

**Minutes of the February 22, 2021**  
**Somerset County Agriculture Development Board**  
**Virtual Meeting**

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the February 22, 2021 Somerset County Agriculture Development Board (CADB) Meeting began at 8:00 AM. This meeting was held virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

*\*There was a moment of silence in recognition of the loss of life suffered on the Puskas farm over the previous weekend. Chairman Kirby sadly reported the tragic incident to the Board as well as the GoFundMe information to support the family at this difficult time.*

**Members in Attendance:**

Mark Kirby, Chairman  
W. Peter Staats, Vice Chairman  
Sandra Rhue, Secretary/Treasurer  
Richard Norz  
Laura DePrado  
Christopher Carnevale  
Ben Auletta  
Matt D'Alessandro, Ex-Officio

**Somerset County Staff:**

Walter Lane, Dir., Planning Div.  
Anthony McCracken, Asst. Dir., Planning Div.  
Kate Katzer, Principal Planner, Planning Div.  
Thomas Boccino, Engineering  
Patrice Brown, Administrative Assistant  
Greg Pasquale, Deputy County Counsel

**Public:**

Amy Mandelbaum, SADC

**Approval of Minutes:**

A correction was made by Ben Auletta citing that he was in fact present at February's meeting but was unable to participate due to his computer's malfunction. A motion to approve the January 25, 2021 minutes CADB meeting minutes with noted correction was made by Laura DePrado and was seconded by Peter Staats. Roll call was done and the motion was passed and carried.

**Public Comment & Presentations:**

There was brief mention of a forthcoming presentation of request from Adonis Basil regarding a Hillsborough Dude Ranch. Planning Director Walter Lane said that the conversation should be revisited when Mr. Basil is able to attend the meeting and submit a formal application.

**Informational Items:**

**I-1) Somerset County Preservation Plan Update:**

Kate Katzer reported that the Steering Committee met two weeks ago and discussed the Agricultural Preservation plan and aspects of the Open Space and Historic Plan as they overlap with the Ag Plan. The Steering Committee voiced concern regarding Open space plans in terms of wildlife or deer management.

They are requesting stronger language to ensure the Farmers' plight was acknowledged and understood by both the Park System and the general public at large. Rich Norz is now a Farmer/ Representative for the CADB Park System's Open Space Preservation Land meeting and he, SCPB staff and Geoff Soriano met with the Park System to discuss some wording that would be best alternatives to put into the Open Space Plan as well as the Ag Plan (eventually in some part). The Language was left broad enough to enable adjustments and action as technology develops and as ideas are introduced. Ms. Katzer referred to an email she sent out to the board listing samples of the wording that was compiled for their review. Ms. Katzer then opened the floor to any comments or questions from the Board.

Richard Norz made comment that the meeting centered mainly on White Tail Deer damage but should be more focused on Wildlife management rather than just Deer management since other animals have proven to be just as problematic. He thanked Somerset County Engineer Tom Boccino for the work he has done with the team with wording. Rich Norz also reported that Geoff Soriano of the Park Commission Staff attended the meeting and was able to expedite the Board's case being heard by the Commissioners to obtain a Depredation Permit.

Vice Chair Peter Staats shared his personal challenges with vegetation deterioration on his property; he now realizes that the change is attributed to the droves of deer that are now present. He further suggested that there be more information gathered along with precise direction on management of the Deer without eradication. Richard Norz replied to Peter Staats comment stating that Deer Management in earlier years compared to now is much more difficult because of the vast increase in numbers and different conditions of both the land and the farmers' resources to do so. He expressed a hopelessness that many farmers feel in "fighting a losing battle".

Chairman Kirby expressed his appreciation for Rich representing the Board and for Tom Boccino's work in assembling a new paragraph to the Draft Open Space Masterplan. Tom's edition flowed in a more concise and inclusive manner which allowed for future options should change occur. Planning Director Walter Lane added a thank you to Tom Boccino and noted that it is a staff recommendation that this language would not only be in the Open Space Plan but in the appropriate section in the Farmland Preservation plan. Kate Katzer stated that after the language is changed in both plans, there would be an opportunity for there to be any further changes, comments or concerns by the board.

### **I-2 SADC Meeting-Update**

Rich Norz reported that at the next meeting, the board will be presented with the final document for the Soil Protection Standards on Preserved Farmland. He reported that he would not be available at the meeting. SADC Alternate will sit in during his absence.

Amy Mandelbaum, Regional Acquisition Coordinator for the SADC, shared that the Soil Protection standards are not technically finalized as of yet and will be going out soon for partner comment and review. Ms. Mandelbaum reported that a new Stewardship Manager was hired at SADC, his name is Tim Welmont.

Monitoring concerns should be forwarded to him. Also Acquisition Projects are moving forward. A application was received last week for Drenchko in Hillsborough for a PIG application.

### **I-3 County /State Boards of Agriculture - Update**

Rich Norz shared that the State Convention was held virtually last week and was a one-day event. Mr. Norz commended the department on having everything done in one day observing that it was a very smooth process. Chris Carnevale said that with the Governor extending the Pandemic precautions, it seems likely that there will be a limited number of activities to plan for from a marketing standpoint.

### **I-4 Staff Comments**

Ms. Katzer said that she spoke to Debbie Norz of Norz Farms about Ag in Action and she said that it will be held on Father's Day in June this year. Mrs. Norz also shared with Ms. Katzer that any further information regarding Ag in Action would be forwarded as soon as possible to be shared with the Board.

The Drenchko application was formally submitted and Hillsborough sent necessary paperwork to Amy Mandelbaum.

Ms. Katzer asked if a card should be sent to the Puskas family. The Board replied with an emphatic "Yes".

Ms Katzer also shared that the Segal and Morel request for appraisal RFP went out and the deadline is approaching. So far there are 4 submissions. Once everything is collected, it will be presented to the Board and then the Commissioners for review.

## **DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS:**

### **D-1) Doyle Farms (Hillsborough)**

Mrs. Katzer stated that the Doyle Farm has officially closed. Final documentation has been received.

### **D-2) Dorn (Branchburg)**

Ms. Katzer reported that she has been unable to pick a site visit day because the weather has proven inclement each time. She is hopeful that she will be able to take the appraisers out to the sites soon. The owners have been actively working to submit any documentation that the appraisers request.

### **D-3) Mueller Settlement Documents (Hillsborough)**

Ms. Katzer stated this is another property that she was unable to visit due to the Snow. A joint site visit was arranged to include Linda Peterson and the Soil Conservation staff to talk about issues to be handled and in what order to handle them. With the snow covering the ground, the team is unable to view the erosion and sediment issues on the property. All are currently waiting a substantial bit of melt to ensure visibility of the problem areas.

#### **D-4) Norz Hill (Hillsborough)**

Kate Katzer referred to the packet which contained an updated resolution with clarification points requested by Rich Norz. The requested changes from the board were made.

***\*Please note: Rich Norz recused himself from all discussions having to do with any Norz Hill matters.***

#### **D-5) Motion to enter Closed Session:**

A motion to enter Closed Session was made by Laura DePrado and was seconded by Sandra Rhue seconded. The motion was passed, a roll call was done and the Board entered Closed Session at 8:50a.m.

#### **D-06) Results and Actions from Closed Session**

**Norz Hill Farm:** Kate Katzer reported to the board that the changes requested regarding ownership have been made. Comments were received regarding the language in the Preservation Plan from Nick Polanin and Commissioner Paul Drake. Motion to approve the resolution for the Norz Hill Farm SSAMP site was moved by Ben Auletta and seconded by Sandra Rhue.

A roll call was done where all were yes with the exception of Peter Staats who abstained and Richard Norz who recused himself. The Motion was passed and carried.

Ms. Katzer mentioned Ag Day materials from 2020 have been inspected and repurposed for distribution to libraries to be handed out at their small events. An online presentation will also be available on the website for teachers and at home parents to share with children. Ms Katzer also shared the games, coloring books and maps that are being developed for distribution as entertainment and informational tools for children as well as adults.

#### **D-7) Adjournment**

*Next meeting to be held on March 22, 2021 via Zoom at 8:00p.m.*

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Richard Norz and was seconded by Laura DePrado. All voted Yes and the motion was passed and carried.

Respectfully Submitted by,

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Sandra Rhue  
Secretary/Treasurer