returning to all three SWCD staff being in the office. We believe we are in compliance with their policy and are following common sense safety protocols. We are staying in communication with NRCS and FSA .

AEM/AEM Round 16 Tier 4 (Implementation Projects)

Planning and design progressing on all three projects.

Browne has selected a pole barn contractor. Projected start date in April.

Still seeking proposals for Edgwick. One in hand.

Vreeland plan/design in progress. Will use a metal roof structure. Anticipating Professional Engineer services from B&L.

Hudson Valley Carbon Farming Project

Engineer hired to provide draft plans for Southway compost facility has been unresponsive. I am seeking roof structure proposals from others, including the metal building vendor Vreeland is using. If favorable building proposal is received, will need P.E. review.

Floodplain Bench Phase 4

Climate Resilient Farming Round 5 grants were announced. Our proposal to support Phase 4 of the Bench is being funded. Contract start date will be 2/22/2021. I anticipate that most of this \$300,000 award will be reserved for construction costs. Ongoing planning, design and permitting costs will be our local match (as long as funding holds out).

We are continuing to develop materials for the Joint Application for Permit (JAP) and progressing the SEQR requirements, but are awaiting the updated bench design and construction plan from B&L before the JAP can be assembled to the point of seeking a pre-ap meeting with regulatory agencies.

Phase 3, Area 1

Contractor has ordered trees. We may delay the lower bank planting portion of the project until fall to be better assured of the low water conditions that will be required, but tree planting on the constructed bench is still scheduled for April.

Phase 3, Area 2

Still no news on SAM grant.

We will 'lift' the bench elevation by 1.0 feet. This will not have a significant reduction in flood conveyance and will have other benefits including reduced cost and better conditions for plant establishment. See letter from Project Engineer in correspondence.

Other

Wright Award

John received his District Director award 'remotely' at the NYSCDEA annual awards ceremony on March 9th. A press release was sent out on March 11th. A post on the office Facebook page reached over 4,000 people – the most of any post we have ever made.

AgNPS Round 26 Grants – were announced. This is the seventh consecutive Orange County proposal that has not been funded. Letters were sent to project farms. I have drafted a letter to NYS elected officials representing Orange County for Board review/approval.

NYS Legislation

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Office/IT

New laptops, server, switch and router all acquired and functioning. Remote access to server functional. Have not received bill from IT consultant yet.

C. DeGroodt

Board Meeting Activities February 11, 2021 – March 12, 2021

- We currently have \$354 cash awards on the rewards credit cards.
- Typed last month's Board Meeting transcript/minutes.
- The District opened a new account with an office supply company called Office Depot since we have been having issues with Staples, the company we have used for 25 years. Office Depot offers the same rewards as Staples and the same free delivery.
- Completed the 2020 Hartford Workers Comp. audit.
- The District cancelled volunteer insurance for year 2021 since there was no point in paying the premium. Our insurance company said they will write us a new policy when the need arises.
- New computers/equipment have been installed and are working. All files on our old share drive have been moved over to the new drive.
- Virtually attended three of the Water Quality Symposium classes – 1) Federal, NYS and Payroll Finances, 2) Overview of Government Accounting and Reporting Responsibilities and 3) Clerks Forum.
- We had M&T issue a stop payment on check 1168 in the amount of \$5,880.00 to CEC Excavating because it was lost in the mail. CEC received an opened envelope with no check. Re-issued payment.
- I contacted our auditors since we had not heard from them yet this year. We will be doing the 2020 audit virtually. I'm waiting on them to send me a link to upload documents.
- Changed a few "nicknames" on accounts at M&T Bank since some of the grants had closed out. Emailed TD Bank to do the same but haven't heard back from them.
- Completed the NYS Sales Tax Report for 2020.
- Completed and sent in the Claim for Payment in the amount of \$112,874.08 for the 2020 Performance Measures.
- A media release for John Wright's District Director award was sent to the local papers.

TF March Board Meeting Activity Summary

- Attended Water Quality Symposium, courses were informative but hopefully in person format will be back soon.
- Working on assembling documents for phase 4 bench permit
- Soil worksheets have tapered off.
- A few calls on no-till equipment, not many yet though.
- Received CCA Test results, passed both tests, currently working on application for certification.
- Working on AEM site visits for farms that are interested in the Grown & Certified program, and other programs
- Helped Kevin survey some elevation shots at the proposed phase 4 bench area
- Submitted reimbursement request to state committee for AEM Tier 4 projects, 65% advance.
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