

MINUTES
ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
May 18, 2020

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:00 AM. Directors J. Wright, G. Keeton and P. Ruszkiewicz joined remotely along with A. Armlin-Sorgen (NRCS) and H. Persoon (FSA). Director P. DeBlock, K. Sumner, T. Ferry and C. DeGroot were present at the office.

2020-5-1 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to approve April's Board Meeting Minutes as written. All in favor.

ACTIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS – There were no actions between meetings.

CORRESPONDENCE

- The bank statements and collateral agreements are available for review at the District office and will be presented to the Board the next time we meet in person.
- The District was copied on a letter from the Riverkeeper regarding the renewal of the Walden Hydro Plant permit. Riverkeeper is involved in the review of the permit and what conditions are going to be attached to it. Because of their past knowledge of the functions of our office, they are promoting that we be included in the mitigation requirements of the permit. Discussion followed regarding some money that may be available. The details remain to be defined. It's a matter of establishing the conditions of the permit and the mitigation requirements. Sumner spoke with Dan Shapley from Riverkeeper about considering using it for some low-cost high-benefit agronomic practices that would give the District a small fund so people wouldn't have a long wait time if they wanted to do cover crop, conservation tillage or a similar practice. It would be nice to have a fund that the District could annually collect applications and act on them immediately.
- The District received an updated offer letter from New York State Retirement. We're anticipating that the amount is going to be similar to what we were looking at previously for Ferry to join.
- Sumner did a write-up regarding Gary Keeton's retirement from the Soil & Water District Board as of the end of this month. It can be seen on Facebook, it will be in the New York State District Employees Newsletter and we sent it out to the local newspapers.

FINANCIAL REPORTS – were reviewed. Wright asked why the District's workers comp and disability insurance was higher than the amount budgeted. DeGroot will look into it.

Sumner mentioned that the District is waiting for payment from Cornell Cooperative Extension on the 4-Hour Erosion & Sediment Control course he taught in February.

No-till receipts were high for the month because it included the \$4,200.00 payment from the Ag & Farmland Protection Board for reimbursement for no-till equipment repair and maintenance.

2020-5-2 Wright made the Motion, Keeton seconded, to file April's 2020 Financial Report for audit review. All in favor.

BILLS FOR BOARD APPROVAL – The list of bills was reviewed by the Board. A bill was added for work completed on the corn planters earlier this year.

2020-5-3 Keeton made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to pay the bills presented including the R. O'Dell bill added to the list today. All in favor.

STAFF REPORTS

Written staff reports were presented for Board review.

Regarding the Riverkeeper letter, Sumner wanted to emphasize that this is hopefully going to result in some funds for us for cost-sharing ag conservation projects.

Sumner has been unable to connect with the Bench Phase 3 landowner Brozdowski after he sent two letters and left a phone message on their machine. Sumner mentioned the idea of asking the County attorney's office to write him a letter. He said the project is entirely within the existing federal flood control project easement so he thinks we have legal standing to do the project without their permission. But the District's practice up to this point has been to try to make sure that we have the permission and buy-in of the landowner as well. Wright suggested sending another letter but this time via registered mail. Ruskiewicz also agreed to try to speak with the landowner if he has the opportunity.

INTERAGENCY REPORTS

H. Persoon (FSA) – The Farm Service Agency has had limited staffing and has had no personal interaction within the office with producers. All business has been conducted over the phone, internet and mail. Since the Care Act was signed and subsequently the CFAP program was announced a number weeks back by the secretary of agriculture, they have almost gotten the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program released. FSA staff are undergoing a training this Thursday so that they are versed on how this program is going to be implemented.

FSA is working on crop reporting, beginning with onion producers, through the mail and over the internet with limited physical contact.

There are certain counties where they're already talking about some limited openings of offices, depending on the data. As far as how the CFAP program is going to be administered, some of the assumptions are it's going to be handled similarly to the Market Facility Facilitation Program. Persoon mentioned that dairy has suffered and for those that have enrolled in the Dairy Margin Contract (DMC) program, the threshold has been triggered already and future pricing forecasts are plummeting. Payments will probably be going out through the remainder (every month) of this year based on current projections unless they do a turnaround by the fall.

Persoon has been doing his CRP training with the CED out of Broome County, Cortland County and State Director, Laurie Dandignac.

Armlin-Sorgen (NRCS) – NRCS is working on ranking EQIP applications and said that they're due in two weeks.

OLD BUSINESS

John Wright, who currently fills the Farm Bureau seat on the Soil and Water District Board of Directors, had his term expire at the end of 2019. The Farm Bureau has recommended to the County that George Constable fill the seat. The District does not have any official correspondence from the County yet with regard to that appointment or re-appointment. Ruskiewicz mentioned that since there are several appointments that need to be made, the County will do them all at once. It was suggested that John Wright could be moved over into the At-Large seat once it's available. The Board and District staff are pleased with John's membership on the Board and would prefer to keep him in the Farm Bureau seat. The Board decided to Table any decisions for a month. Discussion followed.

Office Procedures Update - Since the District shares office space with USDA we give serious consideration to complying with their policies and use common sense with regard to the other requirements and guidelines from the State of New York. Sumner stated that he believes that we have enough space in our office that we can function and reasonably meet the social distancing guidelines. The District has been keeping the doors locked and are not allowing the public into the office, but is trying to continue functioning as close to normal as possible. NRCS is aware of the current office operating plan and doesn't have any issues with it that have been brought to the District's attention.

The District received an email from the County Budget Director stating that the County is looking at cuts throughout their departments of 15%. With our approved County appropriation of \$242,991.00, that amounts to a cut of \$36,449.00 for the District. The District's 2nd quarter appropriation is also on hold and will be re-evaluated in June. Ruskiewicz added that if

there's a strong recovery, there is a possibility that the District could get that 15% back but the way things are looking he don't see that happening.

NYS Retirement Update – Previously discussed at the Meeting. The Resolution to join NYS Retirement was presented to the Board for approval. **2020-5-4 Wright made the Motion, Keeton seconded, to accept the Resolution for the District to join the NYS Retirement System. All in favor.** There is also an Affidavit that has to be filled out and signed by the Chief Fiscal Officer, which is the Chairman. Arrangements will be made at the first opportunity to get that form notarized. Once that's done, we can send in the resolution and the affidavit back to NYS Retirement. A brief discussion followed regarding the Simple Employee Retirement Plans for Sumner and DeGrootd.

NEW BUSINESS

Wallkill Bench Phase 3 Update - The District solicited three proposals formally by letter on behalf of the sponsoring farm, which is Pine Island Turf Nursery. We received two back by the deadline which was Friday at 4 pm. The low bidder was CEC Excavating out of Pine Bush, previously Vellenga Lawncare. His proposal for Area 1 was \$179,430.00. His proposal for Area 2 was \$359,750.00, for a total of \$539,180.00. Sumner believes that the District would be able to afford to do Area 1 of this project. There are a couple of items that we could make optional, based on funding (for example the tree planting). We could get a Phase 3 Area 1 contract down to about \$120,000.00 by focusing the contract on the primary excavation of the bench and seeding to stabilize it but leaving out the tree planting. Sumner did a projection to end of year for District receipts and we would have a surplus of receipts over disbursements of \$119,000.00 which is the amount that he suggests we could shave back the bench phase three, Area 1 contract to. This assumes that the County appropriation minus the 15% is received. Sumner suggested to the Board that we notify the low bidder that preliminarily he's been selected for the project pending completion of a contract with him.

2020-5-5 DeBlock made the Motion, Keeton seconded, to write to the low bidder and tell him he's preliminarily selected pending completion of a mutually acceptable contract. All in favor.

The District Board and staff thanked Gary Keeton for his years of service on the Board and let Gary know that there are some gifts for him at our office.

The next **MEETING** is scheduled for **Monday, June 15, 2020 at 9:00 AM.**

2020-5-6 The Meeting adjourns at 10:10 AM on a Motion by Wright, seconded by DeBlock. All in favor.

Minutes Prepared By:

Christine DeGrootd, Secretary to the Board