

FARMLAND PRESERVATION, INC.  
MINUTES – JANUARY 17, 2023

The regular meeting of the Lower Makefield Farmland Preservation, Inc. (Farmland) Board of Directors (Board) was held remotely on January 17, 2023. Mr. Steadman called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Those present:

Farmland Preservation, Inc.: Dennis Steadman, Vice President  
George Heinze, Secretary  
Dan Bankoske, Treasurer  
Sean Carney, Member

Others: John B. Lewis, Supervisor Liaison

Absent: Michael Blank, Farmland Preservation Inc. President

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Mr. Heinze

Mr. Carney moved, Mr. Bankoske seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the Minutes of November 15, 2022 as presented.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR 2023: Mr. Heinze

Mr. Steadman moved, Mr. Bankoske seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the election of Michael Blank as President for 2023.

Mr. Bankoske moved, Mr. Carney seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve the election of Dennis Steadman as Vice President for 2023.

Mr. Carney moved, Mr. Steadman seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve Dan Bankoske as Treasurer for 2023.

Mr. Bankoske moved, Mr. Steadman seconded and it was unanimously carried to approve George Heinze as Secretary for 2023.

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TREASURER’S REPORT: Mr. Bankoske

Since the last meeting there was a payment to Robert Small & Association for preparation of our compilation, completing QuickBooks for 2022, and prepayment for 2023 purposes for a total of \$4,200 and was in line with what had been agreed to last year. Two checks have been received for 2023 rent, one from Charlann Farms and one from Colavita Tree Farm. There is also one which has been received at the Township Building which was sent to Mr. Bankoske but has not yet been received.

PROPERTIES & ISSUES UPDATE

a. Winter Work by Corcoran Landscaping – Mr. Carney

We contract ten winter work days at a set day rate with Corcoran Landscaping with projects that we would like to achieve over the winter. Two days are held back which can either be used for another project or continue on projects that were not completed. To date they have finished two days behind 2015 to 2019 Leedom’s Drive which is the Stackhouse Farm where they elevated trees, removed a lot of brush, and it looks more consistent with the rest of the buffer area. Mr. Bankoske stated he just received the invoice for that work. It is believed that the next project will be one day spent on Farmview Drive and then a five-day project between 1367 and 1385 Brentwood Road at Makefield Brook. The crew is currently struggling a bit with the ground, and early in the morning when it is frozen they are working on the properties, but when it thaws they go to Clearview because they can stay on the pavement at that location. Mr. Heinze and Mr. Carney have seen the work done at Stackhouse, and it looks good.

b. Makefield Brook Issues – Mr. Steadman

There have been issues at the wooded area along Dolington Road close to where Dolington crosses 295 which has historically been an issue with bottles and debris in the area. In the summer/fall the area was cleaned up and “No Trespassing” signs were installed; however, Mr. Carney has since noticed more debris. A report was filed with the Lower Makefield Police who indicated that they would inform their night shift to patrol that spot. Mr. Carney added that some trees were cut down in the woods, and there are tire tracks in that area.

c. Clearview Issues – Mr. Carney

Mud marks were seen on the road leading down to the highway and someone has driven into the fields and exited over the hill through the farmed area. Those in the area have indicated it is common to see cars on the road and now in the farming area itself.

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A camera has been installed at the entrance as well as a “No Trespassing” sign indicating it is under surveillance, and two orange cones have been put about 10’ in from where the old chain used to be so that if someone does pull in to check the towers or do work they can still get to the area. Mr. Steadman has made the Lower Township Police aware of this situation as well as it is damaging/vandalism to the agricultural properties.

Mr. Bankoske stated he believes the narrow access point is owned by the Township, and it is used by the farmer. Mr. Carney stated it is also used by the workers to check the towers, and this is why it is not chained. The Township has been advised of this situation.

d. Clearview Limb-Cutting along Access Drive – Mr. Steadman

There is a row of white pines along the access drive that constitutes the boundary between the towers’ property and the Township driveway. The Township had been asked to trim the trees and prune the limbs back as they were damaging the farmer’s equipment, and Mr. Fuller indicated they would be finishing the work this week or next week. Mr. Carney stated Monday and Tuesday they did the limbing-up portion and some of the chipping. The job is not completely finished as there is still some equipment there, but should be done shortly. Mr. Lewis was advised that this request was made to the Township late last year, and Mr. Fuller had indicated that he would have to check to see if there was room in the Budget for 2023, and it seems that work is almost done; and the Board appreciates that responsiveness.

POLICY DISCUSSIONS AND/OR ACTIONS

a. Draft Hunting Policy – Mr. Carney/Mr. Steadman

Some of the Farmland properties are suitable for hunting, and over the years we have participated in the Red Tag Program from the Game Commission which allows the harvesting of antlerless deer outside of regular deer season when it is causing agricultural damage. Each hunter is registered and this gives the Board a roster of hunters who we know are on the property and have the Board’s permission to hunt. In managing that Program and through the regular hunting season, we know there are hunting stands and hunters potentially on our properties who do not have our permission to hunt there. Mr. Carney and Mr. Steadman have tagged every stand that has been found on the properties that they have found indicating that the owner should contact Mr. Carney or Mr. Steadman who are representing Farmland Preservation as the property owner, and their phone numbers are provided so that they can contact them to get proper permission. Twenty-two out of twenty-four stands are registered to hunters that are now on our roster.

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A Hunting Policy has been drafted to provide rules based on Farmland's experience which has been circulated to the Board. Farming in Lower Makefield is economically stressful, and the Township roads are not conducive to agriculture. Crop damage from the surplus deer population has gotten worse over the past decade, and we want to do anything we can do to properly control the deer population for the farmers' agricultural output. We also want to do what we can to insure the safety of the farmers, the neighbors, and the hunters. We also want to do what we can to insure that any hunting on Farmland property is conducted ethically and within all PA Game Commission regulations. Any hunter on Farmland property needs the permission of the Board and the farmers to hunt on our property. The Farmland property is not open to the public and not open to anyone other than the farming tenant with the exception being those hunters who are explicitly given permission to hunt those fields for deer, and it is to be archery only.

Mr. Carney stated we want to properly control what is going on and get proper permission. He did not anticipate finding twenty-four stands on these three parcels – Makefield Brook, Longshore, and Clearview. He stated since the tags were put on, people have contacted us, and there is an open line of communication. There is a new roster with everyone's name, phone number, hunting license number, and their license plate number. Each stand is now registered to a hunter; and if there is an issue, it is easy to know who a stand is registered to. There is a plan to deal with the two stands which have not been heard about if there is no contact by a certain period of time. Some hunters like to hunt out of blinds which are on the ground as opposed to up in a tree, and that changes the trajectory of an arrow; and we would like to do away with blinds on Farmland property based on safety and discreteness. Mr. Carney stated it is difficult to see a ladder stand in a tree when driving by a property, but ground blinds are easy to see when driving by.

Mr. Bankoske stated he agrees with the point with regard to blinds, and he asked if BOWMA uses blinds. Mr. Steadman stated he believes that their policy is that they are only shooting from an elevated perch down to the ground, and Mr. Carney agreed. Mr. Steadman stated that is responsible archery hunting particularly in such dense areas.

The draft policy does state that hunting blinds are not allowed subject to explicit rare exceptions where there may be a location where it is appropriate.

Mr. Heinze asked if the blind is still at Stackhouse where they are building a new home, and Mr. Carney stated it is still there. He stated the hunter had permission to have it

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there until the crop was harvested; and while the crop was harvested two days before Thanksgiving, the blind is still there. He stated it will be removed.

Mr. Carney stated another change is that permission needs to be granted by both Farmland Preservation and the farmer the property is being leased to. He stated in the past, it seems that it could be one or the other. He stated they learned from Mr. Stewart last month that he was seeing people on the property he has never seen. When the roster is 100% complete, the roster will be sent to the Stewarts and Mr. Colavita so he also understands how we are managing the properties with regard to hunting.

Mr. Steadman stated the hunters who are being given permission to hunt these properties are hunting by the rules and respect the land and the landowner. He stated this can be seen in the response rate received to the tags that were placed on the blinds. He stated the hunters also advise the Board if there is a hunter who is not respecting other hunters or the land.

Mr. Bankoske stated Note #2 states the hunter must have explicit permission for a specific parcel, and he feels the next sentence should be that permission can be revoked at any time. He added he feels there has been great progress on this over the last few years.

Mr. Heinze asked if this will be circulated once again amongst the Board and approved at the February meeting, and Mr. Steadman agreed. Mr. Steadman stated it will then be passed out to any hunter who wants a Red Tag and anyone who has a stand. He stated this will be an official Farmland Preservation policy that can be turned to when there is a question.

Mr. Lewis asked how many of those registered are BOWMA hunters; and Mr. Steadman stated BOWMA is its own organization, but the policy will be shared with BOWMA. Mr. Steadman stated BOWMA has been given permission to hunt the Leedom's parcel that backs up to the Garden of Reflection, and that is the only Farmland parcel that they hunt. He stated BOWMA manages their own hunters. Mr. Lewis stated we track with BOWMA the total number of harvested deer, and he asked if we would have some of that data from the Red Tags. Mr. Steadman stated in the Red Tag Program we do because any harvests have to be reported; and any tags that are not used, have to be re-collected and sent back to the Game Commission. He stated we do not get a formal report on harvests during the regular hunting season. He stated possibly we could make it a condition of hunting on our property that when you harvest a deer, you have to report it to the Board including whether it was antlered, antlerless, date, etc. He stated while we have not required that in the past, he would be open to that.

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Mr. Carney stated he has mixed views on this since what they are doing is between them and the Game Commission once they harvest a deer, but he would be open to it if we felt that it made our hunting program more secure. Mr. Lewis stated part of the challenge with the data we have about deer is that we have it from only a couple of sources which is the BOWMA-confirmed harvests and traffic reports of deer incidents which are not fully reported as there are number of interactions with deer that are not reported either to the Police or the Game Commission. He stated we also do not have deer population numbers. He stated this is really a separate policy for the protection of the farmland that Farmland Preservation is concerned about so he would not want to burden the Farmland Preservation Board with that, although he is curious given the deer issues that we have. Mr. Steadman stated while he understands this would be good information to have, we do not want to micro-manage the hunters either although we do want there to be responsible hunting on our land. He stated anything the Township can do to reduce the deer population is worthwhile adding that while BOWMA has harvested quite a few deer, the population has tended to grow over the years.

The Board was asked to review the policy and e-mail Mr. Steadman any suggested edits and the policy will be updated, circulated, and hopefully approved in February.

b. Annual Review of Operating Principles - Mr. Steadman/Mr. Bankoske

Mr. Bankoske stated Mr. Blank put this together a few years ago, and these are good operating principles for a Board which are reviewed every January to see if any changes need to be made. It is provided to new Board members. Board members were asked to consider if any changes need to be made.

Mr. Steadman stated he Chairs the Ad Hoc Property Committee, and provided them with our four bullet points on decision making, and they are looking into using them as well with some revisions.

Mr. Steadman stated he circulated one suggested edit in the decision-making process, and Mr. Bankoske stated Mr. Blank has already included that.

OTHER BUSINESS: All

Mr. Bankoske stated he has been on the Board for eight to nine years and it is a pleasure to have Mr. Lewis back as their Supervisor liaison as he has been the most interactive, supportive, and engaged Supervisor liaison that we have worked with. Mr. Steadman agreed.

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Mr. Steadman stated the Game Commission has modified the Red Tag Program this year. Previously he would submit an Application at the beginning of the year, and they would send him Red Tags to distribute to hunters who had to sign them out, and bring them back to him. He stated now they are sending him a coupon for a Red Tag that he will distribute to the hunters who then turn in the coupon at any place where you can buy a hunting license and that retailer will issue them their Red Tag. He stated the hunter is then individually responsible to do the monthly report as to whether there was a harvest or not, and it will not flow through him anymore; and it will be between the Red Tag hunter and the Game Commission. Mr. Steadman stated if they use a Red Tag and want another, they would have to come to him for another coupon. He stated this does not start until January 27; and before then, he will contact all of the Red Tag hunters so they can pick up a coupon.

Mr. Heinze stated he recalls that this past year, Mr. Steadman had nineteen Red Tags, and he asked if he received nineteen coupons this year or whatever number the Game Commission feels is warranted; and Mr. Steadman agreed. Mr. Steadman stated each coupon/Red Tag is specific to a property, and they issue one coupon per five acres of crop land. He stated if it is a twenty-acre field, he would get four coupons. You cannot take a coupon from parcel to parcel. Mr. Steadman stated the tags are in the name of the farmer since that is the damaged party by the deer crop damage, but we are administering it on behalf of the farmer.

Mr. Carney stated he is aware of a hunter on Mr. Colavita's property who has gone through the process, and went to Dick's with his coupon and got his Red Tag.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Mr. Steadman

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

REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS: Mr. Heinze

1. Mr. Steadman – Circulate the draft Hunting Policy to the Board for any final comment/feedback with the goal to formally approve the document at the February meeting.
2. All Board Members – Review the Operating Principles and make any suggested to Mr. Steadman.

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3. All Board Member – Consider in February a new approach to the informal meeting in December to which tenants, stakeholders, and support people are invited for a December gathering.

There being no further business, Mr. Heinze moved, Mr. Bankoske seconded and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

George Heinze, Secretary

