Township of Franklin Agricultural Advisory Committee  
Meeting of September 14, 2020  
Minutes

In attendance (6)  Chay Johnston, Ralph Travaglione, Jim Ketchum, Michelle Doyle, Ken Atkinson, and Cindy Roberts via conference call.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Chay at 7:05 PM after the Flag Salute.  OPMAC guidelines were adhered to.

The minutes of the last meeting (March 9, 2020) were approved. Both the May and the July meetings were not held due to Covid-19 restrictions.

FARM PRESERVATION STATUS

Ken Atkinson reported:
Farms That Are Talking To Our Facilitator To Start Preservation:

DiGioia Farm. Dominick & Tammy. Block 6402, lot 11. Dutch Mill Rd. 15 acres in the Main/Pinee Hollow PIG. Pinelands PRR. They received an application on October 9, 2019. There has been no contact since January 2020.

Hunsinger Farm. Block 5901 lot 88, 23 acres. They received an application in June of 2018. Ken called and left a voice mail if they were still interested. Jeff Thies rents their land, and he will also contact them to see if they still are interested. There has been no contact since January 2020.

Penn Farm. Block 1306 lots 17 & 18, 30 acres. Delsea Dr. Zoned both Highway Commercial and RA, in the Central Project PIG. They received an application on February 10, 2020. They are aware that they cannot preserve their front portion of both lots because of zoning. Because of their commercial exposure adjacent to Delsea Dr. on both lots, the land owners were not concerned. There has been no contact since February 2020.

Jean Bellone Farm. Block 6805 lot 4.1 is in a trust. 32 acres. Jean has signed with intent to preserve and is now deceased.

Andy Bellone. Block 6805 lot 6 is about 18 acres Andy has signed with intent to preserve.
Tom Bellone is about 13 acres. Tom has signed with intent to preserve.

Phil Danko Farm Block 6805 lot 3. 31 acres. Phil has signed with intent to preserve.

All four farms are on Harding Highway in the Downstown area and the front 300 feet of these farms are zoned Highway-Commercial. Their applications are on hold. Steve Bruder of SADC has stated that our zoning ordinance does not include Ag as a permitted use within this zone. Furthermore, the Right-to-Farm act would not apply here to protect these farmers should a concern arise. Therefore, all four farms are currently ineligible to be preserved. The SADC Chief Planner, Chief Legal Counsel, and Program Coordinator all gathered on a very productive conference call with our Facilitator, as well as the Township’s Solicitor and Administrator. The SADC was helpful and gave a road map on how to craft the language for AG to be permitted in all zones of the Township. The word Farm is not specific enough. We need to align our Right To Farm (RTF) ordinance with our land use ordinance. Protected vs allowed. The Township Solicitor is now in the process of crafting language that would achieve the intended purpose.

Our facilitator has researched the zoning language for the Highway Commercial Zone along Harding Highway in its relation to its inclusion in the Township’s Master Plan. Once the Solicitor drafts the new Land Use provision, it will be forwarded to the SADC to ensure it meets with their protocols, and then provided to the Township Committee for consideration for formal adoption.

Grochowski Farm. 260 acres Block 1902 Lot 1 on Fries Mill Rd. This farm is zoned Business Mixed Use and is not in any of our Project Areas. This parcel is on hold while a solar option on the land is in effect until 2023.

Rohs Farm. 30 acres Block 6805 lot 30 on Forest Grove Rd. This farm is zoned RA and is in our PIG area. Fred Rohs first contacted Ken in early Spring and has informed Ralph that due to other pressing issues, he is going to temporarily put a hold on submitting an application. We informed him that we will be ready to assist him when he feels that the time is appropriate.

Martorano Farm. 138 acres. Block 5901 Lots 8, 90, 92, 94, 95, 96, 79.01. Farm is located both on Tuckahoe and Main Roads in our Main/Piney Hollow PIG area. It is in the Pinelands PRR (3.4) acre zone. They first contacted the County in June of 2019. Recently, the Martoranos have contacted the Pinelands Commission to seek approval to build a house on the property. Last contact was September 7, 2020. Cindy Roberts stated that this can be a SADC Direct Easement Farm.

FARMS THAT HAVE BEEN APPRAISED AND CERTIFIED
LaRose/Durkin Farm, 18 acres on Dutch Mill and Tuckahoe Rds. Block 5802 Lot 1. The SADC certified their appraisal on February 28, 2020. Ken and Ralph met with Mr. and Mrs. LaRose on July 28 to discuss their offer. The certified offer was not enough to cover their mortgage with Mrs. Durkin (also on the deed). We discussed with them that the mortgage holder may satisfy the mortgage by accepting the shortfall as payment-in-full. We have given Mrs. Durkin until October 19th to accept the Township’s offer. The plan is to have Mrs. Durkin’s name removed from the deed and add Mr. LaRose’s name, once the mortgage has been paid.

Jeff Thies Farm. Dutch Mill Rd and Lake Rd. Block 5802 lot 21. 79 acres in the Pinelands. One 3.4 acre severable exception along Lake Rd, and one non-severable 1 acre exception along Dutch Mill Rd. have been asked for. On August 11, Ken and Ralph made the Township offer to the Thies family. Mr. Thies felt the offer was considerably lower than the ABNC farm that is next to his farm. His offer is lower because he recently purchased the farm outright at a lower rate per acre than ABNC received for preservation. Furthermore, 27% of the Thies farm is in Pinelands PAP (40 acre minimum) and ABNC’s farm is all in the PRR (3.4) acre zone. He may reject the offer and wait two years and reapply. They currently have a mortgage on the farm and Cindy Roberts suggested that we make the Thies family aware of the interest payments they are making, and they could go away after they agree to our offer and preserve. Currently they have till October 11 to accept or deny our offer.

FARMS THAT HAVE BEEN SURVEYED

McAlister Farm, 62 acres on Dutch Mill and Marshall Rd. Block 5701 lot 17. There is a deed overlap and the Township will pay an additional $500 fee to Fralinger Surveying to identify the five lot owners that also own a portion of the McAlister farm. Mr. McAlister will do a Quit Claim deed and relinquish any claim to 4 of the 5 lots (he owns one of the five lots). Once the Quit Claim deeds are completed, they will be forwarded to the SADC for review and then recorded in the County Clerk’s office. Once this occurs, we will be able to continue with preservation and we anticipate an early winter settlement.

FARMS THAT HAVE SETTLED

Corwonski/Miller ABNC Farm. Block 5802-21, Dutch Mill Rd. 88 acres. PRR zoning. Settlement was on April 22. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the three
parties involved were not present and Ken shuttled papers for signatures. This is the first farm that the Township of Franklin preserved with the aid of South Jersey Land and Water Trust’s facilitator Ken Atkinson. 50% of the Township’s soft costs (Title work, appraiser fees, survey fee) have been reimbursed by the SADC.

SADC REPORT

Cindy Roberts reported that Gloucester County has received a rejection for their offer to preserve the Norm Stiles Farm on Coles Mill Rd. in the Janvier section of the township. Cindy reported that we have $801 thousand in funds left to spend for FY 19. We have received over two million dollars to date from the SADC to preserve farmland here in Franklin. Cindy is doing outreach and training and partnering with Rutgers Univ. They plan on having a zoom training session to help towns address preserved farms and new construction. The meeting will be in early December for Zoning officers, Planning & Zoning secretaries, Township clerks, etc.

PRESERVATION PLAN UPDATE

Ken reported that our plan was last updated in 2009 and we are in the process of our decade update. Bids were received, and the Land Conservatory of NJ was the winning bid with $15,000. 50% of their fee will be reimbursed by the SADC. Barbra Davis has been working with Ken, and work has begun. This work should take about five months. They will tour the Township on October 13. They have requested a work session with our group, on Monday, October 19, at 7:00pm.

NEW BUSINESS

Ken reported that our annual contract with South Jersey Land and Water Trust for our facilitator is up for renewal. SJLWT will bid the same fee for 2021-$17,500.

The next meeting will be held November 9, 2020 at 7:00pm.

Meeting adjourned 8:30 pm.
Respectfully submitted,
Ralph Travaglione
Secretary