

DRAFT MINUTES
ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
August 17, 2023

The **MEETING** was **CALLED TO ORDER** by the Chairman at 9:15 AM. Directors P. DeBlock, J. Wright, P. Ruszkiewicz, and G. Constable were present along with K. Sumner (SWCD).

2023-8-1 Ruszkiewicz made the Motion, Constable seconded, to approve July’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.
- NYACD Annual Meeting information available for review.
- Miscellaneous newsletters were available for review.
- Letter and Form EBD-545 sent to NYS Civil Service requesting add Sumner as Health Benefits Administrator
- Letter from Bailey Sawyer, NYSDEC regarding July flash flooding
- Resignation Letter from Christine DeGroot
- Copy of notice to County of Orange from NYSA&M re: certification of 2023 additions to the Agricultural District.
- Letter from OCSWCD to Senator Skoufis’s office requesting funding for No-Till equipment purchase. After receiving the letter, Skoufis’s office contacted Sumner asking if we would consider eliminating or reducing rental fees if new equipment funding was provided. Discussion followed.

2023-8-2 Wright made the Motion, Constable seconded, to indicate to Skoufis’s office that we are not inclined to eliminate or reduce no-till rental fees due to costs of the program already exceeding income, and value of maintaining a contribution from users. All in favor.

- Correspondence from the County Orange offering the option of switching from paper checks to Electronic Fund Transfer.

2023-8-3 Constable made the Motion, Ruszkiewicz seconded, to switch to EFT for payments from County of Orange. All in favor.

FINANCIAL REPORTS

2023-8-4 Wright made the Motion, Constable seconded, to file July’s Financial Reports for audit review. All in favor.

BILLS FOR BOARD APPROVAL

Sumner clarified that \$75,000 of payment 4 was covered by the CRF 5 contract advance payment. A second Claim for Payment on this contract has been made for \$195,000 and it hopefully be paid before another interim payment on the Floodplain Bench Phase 4 South Project is made.

2023-8-5 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, DeBlock seconded, to pay the bills as presented, excluding #13. All in favor.

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

INTERAGENCY REPORTS

Oscar Velez-Juarbe, USDA-NRCS, submitted a report by email:

So far, we have received letters from the Town of Cornwall and The Village of Cornwall on Hudson requesting EWP assistance. Jerry and I were out on a few sites with the Town of Cornwall and are planning on another day to go look at more sites.

We finished our contract obligation in Orange Co. There are 14 new contracts for a total of \$724,994.

I’ll keep you posted on what happens with EWP.

STAFF REPORTS

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

C. DeGroodt (SWCD)– DeGroodt submitted her staff report via email to Directors prior to the Board Meeting.

K. Sumner (SWCD)– See “Old and New Business” and staff reports appended to these minutes.

OLD & NEW BUSINESS

Sumner summarized the discussion at last night’s AFPB meeting regarding the O’Dell Farm PDR application currently being negotiated with NYSA&M by OCLT. The process was progressing well until recently. The crux of the issue appears to be a refusal of NYSA&M to allow the O’Dell’s to exclude their residence from the farmland easement. There was confusion about the precise definition and differences between an exclusion and an ‘outparcel’, but there was consensus of the AFPB that A&M’s position was unreasonably rigid and threatens to derail a very desirable PDR project. They agree by formal motion to write to A&M expressing strongly that A&M should reconsider their position regarding exclusion of the residence.

Quaker Creek – Sumner augmented briefly his written report on the Quaker Creek flooding situation, stressing to the Board that he is continuing to explore options for a project here but reminding them that is currently not a workable consensus on a feasible approach.

Farm Tires – The cost for providing a container that can be filled with as many tires as possible has been determined to be \$2,400. Phil Johnson has offered to ‘host’ the container. Other farmers with tires they wish to dispose of would be responsible to get their waste tires there. A procedure would be developed to allow for an equitable allocation of tires to each applicant in the event that interest exceeds available space/budget. The project is proposed to be limited to farms. Submission of a Schedule F would be a means to document status as a farmer. Other applicants with unclear status as a farm would be handled on a case-by-case basis by the Board.

2023-8-6 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, Wright seconded, to allocate up to \$4,800 for a one-time farm tire collection. All in favor.

The final 2022/2021 Audit Report for OCSWCD, prepared by PKF O’Conner Davies Accountants and Advisors, was received and reviewed by the Directors.

2023-8-7 DeBlock made the Motion, Ruskiewicz seconded, to accept the 2022/2021 Auditor’s report. All in favor.

Budget Hearing with County Executive’s Office – Wright, Ruskiewicz and Constable all agreed with Sumner’s assessment that those present at the Hearing appeared to be favorable to our 2024 County Appropriation request.

The Ag Commissioner’s visit and farmer gathering at the Otisville fair were briefly discussed.

Local Cost Share Program Update – The current uncommitted balance from the \$50,000 2023 allocation is \$22,500. A ‘fall 2023 cover crop funding opportunity notice has been distributed by social media and website announcement, with a due date for applications of 9/8/2023. Sumner proposes at the September Board meeting to review applications and allocate available funding as decided by the Board, with the possibility of allocating additional funds if warranted. R&G Produce recently requested cover crop funding. They have cropland that was flooded out in July, and they would like to take advantage of an early cover crop plant date. Tom Owens is also on the list, having signed up early this year for fall cover crop. His application will be considered at the September Board meeting.

2023-8-8 Constable made the Motion, Ruskiewicz seconded, to approve R&G Produce for 50 acres of cover crop funding at the standard \$70/acre rate. All in favor.

Approval of additional funding for R&G will be considered at the September meeting after other applications are in hand.

Vacancies Update –Sumner presented two candidates he proposes hiring, one for the vacant Conservation District Technician position, and one for the vacant Secretary to the Soil and Water Conservation Board position. Sumner noted that both applicants applied for the Technician position, but that one of them agreed to accept the Secretary position if it is offered.

Both have been reviewed by the County Human Resources department. The Technician applicant has been approved for provisional hiring (until a Civil Service test is offered). The Secretary position is an exempt position. The Secretary applicant has been pre-approved for hiring.

Sumner explained to the Board that he is proposing to include technical duties in the Secretary's duties, and to have himself and the new technician assist in completing tasks previously assigned to the Secretary position. He believes that this modified approach to the office workload could work well and suggests that hiring a full- or part-time additional staff person could be considered going forward depending on how this proposed modified arrangement works. The Board was agreeable to this proposed modified staffing approach.

2023-8-9 DeBlock made the Motion, Wright seconded, to go into executive session to discuss the employment history of a particular person. All in favor.

2023-8-10 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, Constable seconded, to come out of executive session. All in favor.

2023-8-11 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, Wright seconded, to thank DeBlock for her assistance to Sumner in managing office affairs during and after the Office Manager's departure, and to issue a payment to her from our credit card rewards balance of \$550. DeBlock abstained, all others in favor.

2023-8-12 DeBlock made the Motion, Ruskiewicz seconded, to pay bill number 13 on this month's Bills for Board Approval. All in favor.

Banking – With DeGroodt's resignation, she had to be removed from our bank accounts and new signatures were needed by our banks for remaining authorized signers. Sumner and DeBlock completed the necessary paperwork at M&T. Wright may be added to M&T if he visits the bank with his driver's license and signs the necessary paperwork. Paperwork for TD re-authorizing DeBlock, Sumner and Wright and removing DeGroodt was completed.

2023-8-13 Ruskiewicz made the Motion, Constable seconded, to hire Emily King for the position of Secretary to the Soil and Water Conservation Board with a start date of 9/13/2023 at a starting salary of \$45,234, and to hire Mary Held for the position of Conservation District Technician with a start date of 9/5/2023 and a starting salary of \$45,234. All in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

2023-8-14 The Meeting was Adjourned at 11:05 AM on a Motion by DeBlock, seconded by Wright. All in favor.

Minutes Prepared By:

Kevin Sumner, Conservation District Manager