

MINUTES
ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
March 19, 2012

The Meeting was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:07 AM. Directors T. Pahucki, D. Hulle, J. Wright and G. Keeton were present, along with K. Sumner, C. DeGrootd and K. O'Dell (OCSWCD), J. Heller (NRCS), R. Baglia (CCE) and Ford Barber (FSA).

Keeton made the Motion, seconded by Hulle, to accept February's **MINUTES**.

The District's seeder is out now, the second one is going out today. The corn planter usually goes out the beginning in May.

Wright made the Motion, seconded by Keeton, to accept February's **FINANCIAL REPORT**.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Orange County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board Agenda was passed around. The meeting is scheduled for March 21st.

An Invoice in the amount of \$450.00 was received from the New York State Conservation District Employees Association for the 2012 NYS Envirothon Registration. The Invoice was tabled with a Motion by Wright, seconded by Keeton. All in favor. It will be revisited next month.

SWCD STAFF REPORTS

C. DeGrootd (SWCD) – The District's audit was on February 28 and March 2, 2012. So far, there have been no issues. To date, 35 Tree and Shrub orders have been received. April 21st is the pick-up date.

DeGrootd has been working on Soil Group Worksheets and the ACRF Program.

K. O'Dell (SWCD) – The seeder is in use.

O'Dell completed her first Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan and handed it in to the State Committee for review.

O'Dell attended the Water Quality Symposium March 13th – 16th. Some of the classes she took included: Construction Issues, Arc Gis and Ag Best Management Practices.

K. Sumner (SWCD) – The County MS4 audit was on February 22nd. He does not believe there is a written report yet.

Sumner reviewed 28 flood mitigation grant proposals that were submitted to the County. Sumner ranked them and passed them on to the Orange County Planning Department. They then honed it down to 7-8 proposals that they asked for additional information on. The Pochuck Dike Relocation Project (which Sumner worked on with the Town of Warwick) made the first cut. Sumner heard that the County is asking these 7-8 applicants to increase their local match and to decrease their funding request.

The District earned \$6,800 for a 4-hour erosion and sediment control course that Sumner taught at Cornell Cooperative Extension. CCE staff handled the registrations and room accommodations.

Sumner helped the Orange County Land Trust with a grant proposal through one of the state flood response offerings on stream work at the Moonbeams Preserve in the Town of Wallkill. Sumner offered in-kind technical assistance if it gets funding.

ACRF Program - Eight projects received time extensions. A lot of work has been completed on the DeBuck Dike Project but they still have a ways to go. The District will see if unused ACRF funds from other projects can be shifted to the DeBuck Project. The District has to submit "as built" pictures of all projects in order to close out this grant.

CAFO – The District is still working with all three medium CAFO dairy farms. March was the due date but all three farms requested time extensions. We don't know if they were granted the extensions or not. Two of the farms had to build vegetative treatment areas.

Quassaick Creek – Breitenfeld attends the watershed group meetings. They received a grant and hired a Watershed Plan Coordinator. When the proposal was first put in, the District agreed to assist with it and was put in the grant to provide in-kind match.

CAC – The Orange County Planning Department, Soil and Water and the Orange County Land Trust are trying to bring the County CAC groups together a few times a year. The next meeting is planned for March 28 in Goshen.

F. Barber (FSA)- NAP signups have passed. Producers are now coming in to report plantings. If you plant early you have to report to FSA ten days before you harvest.

ECP – Funding was received in January. Signups ended on March 16. FSA has to do site visits.

MILC – Getting a lot of dairy farmers coming in.

CRP and CREP – Now accepting requests for cost-sharing re-seeding. If you had grass that died out from the flooding you can request cost-sharing.

DCP – Not issuing advance payments. Last year was the last year to do that.

R. Baglia (CCE) – Stormwater Ponds and Wetlands was held on February 29.

CCE assisted with the 4- Hour Contractor Training. CCE had three lectures that same day on Stormwater Management for Landscaping.

J. Simpson held cheese making sessions that were well attended.

M. Ulrich taught onion vegetable school and a program on cold crops. On Thursday there is a Commercial Hop Production workshop at the Hudson Valley Lab in Highland.

The Master Gardeners went to the Philly Flower Show on March 6th. They are also having a Rain Barrel Workshop on March 31, 2012 from 9-1 at CCE for homeowners.

J. Heller (NRCS) – Robert Merrill has been handling the majority of signups this year. They have about 25-30 applications right now that are eligible.

There are some national initiatives that are going to be announced soon which highlight two specific species – the Bog Turtle and Gold Winged Warbler. They will be under the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program. They did not qualify for the Eastern Cottontail.

EWP- Received another site that requested support and that is a house in danger of falling into the Moodna. FEMA and NRCS are negotiating who will be doing what. Sumner asked Heller if the District is going to get a written response on the flood plain inquiry. Heller stated that the District will receive a response and according to Pete Wright, he is not savvy with funding it. Heller suggested he come here and look at the black dirt areas, but Wright is unwilling to do so.

FSA, NRCS and RD went to look at potential office space. There is no timeline and no one knows when a decision will be made.

OLD BUSINESS

Pahucki announced that the County Executive was taken to the hospital last week. He is still there under observation.

NEW BUSINESS

A proposal for a revised position description was mailed to the Directors prior to the Board Meeting. The description stated: 'Funding for education programming, and specifically for youth education – which has been a mainstay of OCSWCD's education programming, has been much harder to secure. Education 'components' can sometimes be incorporated into other more technically oriented grants/contract work, but funding for school programming has been particularly challenging. Several years ago, OCSWCD began asking schools who were utilizing the services and programs of our educator to consider making 'donations' to help offset the costs associated with delivery of the programming. This effort has resulted in only several hundred dollars of donations annually – hardly enough to even justify the efforts associated with making the annual donation requests.

In addition to the challenges with obtaining dedicated education funding, OCSWCD recently adopted a 'grade-step' system modeled after systems in use by federal, state and county governments. This system has been successful in establishing salaries for OCSWCD employees commensurate with comparable professional positions. However, this has strained the District's ability to generate adequate revenues to maintain a balanced budget. The District's County appropriation, which in recent years has constituted around 25% of total operating revenues, can be considered the 'platform' from which the office works to secure other grants – which often require a 'local match' that the County appropriation helps to provide. However, the District's appropriation did not automatically increase to help cover increased salary expenses as the 'grade-step' system was phased in, nor does it automatically increase when grade/step increases are reached. As a 'contract agency' to the County, increases in appropriation can be requested during the annual budget request and hearing process, but in recent years direction from the County's administration has called for zero increases – effectively preventing the District from covering any of their increased salary costs from their County appropriation. As regards the grade/step system, County administration was made aware of the District's adoption of this system, but no agreement was reached that the County would assist financially with its adoption.

These issues weigh upon decisions regarding the pursuit of a replacement for the Conservation District Educator, and upon the job duties that should be included. It is the current opinion of the Conservation District Manager that proposing and delivering a balance budget in the next several years will continue to be a considerable challenge, and that retaining financial solvency will be even more difficult if the Conservation District Educator position was replaced and job duties were modeled after the present. It is therefore the Manager's recommendation that the District Board consider hiring a second District Technician. As opposed to seeking a candidate with educational training or background, we would seek a candidate with more technical training and background in a natural resources related field such as engineering or environmental science. A person with such background would be much better suited to assist with the type of grant-funded work tasks that tend to be available to assist with staff time expenses."

Discussion followed regarding the District's Conservation Field Days program. There is a possibility that Cornell Cooperative Extension would have an interest in taking it over. Rose Baglia said that she will discuss this with Deborah Lester, the community horticulture educator.

Wallkill River Update – Pahucki gave a quick summary of the Wallkill River Maintenance Project - Last year the NYS DEC said that you could remove trees at a high stretch. Sumner and Pahucki went out and marked a representative stretch of the project area for DEC to review. In January the DEC went out and looked at the site. The Town of Goshen sent a letter stating they require a study. Two estimates came in. In late February, Pahucki and Pillmeier spoke to the County Executive and on March 1st, 2012 the County Executive signed an Executive Order to fund the cheapest estimate. Work commenced and the County Executive said that he would take responsibility for the Town of Goshen. Pahucki took charge of the project. On March 10th Suburban Excavating started cutting trees. The Goshen side is now completed. The Wawayanda side will start on Friday. There is a large number of Oak trees on this side. The stumps being left are approx. 3'-4' high. Sumner let the Board know that he was uncomfortable with the way this project was done.

Machelle Simmons briefly joined the meeting to introduce herself. She is the Assistant State Conservationist for NRCS.

There was continued discussion on how to treat the stumps left along the Wallkill River. Keeton mentioned poison can

be used but it's dangerous to wildlife. Sumner asked if the District is paying Suburban Excavating's bill. If so he wants it presented to the Board for Approval. Wright requested whether or not there should have been a special Board Meeting called to discuss this project before work started. Pahucki reiterated that Sumner was not comfortable with this project but that the County Executive felt that time was of the essence. Wright said there should be a long term plan in place where the trees are cut when they are small instead of waiting until they are huge. Keeton suggested seeding the banks where the trees are removed.

Sumner said that he has been hearing a lot about a dredging project. Lucy Joyce, CCE Executive Director, called Sumner about this. She specifically asked what Soil and Water's position is on this. In Sumner's opinion it is a bad idea. Pahucki made the Motion, seconded by Hulle, that the Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District is not in opinion of for or against it until there is a professional evaluation.

Pahucki made the Motion, seconded by Wright to approve the District's 2012 Annual Plan of Work.

Sumner mentioned to the Board that he filled out a Fraud Protection questionnaire that was sent to him by the Auditor.

The **NEXT MEETING** is scheduled for **Monday, April 16, 2012** at 9 AM. The **MEETING** was adjourned at 11:05 AM on a Motion by Hulle, seconded by Wright.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine DeGroodt
Secretary to the Board

