

**Minutes of the July 25, 2022**  
**Somerset County Agriculture Development Board**  
**Virtual Meeting**

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the July 25, 2022 Somerset County Agriculture Development Board (SCADB) Meeting began at 8:00 A.M. This meeting was held virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Open Public Meetings Statement**

Chairman Mark Kirby reported the meeting had been duly advertised in accordance with Open Public Meetings Act as follows:

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 *et seq.*, and the Emergency Remote Meeting Protocol for Local Public Bodies N.J.A.C. 5:39-1.1 through 1.7, adequate notice of this meeting has been provided. The date, time and virtual meeting information for this meeting were published in The Star~Ledger and the Courier News. The agenda and the virtual meeting information were also posted on the County Planning Board website.

**Roll Call**

Roll call was taken. There was a quorum.

**Members in Attendance:**

Mark W. Kirby, Chairman  
W. Peter Staats, Vice Chairman  
Sandra D. Rhue, Secretary/Treasurer  
Laura DePrado  
Robert Shultz  
Matt D'Alessandro, Soil Conservation District  
County Commissioner Paul Drake, Liaison

**Members Not in Attendance:**

Kenneth Osterman

**Somerset County Staff:**

Walter C. Lane, Director, Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development  
Kate Katzer, Principal Planner, Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development  
Thomas Boccino, Supervising Planner – Preservation, Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development  
Patrice Brown, Administrative Assistant, Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development  
Greg Pasquale Esq., Deputy County Counsel

**Public Members Present:**

Dave Clapp, SADC Staff

Dave Zaback, SADC Staff  
Richard Dodds- NJCF Staff  
Linda Petersen, Consultant for Michael Mueller  
Mark Melillo, owner of Jessica Associates Farm  
Nick Villa, owner of Bluebird Farm Alpacas

### **Approval of Minutes:**

Due to a problem with PDF translation, Peter Staats made a motion to postpone the June 27, 2022 SCADB meeting minutes until next meeting. The motion was seconded by Laura DePrado. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion unanimously passed. A motion to approve the May minutes was made by Laura DePrado and seconded by Peter Staats. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion unanimously passed.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT & PRESENTATIONS:**

#### **1. Jessica Associates Farm- (Bernardsville)**

Principal Planner Kate Katzer shared with the Board that Mr. Mark Melillo, owner of Jessica Associates Farms on Campbell Road in Bernardsville is seeking a Commercial Farm Certification for his 62-acre farm. This farm currently hosts ducks, sheep and has fruit trees, hay, and alfalfa. Mr. Melillo spoke about his intention for a multi-generational style of living coupled with his vocation in restoration. He expressed that he was pleased that there was opportunity to accomplish everything all at once. Mr. Melillo touched on the history of this property and the many improvements he has made. This matter will be discussed in closed session.

#### **2. Bluebird Farm Alpacas- SSAMP (Peapack/Gladstone Township)**

Principal Planner Kate Katzer reminded the Board that Nick Villa, Owner of Bluebird Farm Alpacas, came before the Board previously in June to obtain a Commercial Farm Certification which was approved by the Board. Mr. Villa has returned to seek application for a (SSAMP) Site Specific Agricultural Management Plan. Mr. Villa runs an alpaca operation where they raise and then shear the alpaca harvesting their fibers for sale. Mr. Villa has a tenant flower farmer and is seeking approvals to utilize the lower level of his barn for a flower co-op. Mr. Villa would like to obtain approval for events to take place on this property, as well as seeking the ability to have one Agricultural Labor Housing Unit on the second floor of the existing barn structure. This is not a preserved farm. This matter will be discussed in closed session.

### **INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

#### **SADC Meeting –Update**

Dave Clapp, of the State Agriculture Development Committee reported that the SADC will hold its next meeting July 28, 2022 in person at the State Offices in Trenton. There is a virtual option available as well. Mr. Clapp provided an update on the Soil Protection Standards. Informal comments were submitted to the Committee last month and staff is currently updating the rule text. When the final proposal is ready it will be given back to the State Agriculture Development Committee, and they will vote to publish it in the New Jersey Register as a Notice of Proposal which will start a formal public comment period. A newsletter is currently in preparation

stage to be distributed to various preserved farm owners that will have information about the rules and opportunities available to the farmers.

Linda Petersen, consultant for the Mueller Farm, asked if the Soil Erosion Sediment Control Plan that was submitted was reviewed by the SADC yet and requested the status of that approval. Dave Clapp of the SADC replied that the plan had been reviewed and was awaiting final comments from his supervisor. Mr. Clapp stated that the comments should be out to Linda Peterson by the end of the week.

### **County /State Boards of Agriculture – Update**

No Update.

### **Staff Comments**

Principal Planner Kate Katzer reminded the Board about this year's 4-H Fair. The 4H Fair will take place August 10<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Ms. Katzer also reported that the Deerfield Farm is set to close on July 28, 2022.

Ms. Katzer shared that staff met with the State Agriculture Development Committee's (SADC) David Zaback and Cindy Roberts on July 7<sup>th</sup> to discuss current projects occurring in the County. Staff members were introduced to Richard Dodds of New Jersey Conservation Foundation who has replaced Beth Davidson.

Director of Planning, Policy and Economic Development, Walter Lane informed the Board the Preservation Plan will be presented at the October County Planners Association meeting. Director Lane also informed Chairman Kirby that the 4H Fair tables will be staffed without the need for Board member assistance this year.

### **DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS:**

#### **1.Blue Bird Farm Alpacas (Peapack/Gladstone)**

To be discussed during closed session.

#### **2.Jessica Associates Farm (Bernardsville Township)**

To be discussed during closed session.

#### **3.Drenchko Property (Hillsborough Township)**

Principal Planner Kate Katzer mentioned that proceedings are underway. Bruce Carlin and Merrill Taub have been hired to appraise the property. Staff has met with the appraisers and led them on a site visit where they were able to obtain photos and gain more information on the property. The property owners were present for the tour and were guided through the steps of the process taking place. The appraisers are working diligently to have the reports within 30 days.

David Kois, Hillsborough Director of Economic and Business Development is currently working toward removing the clause in the Drenchko deed that would disallow further development of the property which would deem it ineligible for preservation through the State program. It is the intention of Somerset County Agriculture Development Board to request reimbursement from the State Agriculture Development Committee for this property and its ineligibility status would prevent that. This matter will be discussed in closed session.

#### **4. Wesley -King (Bedminster Township)**

Principal Planner Kate Katzer reported to the Board that the new owners of this property are interested in taking over the preservation application from the previous owners (Wesley-King) and are interested in continuing the preservation process.

#### **5. Bridge Replacement-Dutch Hollow Farm (Bedminster/Bridgewater)**

Principal Planner Kate Katzer updated the Board that Planning, Policy and Economic Development staff have been working in conjunction with County Engineering staff to update the plans to avoid impacting a preserved farm. The meetings taking place between Somerset County Planners and Engineers ensure that there is no detriment to the easement of the property. State Agriculture Development Committee and Planning staff will review the revised plans. Staff will meet with Assistant County Engineer, Adam Slutsky to discuss strategies to minimize preventable delays in road and bridge projects on preserved properties in the future.

#### **6. Christopher Carnevale – Resolution of Appreciation**

Principal Planner Kate Katzer read the Resolution of Appreciation for Christopher Carnevale which is included in the packet for review. Mr. Carnevale is to be invited to be presented with this honor in person at the upcoming September SCADB meeting. A motion was made by Laura DePrado and seconded by Sandra Rhue to approve this resolution. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was unanimously passed.

#### **7. August Meeting**

The August meeting will be cancelled for this year unless pressing matters arise. A motion was made by Sandra Rhue and seconded by Peter Staats to approve the August meeting cancellation. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was unanimously passed.

#### **CLOSED SESSION:**

At 8:42 a.m., a motion was made by Laura DePrado and seconded by Sandra Rhue to go into closed session. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion unanimously passed.

At 8:58 a.m., the Board came out of closed session.

#### **RESULTS AND ACTIONS FROM CLOSED SESSION:**

##### **Jessica Associates Farm (Bernardsville Township)**

A motion was made by Sandra Rhue and seconded by Peter Staats to for approve Commercial Farm Certification. A roll call vote was taken and the motion unanimously passed.

**Blue Bird Farm Alpacas (Peapack/Gladstone Township)**

A motion was made by Laura DePrado and seconded by Sandra Rhue to approve the SSAMP (Site Specific Agricultural Management Plan) application as submitted by the owner, and to refer the application to the Right to Farm Committee for the creation of the SSAMP resolution. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion unanimously passed.

**Additional Items for Discussion** Principal Planner Kate Katzer is working to contact representatives from Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Bureau for possible demonstrations at this year's Somerset County 4-H Fair. These demonstrations would take place in the Government Tent to further educate the public about the important role County farmers play in the community, and the many jobs they must perform on their farm to ensure the sustainability of their business.

At 9:11 a.m., a motion was made by Laura DePrado and seconded by Bob Shultz to adjourn. A vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

***The next meeting will be held on September 26, 2022, at 8:00 a.m.***

Respectfully Submitted by,

*Sandra Rhue*

Sandra Rhue  
Secretary/Treasurer