

LOWER MAKEFIELD
FARMLAND PRESERVATION, INC.
MINUTES – FEBRUARY 15, 2021

The regular meeting of the Lower Makefield Farmland Preservation, Inc. (Farmland) Board of Directors (the Board) was held remotely on February 15, 2021. Mr. Blank called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Those present:

Farmland Preservation, Inc:	Michael Blank, President Dennis Steadman, Vice President and Acting Secretary Daniel Bankoske, Treasurer Dawn Bock, Member Sean Carney, Member
-----------------------------	--

Absent:	James McCartney, Supervisor Liaison
---------	-------------------------------------

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Bankoske moved, Ms. Bock seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the Minutes of January 13, 2021 as written.

FOLLOW-UP ON PROPOSAL FOR HONEYBEES: Mr. Steadman

Background:

The proposal is for a small plot set back from residential neighbors and cornfield within the wooded area at Makefield Brook property (currently leased to Charlann Farms) to be leased to Dr. Strnad, a neighboring beekeeper for a three-year trial period to establish honeybee hives. Dr. Sven Strnad, 1433 Wheatsheaf Drive, is a PhD entomologist and experienced beekeeper. Mr. Sam Stewart and Mr. Tim Stewart who farm the field have no objection to honeybee hives at this location; and in fact, Charlann Farms uses honeybee hives to support some of their crops. While the hives at Makefield Brook will not be important in pollinating the cornfield, they are good for the general environment in the vicinity. The Township Ordinances were reviewed, and there were none associated with beehives. The honey produced would be donated/given away, and this project would also provide unique community education, which Dr. Strnad has said he would be happy to provide as an experienced entomology educator.

Lease:

Since the entire parcel is currently Leased to Charlann Farms, rather than have Charlann sub-Lease this small plot and become a “middleman” between honeybee keeper and Farmland, it was felt that Farmland would enter into the Lease directly with Dr. Strnad with a “side letter” with Charlann Farms approving the modification to their Lease.

A Lease for honeybee farming has been drafted to lease approximately ~150 Sq. Ft. (~10Ft x ~15Ft) with the specific location to be determined based upon appropriateness for honeybees, distance from residences, and access from Dr. Strnad’s back yard. The Lease contains all the same terms, conditions, indemnification, responsibilities and liability provisions and language as the standard Farmland Lease. It is modified, where appropriate, recognizing this is honeybee farming and not crop farming. (For example, provisions for non-till, soil conservation removed.) The Board had been asked for their opinion as to the Farmland standard requirement to carry a minimum of \$1 million of liability insurance, which seems excessive in the case of this type of small activity. This has not yet been discussed with Dr. Strnad. It was proposed the lease amount would be a nominal charge of \$1 or \$10/yr. as this is not a commercial operation, and the honeycomb will not be sold.

Access:

Currently, there is a Farmland fence across Dr. Strnad’s back yard, and it is proposed that Farmland install a simple, non-permanent farm gate which would allow Dr. Strnad passage to service the operation (likely on approximately a weekly basis). In the past, other Farmland neighbors have wanted to install gates along their rear yards to give them access to the Farmland property, but this is not permitted as it would be trespassing. In this case, Dr. Strnad would have a Lease to the property and needs access, so this is a very different situation and thus, would not create a problematic precedent concerning other neighboring homeowners. Mr. Steadman will ask Dr. Strnad to let surrounding neighbors know that his ‘gate’ is strictly because he has leased part of the parcel. The leased plot would have demarcation (such as posts on the four corners with string or tape). A fence is not proposed.

Timing:

Typically, a colony and equipment would need to be ordered within the next few weeks so that the colony could be established in the spring. However, Dr. Strnad has indicated that he has the capability to split off a queen and some colony bees from his current honeybee colonies in Ewing, NJ to seed this new site. This gives the Board additional time to consider this project although it is suggested that a decision be made by April.

It was agreed that Mr. Steadman present the draft Lease to Dr. Strnad and discuss the insurance and indemnification issues to determine an acceptable approach and report back to the Board. No final decisions were made, and the topic will be discussed at the March meeting.

Mr. Steadman will prepare the side letter for Charlann Farms for consideration by the Board and Charlann Farms.

The Board discussed the proposal to send a letter to the surrounding neighbors. It was decided to send a letter to those neighbors whose properties border the Makefield Brook parcel. The letter is to provide information on the proposal, its potential community benefits, notice of the gate, and seeking public comment. Mr. Steadman will draft the letter for Board review and compile a mailing list of adjacent recipients.

There was no one from the public wishing to speak on this matter.

FOLLOW-UP ON PROPOSAL FOR HISTORICAL SEARCH OF FARMLAND: Mr. Blank

The Board has agreed to let Mr. Doug Johnson and Mr. Jason Bozuffi do historical searches on the farmland using metal detectors, and they have thanked the Board for granting them access to the Farmland properties. Board members were encouraged to look for them on the properties and ask the farmers if they have seen them. These hobby historians had indicated that they are currently doing map and document research to learn where former farmhouses, etc. were located, after which they will then go out to the properties.

There was no one from the public wishing to speak on this matter.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Mr. Bankoske

Operating Expenses included paying for stamps, envelopes, and copying for the letter that was sent to all neighbors of Farmland properties in the Township. Rent was received from everyone other than Charlann Farms. Mr. Steadman will follow up with Mr. Stewart on the rents. Rents were slightly less than expected, and Mr. Bankoske will review this further.

There was no one from the public wishing to speak on this matter.

UPDATE ON BUFFER ISSUES:

FARMVIEW I: (1604 and 1642 Fairfield Rd) – Mr. Bankoske

The resident from 1604 Fairfield Rd had reached out regarding trees and debris from the woods. An aerial photo was shown of the area. There is a relatively small tree bordering the field, which the farmer must go around to maintain the buffer. This is not urgent, but should be taken care of the next time someone is on the property doing work.

The home and driveway at 1642 Fairfield Rd were shown where a number of issues need to be addressed. The field of Farmview I was there long before the development and whatever mitigation put in place to prevent these drainage issues is not working at this point.

- (1) The aerial shows a swampy area and also an area where trees came down. Water is coming to the driveway and going into the street and also goes across the driveway and into the neighbor's yard at 1644 Fairfield. One corner of the farmland was noted where crops should not be planted. Modifying the direction of the planting should also be considered to help the water situation. Building up the terraces or berms may also help. There needs to be discussions with Mr. Stewart about this and continue to monitor it. Maybe we could get the Bucks Conservation District out at some point.
- (2) Further north, within the field, there is a soil conservation drainage swath, which should be revisited before planting takes place, and the property should be looked at by the Board, Mr. Stewart, and Mr. McGowen to see what is being done now compared to the Plan as it seems that it should be wider in certain areas.
- (3) At the end of this ravine, at the NW corner of the field is another issue. Because of the way water drains down the field, an area of the property becomes a 'pond' at times of the year. The tree line/property line is an elevated ridge preventing water from reaching the basin. Additionally, some years ago the Township installed a rock dam further impeding water reaching the basin. It was decided that there should be a site visit with the Township to develop a plan to correct the situation.

The Board had worked with Mr. Hucklebridge from the Township previously on these issues and Mr. Bankoske will contact Mr. Hucklebridge with a copy sent to Mr. Majewski regarding all these Farmview I drainage issues to reach a solution.

Leedom: (2052 and 2088 Farmview Dr.) – Mr. Carney

A tree is down from the buffer toward the fence line at 2052 Farmview Dr., which is being held up by overgrowth. This is not an imminent situation.

The homeowner at 2088 Farmview was contacted via e-mail advising that Mr. Carney would be walking the fence line in late January as well as walking the farmland with Matt Corcoran of Corcoran Landscaping. There is overgrowth back by the fence, and there are some stumps indicating Farmland had been active in the past in that location. There is nothing imminent there, but since this Lease just changed hands, it is a good time to clean up the buffer to what the Board wants, and document that with pictures. This way, the Board can ensure that the tenant maintains the buffer in this proper state in future years. Mr. Corcoran had a number of good ideas for this area, including trimming some trees up to 8Ft-10Ft so that tractors can get through to keep the area clean. This will be discussed further at the Executive Session meeting later this week.

Stackhouse: (1578 Brookfield Dr.) – Mr. Carney

A large dead tree fell behind 1578 Brookfield Dr., which originated on the fence line and fell from the fence line into the buffer area. The homeowner has not made any contact. Pictures of the tree have been put in the file, and this will be part of a project on the fence line when Mr. Corcoran is in the area doing bamboo and other work. Post work is also needed on the fence line as the tree took it out when it fell. These issues will be discussed further when the Board meets in Executive Session later this week.

Review of Bridle Estates: - Ms. Bock

There are no issues on this property line. Contact information for Mr. Wright, Breezyvale Farm, will be made available to Ms. Bock.

There was no one from the public wishing to speak on this issue.

PLANS FOR BUFFER MAINTENANCE

Executive Session Scheduled for 02-18-2021

An Executive Session will be held this Thursday to discuss buffer maintenance issues, approaches, and priorities. The Board was satisfied with the Agenda for that meeting.

UPDATE ON INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO NEIGHBORS: Mr. Blank

Letters were sent out early February to the neighbors and there has already been good feedback. Each of the farmers was also sent a copy of the letter, and they were also thanked for putting the land to agricultural use. Mr. McGowan advised that he felt the tone of the letter was right. There was a response from a neighbor through the Township indicating she was taking down some trees on her own property off of Heather Ridge, and she wanted to let the Board know. This is positive.

There was no one from the public wishing to speak on this issue.

YEARLY REVIEW OF BOARD OPERATING PRINCIPLES: Mr. Blank

The Board agreed to review the Operating Principles on a yearly basis. The President and the Vice President have been given the ability to approve up to \$500 worth of work without consulting with the rest of the Board on the condition that it is brought up to the Board at the earliest possible time, likely the next meeting. Any member of the Board who has incurred expense will be reimbursed provided it is approved by a majority of the Board. The Board has agreed to respond to each other within a day or two assuming there are no illnesses/extenuating circumstances. It has been agreed to put "Farmland" on the subject line when communicating with each other via email. Microsoft Office SharePoint is being used. The Board will review and evaluate the effectiveness of Farmland meetings whenever needed and continue to improve the process. The Board agreed that they would strive to reach consensus; but if they could not, they would make sure that everyone could live with the decision made, and recognize that there may be cases where a simple majority vote carries. The Operating Principles are in the SharePoint site and can be modified provided the modification is proposed to the Board.

OTHER BUSINESS

Barbara Ellison retired the end of January, and her replacement Katie McVan, (katiem@lmt.org) was sent an email to find out when the Farmland meetings are scheduled for March and April. The Board will be advised once those dates are known.

Mr. Carney reported on an Action Item from last meeting regarding the Conservation Plan north of 1561 Dolington to be done in the spring. Mr. Carney spoke with the resident, Mr. Kaplan, who had requested a copy of the Conservation Plan, which was provided to him.

Mr. Carney stated he received a copy of the letter to the Neighbors which. he felt was very effective. He suggested that if this is done again in the future, it should be addressed to the homeowner on record, but also list “or current resident.” Homes have been selling quickly, and two of his nearby neighbors did not receive the letter because those homes had recently sold and it was forwarded to the previous owner. In this case, he made copies for those two neighbors; nevertheless, there are likely other new owners who did not receive the letter. It was agreed that all future such mailings include “(or current resident)” in order to address this issue as mailing lists cannot always be sufficiently up to date.

There was no one from the public wishing to speak at this time.

REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS: Mr. Blank

Mr. Steadman – Follow up with Sam Stewart/Charlann Farms regarding rent due.

Mr. Steadman – Follow up on Honeybee Lease, including insurance and Charlann Farms Side Agreement.

Mr. Steadman – Create list of names and addresses of the adjoining Makefield Brook neighbors.

Mr. Bankoske – Work with the Township on Farmview I drainage issues.

Ms. Bock – Contact Doug Wright and introduce herself as Farmland liaison.

There being no further business, Mr. Steadman moved, Ms. Bock seconded and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 6:41 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael Blank, President