

**MINUTES**  
**ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
**March 20, 2023**

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:10 AM. Directors P. DeBlock, J. Wright, P. Ruszkiewicz and G. Constable were present along with K. Sumner and C. DeGroodt (SWCD) and B. Luskin (NYS Ag & Markets).

**2023-3-1 Ruszkiewicz made the Motion, Wright seconded, to approve February'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.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

- The bank statements and collateral agreements were available for review.
- Ben Luskin, NYS Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC), sent us a written report of general updates on NYS SWCC activities.
- The County re-appointed Constable, Ruszkiewicz and Cheney to the District Board.
- The District received a letter from Ben Luskin, Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC), regarding our 2022 Performance Measure Part C. The letter advises us that the District has met all of our Performance Measure Part C requirements for funding in the amount of \$181,746.76. Luskin mentioned that the District should see the money direct deposited into our account some time this week.
- NYACD updates were available for review.
- Copy of support letter to Congressman Pat Ryan's office. Re: support for New York-18 based Community Project Funding for the Chester Agricultural Center, National Development Council and Orange County Land Trust project that will create 28 units of affordable housing for farmers and farm workers.

**FINANCIAL REPORTS**

The Dedicated Fund Summary balance is being carefully tracked. Sumner mentioned that the District's Part A money was received recently.

**2023-3-2 Ruszkiewicz made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to file February's Financial Reports for audit review. All in favor.**

DeBlock mentioned that the District's auditor was in and chose DeBlock this year to fill out a questionnaire.

**BILLS FOR BOARD APPROVAL**

There was a brief discussion regarding the Southway bill in the amount of \$10,000.00 that is #11 listed on Bills for Board Approval.

**2023-3-3 DeBlock made the Motion, Ruszkiewicz seconded, to advance \$10,000.00 to Matthew Southway for his project. All in favor.**

**2023-3-4 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to pay the bills as presented. All in favor.**

Bill #5, in the amount of \$15,000.00 on the list, is for the Schunnemunk Trail bridge project, being paid for out of the Legoland EBP money.

(E. Schellenburg joined the Meeting at 9:20 AM)

**GRANT REPORT UPDATE** – The Board reviewed the monthly Grant Report. The Grant Report is updated monthly to reflect changes.

The Hudson Valley Carbon Farming Project contract ends at the end of April 2023. Matthew Southway's project started today.

One project is completed on Ag NPS RD 27 and one is in progress.

There are two projects completed on Round 17 Tier 4.

## **INTERAGENCY REPORTS**

**E. Schellenberg (CCE)** – CCE Orange County is one of five CCE's across the state taking part of a Climate Stewards Training Program. The 10-week long training series starts this Thursday.

Schellenberg said that CCE and the Otisville Country Fair will combine and will be called the Country Fair. They are anticipating approximately 5-7,000 people to attend on July 27<sup>th</sup>.

The Chainsaw Safety Course will be held on June 4-5<sup>th</sup>.

A Shitake Mushroom class will be held on April 29<sup>th</sup>.

CCE is working on a field day on April 7, 2023 with Soil and Water where Sumner will talk about black dirt flood control mitigation.

**B. Luskin (NYS Ag & Markets)** – Districts can nominate a farm through the AEM Leopold Conservation Award. This award recognizes landowners who inspire others with their dedication to ethical land, water, and wildlife habitat management on ag land. The recipient will be presented with \$10,000.00 from the Sand County Foundation. The deadline for applications is May 27<sup>th</sup>. So far, there have been three farms awarded in the past. One located in Long Island, one in Central NY and the last in Western NY.

The next round of Request For Proposals should be coming out soon.

Bethany Bzduch was appointed as the new Executive Director, replacing Brian Steinmuller.

The Water Quality Symposium was held last week. Over 350 people attended throughout the course of the week.

## **STAFF REPORTS**

## ORANGE COUNTY SWCD MARCH 2023 BOARD MEETING MINUTES

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

**C. DeGroodt (SWCD)** – DeGroodt brought up the idea of purchasing a portable scanner. She would like to scan some of the archival papers that are currently kept in cardboard boxes in the office. There was a brief discussion. **2023-3-5 Ruszkiewicz made the Motion, seconded by Constable, to purchase a scanner up to the amount of \$250.00. All in favor.**

**K. Sumner (SWCD)** – See “Old and New Business”.

### **OLD & NEW BUSINESS**

**AEM Round 17 Tier 4 (Implementation Projects)** – There are four projects, two of which are complete. The third is in-process and the fourth is seeking contractor proposals. All projects must be completed before the end of this year.

**Hudson Valley Carbon Farming Project** – One out of the six projects will not be completed. The Minkus Controlled Drainage Project does not have a schedule for construction and Sumner does not expect it to get completed at this point in time. There was some discussion on the projects.

**Floodplain Bench Phase 4 (CRF 5)** – The DEC public comment period ended 3/16. There were no comments. Our permit was issued 3/17. The tree cutting job has been marked out in the field and work is expected to start 3/20. All the trees need to be cut by 3/31. Two contractors have been hired to better ensure that the tree cutting is completed before the deadline. 1-CEC Excavating and 2-Gurda Landscaping. Sumner said although a lot of trees were saved, 68 trees still need to be cut. Sumner mentioned that the District did not need Army Corp. permits for Phase 4 and we received the final DEC permits.

**Floodplain Bench Phase 3, Area 2** – Sumner is still working with the County surveyor and attorney on the Conservation Easements.

**Pellets Island Reach Maintenance Program** – The District continues to follow-up with the remaining parcels that to sign but says he will grant permission for access as needed. So far, we have 15 of the 19 easements signed. The Part B \$6,000.00 was assigned to the Pellets Island Project. There was discussion on having the five Maintenance Agreement partners agree to the use of the annual \$60,000 fund to maintain this section going forward. Sumner does not think it would add an unmanageable burden to the Fund.

**AG NPS Round 27** – The Keziah Lain compost shed roof structure is up. The floor/concrete and plumbing is expected in the next two weeks.

**New Hire** – We have been reaching out to colleges about the tech position. Sumner interviewed one person but the salary was not acceptable to this person. The Technician position has a starting salary range of \$45,000-\$55,000. Discussion followed.

**Chester Fill Site** – The downslope landowner, who is also a farmer, called Sumner about the extensive filling, which is changing the drainage pattern on to his property. Sumner called the DEC stormwater staff on his behalf. They investigated but after the fill site landowner told them it was for farming (fill for Christmas trees and pumpkins), they said no stormwater construction permit was needed. Discussion followed.

Sumner received several calls from farm landowners about selling easements (PDR). Four are fairly close together, and could rank higher as a ‘protected land block’. He connected the owners with the Orange County Land Trust. Sumner said they have a new employee working on farmland easements. Sumner also encouraged the landowners to contact their town since support at this level is important to a strong PRD application.

## ORANGE COUNTY SWCD MARCH 2023 BOARD MEETING MINUTES

On 3/15 Sumner gave a report to the Ag & Farmland Protection Board on progress that has been made since the preparation of the Orange County Farmland Protection Plan update. He reported on **Priority Project 8. Implement Wallkill River Drainage Programs** for which we are the lead partner. He also provided suggestions on how the list of work items for this Project should be updated based on completed work and anticipated new work. Sumner handed out copies of the report to the Directors. Discussion followed.

The 1998 Seeder Bid Notice was released on 3/16. The minimum bid is \$5,000.00. Bids will be accepted right up until the next Board Meeting in April. Our attorney suggested that we should formally 'surplus' the equipment.

(E. Schellenberg left the Meeting at 10:30 AM)

Sumner presented a contract between the District and Pine Island Turf Nursery for the Floodplain Bench Phase 4 tree cutting project. **2023-3-6 Wright made the Motion, Ruskiewicz seconded, for the District to enter into a contract with Pine Island Turf Nursery and to lend the necessary support to the two associated contracts between the contractors and Pine Island Turf Nursery. All in favor.**

**2023-3-7 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, Constable seconded, to surplus the 1998 No-Till Seeder. All in favor.**

Ben Luskin presented District Law Training for the Directors.

There was discussion regarding the fee to be charged for using the new seeder. **2023-3-8 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to charge the standard delivery fee and then \$35/acre after that. All in favor.**

**NEXT MEETING DATE** - The next **MEETING** is scheduled for **Monday, April 17, 2023 at 9:00 AM.**

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**2023-3-9 The Meeting was Adjourned at 11:15 AM on a Motion by DeBlock, seconded by Wright. All in favor.**

Minutes Prepared By:

Christine DeGroodt, Secretary to the Board

March, 2023

**AEM/AEM Round 17 Tier 4 (Implementation Projects) Deadline for Completion – 12/31/2023**

O'Dell project is complete except for final grading/seeding in spring

Dean Ford – completed week of 2/13

Hoyt- design complete. Participant seeking contractor proposals

Ewanciw – Design complete. Participant indicates he has started.

**Hudson Valley Carbon Farming Project [contract extended to 4/2023]**

Southway Compost Facility – Construction expected to start 3/20.

Minkus controlled drainage project – no schedule for construction.

**Floodplain Bench**

**Phase 4 (CRF 5)**

DEC Public comment period ended 3/16. There were no comments. Our permit was issued 3/17.

ACoE permit will not be required because no wetlands will be impacted, and work will be above Ordinary High Water (OHWM).

Solicited contractor proposals for the tree cutting on behalf of Project Sponsor (Pine Island Turf Nursery).

Tree cutting job has been marked out in the field, work expected to start 3/20. All trees need to be cut by 3/31. Additional processing can be done later. Two contractor have been hired to better ensure tree cutting is completed before deadline. Approximately 68 trees to be cut, 30 are large, multi-trunked Silver Maples that will time-consuming to cut and process.

**Phase 3, Area 2**

Still working with attorney and County Surveyor on Conservation Easement matters.

**Other Flood Mitigation**

Pellets Island Reach Maintenance Program – Continuing to follow up with remaining parcels that have not signed the easement. Owner of parcel fronting on Maple Avenue on Wawayanda side is refusing to sign the easement. But says he will grant permission for access as needed.

**Round 27 ANPSACP**

Keziah Lain compost shed – roof structure is up. Floor/concrete and plumbing expected in next two weeks.

## **Other**

Legoland EBP –Use of \$15,000 for Schunemunk Trail bridge project approved by DEC. On bills for payment this month.

**New Hire** – Still looking. Had an interview. Salary range was not acceptable to applicant.

**Meat Processing Facility** – Spoke with Sullivan SWCD Manager. He has spoken with owner. He indicates facilities are there for beef side, they are looking for an operator. Provided name of butcher who visited our office last year. Information presented at March AFPB meeting and on AFPB Implementation Committee meeting 3/16 suggests there are some additional issues delaying opening of the facility.

I suggested that the AFPB send a thank you letter to survey participants that included survey results. CCE responded to this suggestion and prepared a draft letter and updated survey results summary along with list of respondents for AFPB to review at March meeting.

4 hr contractor erosion and sediment control course completed for 30 participants at Local 17 Laborer's 2/22. See evaluations from participants.

Chester fill site – downslope landowner called about extensive filling, changing drainage pattern on to his property. I called DEC stormwater staff on his behalf. They investigated quickly, but after landowner told them it was for farming, they said no permit needed. I find this to be an abuse of the 'agricultural exemption'. Will discuss more at meeting.

## **Farmland Easements**

I have had five inquiries from farm landowners about selling easement (PDR). Four are fairly close together, and could be considered part of a 'protected land block'. There is municipal land in between.

I have connected all of these landowners with OCLT. There may be justification for somehow increasing staff resources, at OCLT or elsewhere, to allow for aggressive pursuit of funding for these and other properties.

I will be out of the office 4/21 to 5/2. I will need help with equipment program, assuming weather that week is favorable for planting. I have discussed this with Chris and Ron. Ron expects to be available to cover equipment moves.

I gave the AFPB an update on Priority Project #8 from the County's Farmland Protection Plan, and provided my suggestion on how the list of work items should be updated based on completed work and anticipated new work. Copies of my hand-out will be available our Board meeting.

Sale of 1998 Seeder – Bid Notice released 3/16, open bids at April meeting. Attorney suggests we should formally 'surplus' the equipment.

## C. DeGroodt

### Board Meeting Activities February 17, 2023 – March 17, 2023

- We have \$562 cash awards on the rewards credit cards.
- Worked on Soil Group Worksheets.
- Audit was the week of Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>. Still finishing up some requests for paperwork.
- Mailed out wallet cards and emailed certificates of completion for the DEC 4-Hour Course Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup> training.
- Sent in our 2022 Sales Tax Report.
- Completed the Hartford audit for our workers comp.
- Researched and purchased a projector.
- Issues connecting remotely to our server. In contact with the IT guy.
- Listened in on the No-Till Webinar on 3/9/23.
- Researched grants available for archival storage. Looked into scanners to digitalize our archival documents (board meetings, resolutions, etc.)
- **MISC/MONTHLY:** Payroll, taxes, mail, phones, walk-ins, office supplies ordered, type minutes/board meeting documents/financials, pay bills, computer backup, bank deposits, etc.