



**VIRTUAL AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**MINUTES**

November 5, 2020  
8:00PM

**PRESENT**

Bob Puskas, Chairman  
Al Puchalek  
Craig Feibel  
Rik Johnson  
Michael Peacos  
Councilman Ted Chase, Liaison from Township Council  
Tara Kenyon, AICP/PP – Land Preservation and Management Consultant

**CALL TO ORDER IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT (N.J.S.A. 10:4-6)**

Chairman Bob Puskas called the meeting to order at 8:09PM

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

*The meeting will be opened to the Public to provide time for comments and/or questions related to the agenda*

Rik Johnson made a motion to open the Public Comment portion of the meeting, which was seconded by Al Puchalek. All agreed and the meeting was opened for public comment.

Barbara Lawrence, residing at 383 South Middlebush Road, stated that she will be speaking at the Franklin Township Board of Adjustment meeting in January in opposition of the development of two proposed temples on South Middlebush Road. In her opinion, South Middlebush Road is historically and currently a rural area in conformance with the Township's Master Plan and Farmland Preservation Plan. Ms. Lawrence stated that this is a highly contentious proposal with many of the residents of the area because of the impact on the existing rural and agricultural character of the corridor. Ms. Lawrence wanted to make sure that this development proposal is on the radar of the Agriculture Advisory Committee.

Hearing no other requests for public comment, Rik Johnson made a motion to close the Public Comment portion of the meeting. This motion was seconded by Craig Feibel with all members in agreement.

**APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 2020 MEETING MINUTES**

Al Puchalek made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 3, 2020 meeting, which was seconded by Craig Feibel. All agreed and the motion carried.

## NEW BUSINESS

### ***Discussion about management issues at Six-Mile Run***

Chairman Puskas updated the group that he made a request at the October Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) to investigate the possibility of managing the agricultural ground at Six-Mile Run. The land in question is owned by the New Jersey Water Supply Authority and currently managed by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. Many of the current leasees have experienced inconsistent decisions and have voiced concern over many provisions in the lease.

Tara Kenyon stated that Township Manager Bob Vornlocker has spoken with the Township's attorney about this issue. His opinion is that the process of taking over management may be difficult since a third-party agreement would have to be negotiated. OSAC recommended that the Township speak with NJDEP about this opportunity in more detail when they are available (all Staff is partially or fully working from home due to Covid-19). Tara also updated the Committee that Bob Vornlocker has concerns over insurance costs and liability issues due to the increase in management responsibilities. Chairman Puskas feels that the Township already has the Staff and resources (Trails and Agriculture Advisory Committees, equipment, etc.), and that insurance can be reviewed prior to taking over any management.

Rik Johnson asked how the rest of the Committee feels about this proposition.

Chairman Puskas states that there are only two renters right now on the agricultural lands in Franklin Township, which comprise approximately 1000 acres. There is one hired Ranger from NJDEP supervising these lands. In instances where a problem arises (trespassing, illegal parking, crop damage from people, etc.), Chairman Puskas has been advised to contact the local police department.

Al Puchalek agrees with the sentiment but is confused about how this Committee can help.

Chairman Puskas replied that the Committee could make a recommendation to OSAC and/or Planning Board and Township Council that the Township take over management for the agricultural lands being leased in Six-Mile Run.

Councilman Ted Chase stated that the Township would have to hire its own Ranger or Rangers to monitor activity and stewardship needs at these properties if the Township took over management responsibilities.

Chairman Puskas responded that it would be easier for the Township to manage these properties using the resources we already have. Chairman Puskas asked Tara Kenyon to discuss her review of the leases prepared by NJDEP.

Tara Kenyon reviewed the leases prepared by NJDEP, per the request of Chairman Puskas. During her review, she found a few items that are in deference to the New Jersey Right-to-Farm Act, specifically the limiting of types of crops that can be grown onsite. Tara asked about the increased amount of maintenance that would be required by the Department of Public Works, and how the lease program would be run (collection of fees, drafting of leases, etc.).

Councilman Chase recommends that Bob Puskas develop a detailed proposal for Council to review (costs, strategy, timeframe, maintenance, etc.)

Chairman Puskas recommends that a subcommittee of renters be formed with an AAC member to learn about the existing problems and management opportunities.

Rik Johnson offered to serve as the AAC member on this subcommittee. Chairman Puskas thanked him and will provide contact information to him.

Councilman Chase reminded Chairman Puskas that because he is a current renter of agricultural land in Six-Mile Run that he cannot serve on the subcommittee due to the conflict of interest.

### ***Submittal of Application for FY2022 Municipal PIG Program***

Every year, the Township must apply to the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) to show obtain farmland preservation funding. The application includes an inventory of preserved farmland, targeted farmland, existing and targeted open space properties as they relate to preserved and targeted farmland, changes to any agricultural policies, balance of the municipal Open Space Trust Fund, and a roster of the current Committee members. Tara is working on compiling the application and will submit it to the SADC by the prescribed deadline of December 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### ***Hunting on State-owned properties bordering/near farmland***

Chairman Puskas reported that hunters at the State-owned properties bordering or near leased agricultural properties often accidentally trespass on the farmland. Most hunters are apologetic and understand the property boundaries moving forward, however there have been incidents where hunters are irritated by the inability to cross the farm fields. Reports have been forwarded to the State, along with requests for better signage for property boundary descriptions

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Craig Feibel made a motion to enter into Executive Session to discuss current property negotiations, which was seconded by Al Puchalek. All agreed and the Committee entered into Executive Session.

**Note:** No official action will be taken following Executive Session so once the Committee enters into Open Session, the meeting will be adjourned.

After discussion, Craig Feibel made a motion to exit Executive Session to discuss current property negotiations, which was seconded by Michael Peacos. All agreed and the Committee exited Executive Session.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Rik Johnson made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Al Puchalek. All agreed and the meeting was adjourned at 9:15pm.