



MINUTES OF THE
VIRTUAL AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

October 7, 2021
8:00PM

WebEx Meeting ID:

<https://franklintwpnj.webex.com/franklintwpnj/onstage/g.php?MTID=eec7954cc57a0a81315303c6b0c0046dc>

Password: FranklinAAC

Audio Information: (408) 418-9388

Access Code: 179 397 6700

PRESENT

Bob Puskas, Chair

Al Puchalek

Craig Feibel

Michael Peacos

Councilman Ted Chase, Liaison -Franklin Township Council

Tara Kenyon, Land Preservation and Management Consultant – Township of Franklin

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

Chairman Puskas called the meeting to order at 8:09pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT – NONE

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

Mark Renfree, member of the public, was present but stated that he had no comment.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2021

Craig Feibel made a motion to approve the June 2021 minutes, which was seconded by Michael Peacos. All agreed, and the motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

Review of Somerset County Preservation Plan – Farmland Preservation Plan element

Tara Kenyon provided an overview of the *Farmland Preservation Plan* element of the *Somerset County Preservation Plan*, as well as the Plan as a whole. This Plan encompasses the updated *Farmland Preservation Plan* (last completed in 2008), the updated *Open Space and Recreation Plan* (last completed

in 2001) and creates a *Historic Preservation Plan* element. The Plan also examines where these programs coincide so that leveraging of funding and partnerships can be implemented.

Tara provided a draft copy of comments to be submitted to the Somerset County Planning Board. These comments include discussing stewardship and wildlife management in greater detail, adding in a discussion about recent amendments to the New Jersey Right-to-Farm Act, and correcting minor items as it relates to farmland preservation in Franklin Township. The Committee reviewed these comments and agreed to submitting them to the County prior to the public comment deadline.

OLD BUSINESS

Database of Active Applications

The Committee continued to discuss the use of an Excel database to document status of projects pending farmland preservation. This database will hold information related to dates when offers are made, contracts are signed, appraisals are ordered and approved, and due diligence is performed. The Committee felt this database is valuable but must be discussed in Executive Session due to the information being sensitive during property negotiations.

2021/2022 Hunting Program

Tara Kenyon updated the Committee that the hunting permits at the newly added County Route 518 Property (formerly known as "Farm Credit East Property") have been suspended indefinitely. A complaint was received by the neighboring property owner related to the traffic and use of the property for hunting so close to her property. Franklin Township's Council decided to suspend the current hunting permits to allow for review of the access and potentially design an alternative driveway and parking area.

In the interim, all hunters having permits for the County Route 518 property can hunt at Ten-Mile Run with their current permits. Tara will continue to update the Committee as to the status of the permits and changes to access.

Stewardship at Grassland Preserves

Tara updated the Committee that stewardship at the Grasslands Preserves is ongoing after much research and strategic planning. Members of the AAC, the Trails Advisory Committee, and the Open Space Advisory Committee met onsite at Negri-Nepote Native Grasslands Preserve to discuss stewardship needs for ecological conservation, habitat protection, and passive recreation. Following that meeting, it was decided that the Franklin Department of Public Works would mow the entirety of Negri-Nepote (with the exception of an identified habitat area for the Monarch butterfly) as well as the entirety of John Clyde Memorial Native Grasslands Preserve.

DPW has already completed the mowing at John Clyde Memorial Native Grasslands Preserve and is nearly completed at Negri-Nepote Native Grasslands Preserve.

Prescribed Burn applications have been submitted to the New Jersey Forest Fire Safety Service for burning of identified field areas (from the *2019 Grasslands Management Plan*, prepared by New Jersey Audubon Society), which will take place between December 2021 and April 2022.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Executive Session was not held.

ADJOURNMENT

Al Puchalek made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Craig Feibel. All agreed and the meeting was adjourned at 8:40pm.