

**HOWARD COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION BOARD (APB)  
AND STATE AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD (APAB)**

**January 27, 2025**

([Recording](#))

**Attendance:**

Board Members: Jamie Brown  
Cathy Hudson  
Chris Rhodes  
Joe Dymek  
Derek Patrick  
Leslie Bauer

Staff: James Zoller, Executive Secretary/Agricultural Coordinator (OCS)  
Lauren Longo, Planning Specialist, (DPZ)  
Joy Levy, Program Administrator, (ALPP)  
Lisa Bagrosky, Senior Assistant County Solicitor, Office of Law  
Beth Burgess, Chief, Resource Conservation Division

Guests: Ann Jones, Josh Feldmark, Sue and Jeff Harrison, Kathy Johnson

**Action Items**

**1. Minutes from the November 25th 2024 meeting**

Mr. Dymek motioned for approval, and Ms. Hudson seconded the motion. All members in attendance were in favor of the motion, so the motion passed and the November 25<sup>th</sup> 2024, Minutes were approved.

**2. Request for Recommendation to County Executive, Easement Acquisition, Harrison property; 67 +/- acres**

Ms. Levy reviewed the staff report with the board. Mr. Brown questions on the validity of Soil Productivity as Measured by Land score in today's world. The board agrees to an additional 5 points as farm business is active in the local community and additional 5 points for easement is owner. Score amended from 20 to 30 points.

**3. Recommendation for Approval, Revisions to APB Commercial Solar Facility Policy**

Ms. Levy reviewed the Solar Facility Policy as requested from November meeting. Mr. Brown asked about the forestry and the woods in relation to the acreage. Mr. Brown considers 20%

unsuitable and asks how the 20% could be farmed. Ms. Hudson asks for a definition of what is 'unsuitable for farming'. The property owner needs to bring their burden of evidence and justification to hearing examiner.

Ms. Hudson suggests that steep slopes that are non-farmable be prioritized over flat areas, understanding that sloped areas are less return on money.

Ms. Jones objects to policy change and suggests that the change be made in the zoning regulations. Ms. Jones emphasizes that most of the property is rented and not being owner operated. There is a need to add a requirement for the CSF to be owner operated in the zoning regulations. The definition should encompass both landowners who actively manage the farm and those who lease their land to separate operators.

Ms. Levy reviews the current list of solar projects over the years and who was owner vs. not owner operated. All were concerned that some operations are not farming the land at all. Ms. Bauer suggests that an inspector or enforcer would be needed.

Ms. Hudson motioned to make amendments to section 1.b.2 to state additional acreage above the allowable 20% is unsuitable for farming or be either c or d slopes, no second. Motion died.

Mr. Dymek motioned to add a #4 under criteria to require the applicant be an owner operated. Ms. Hudson second. All voted yes except Ms. Bauer voted no. Ms. Gibbon was absent. Motion passed 5 to 1.

Overall changes to the Policy: Mr. Dymek moved to approve the policy as amended. Mr. Rhodes second. All voted yes except Ms. Bauer voted no. Motioned passed 5 to 1.

#### **4. Recommendations for FY26 Budget**

Mr. Zoller presented a form with budget items and board members ranked by importance for FY26. Scoring results: #1 Enhanced Ag Grants, #2 Ag Innovation and Expansion Grants, #3 Roving Radish Support, #4 Grants for BMP, #5 New and Beginner Farmer Program, #6 Roving Radish Marketplace Website, #7 Protein Farmer Assistance, #8 HoCo Harvest for the Hungry, #9 Ag Marketing, #10 4H & FFA Program, #11 Special Ag Events, #12 Office of Ag Vehicle, #13 Invasive Weed Control Specialist.

#### **5. New and Beginner Farmer Program**

Ms. Johnson discussed a new and beginning farmers program where individuals interested in farming can apply to receive land from quarter acres up to two acres to work the land for 2-3 years. It is still to be determined whether equipment will be provided or not. There is already interest. The hope is that a current farmer(s) will come in and assist with mentorship, education and the initial tilling. Program is still evolving and there will potentially be a committee or

advisory board to help run this program. Mr. Brown moved to approve program as presented, all in favor.

## **Discussion Items**

### **6. Soil conservation**

There is confusion about caps on funding for farmers and the need for more transparency from Soil Conservation. If there is a cap on funding, is it per project or lifetime. A meeting with Soil Conservation should be scheduled to discuss budget allocation and project progress.

### **7. Office of Agriculture Updates**

Howard County Office of Agriculture is completed and open. Currently operating from Hebb House site. Administrative Assistant, Emily Sizemore, and Agricultural Program Manager, Jasmine Simone, have been hired and have started. EDA Kathy Johnson is in the office a few days a week. Ribbon cutting date is to be determined, sometime in March when weather is better.

Networking event for farmers scheduled for February 26th at 5:30 PM. "Connect and Collaborate" event At Tony Locos for a networking day. Will have Ag agencies present. EDA, SCD, Extension, Farm Bureau.

### **8. Meeting Adjourned**

Mr. Brown motioned to adjourn, and it was seconded. All attending members were in favor of the motion, so the motion passed, and the meeting adjourned.