



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

450 Columbus Blvd, Suite 703 | Hartford, Connecticut 06103 | 860.713.2500

Bureau of Agricultural Development & Resource Conservation

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FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, July 21, 2022

9:00 – 10:50am

BOARD MEEMBERS PRESENT:

- Jiff Martin (Vice Chair), Ben Freund, Jason White, Will O'Meara, Joan Nichols, Ellie Angerame, Elisabeth Moore, Robert Chang

DOAG STAFF PRESENT:

- Cam Weimar, Jaime Smith, Holly Lalime

PUBLIC PRESENT:

- Chelsea Gazillo (Working Lands Alliance)

Meeting Called to Order at 9:03AM by Chairperson Jiff Martin

Approve May Meeting Minutes:

Jason White made a motion to approve the May meeting minutes. Ben Freund seconded the motion. Board voted to approve the May meeting minutes. Ellie Angerame abstained.

PDR Programs Report (Cam Weimar):

- 2022 State Fiscal Year recently ended. The Department closed on 16 farms. Fifty-seven percent of project costs came from project partners. We are now at 403 protected farms and a little over 47,000 acres protected. There are 25 farms under agreement covering about 1,700 acres. There are 57 projects in the pipeline covering about 3,800 acres.
- Stewardship is in full swing this summer and fall.
- The Department's Fairfield Hills property is due for a new holder as well as a Department of Corrections property. The Department is having internal discussions

about the Savin Property and how that property can remain open and available for agriculture.

- Jaime Smith: The Department submitted a project to the SPRB in late June. It was approved in less than four weeks with no questions or concerns from the board.

Jaime Smith provided a presentation to the board outlining changes and updates to the preservation program.

- The Department needs to revise its approach to meet the recent Executive Order that mandates the preservation program close projects within 24 months.
- There will soon be an annual application acceptance period. This would likely be for just one year to allow the Department to catch up on the 57 projects that are in the pipeline.
- The Department is establishing separate tracks for the FLPP and CFPP. All applications must first be scored by the FPP criteria. If it is not eligible for FPP it can then be scored by the CFPP scoring criteria.
- The Department is reconstructing policy and procedures.
- The Department is creating a FLPP research RFP to hire a firm to collect feedback from industry partners, farmland owners, and project partners.

Update on Chair Leadership:

- Robin Chesmer and Jiff Martin will create bylaws for chair leadership and share it with the board at an upcoming meeting.

Agricultural Lands Easement Program (ALE) Discussion:

- Jeffrey Everett shared his views on ALE at the last meeting. He believes that the ALE program is very slow and cumbersome. Therefore, New Jersey does not do projects with ALE.
- Board discussed how to prioritize ALE funding with the current program funding. There were discussions about creating a threshold dollar amount for ALE (i.e. projects estimated to cost above XX amount will trigger an ALE funding application).
- The board discussed whether moving away from ALE for better strategizing its use could support the protection of small and urban farms that are currently bypassed because of soil composition or size.

- The board would like to see a pros/cons list for ALE and to compare timelines for ALE vs. non-ALE projects

Appraisal Issues:

- This conversation is being tabled for a future meeting.

Board Policy Concerns and Recommendations:

- Ben Freund made a motion to put forward the advice that was presented last year regarding OPAV. Joan Nichols seconded the motion with an amendment that the motion state: “The Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (FPAB) advises the Department to create OPAV legislation in the 2022 legislative session.” Motion passed.
- Joan Nichols made a motion to advise the Department to conduct an extensive study on the usefulness and potential effects of PDR subdivision before a legislative proposal is brought forth in the 2022 legislative session. Ben Freund seconded the motion. Joan Nichols amended the motion to include that the Department’s research be presented to the FPAB. Motion passed.
- Joan Nichols made a motion to hold a special meeting in August, with the Commissioner present, to address policy recommendations on OPAV and the Department’s PDR subdivision legislation. Ben Freund seconded the motion. Motion passed.
- Ben Freund made a motion to advise the Department to expand its staff in order to address the needs of smaller farmland preservation applications in support of urban agriculture. Ellie Angerame seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Public comment:

- Chelsea Gazillo discussed with the board a conversation she had with Senator Moore regarding a request to research urban farmland protection programs in other states that work specifically with protecting urban lands that do not have prime or statewide important soils.
- Chelsea Gazillo invited board members to the Farms Under Threat Webinar being hosted on September 9th. This presentation is specific to northeast states.

Joan Nichols made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ben Freund seconded, meeting adjourned at 11:12PM.

Preservation in Perpetuity

Goal Objective Outcomes

Goal: **Revise the approach and timeline** of the preservation process to ensure applications move efficiently through closing in no more than 24 months.

Objective: Deconstruct and reconstruct the application and preservation process through **obtaining agency staff, partners, and program user feedback and input on the process and experience.**

Outcome 1: **Develop/finalize written policies and procedures** which engage program partners, uses staff time efficiently and support a 24-month turn around.

Outcome 2: **Develop a strategic plan** for the farmland preservation program

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Successful program	Lack of appraisers and surveyors	FLPAB at a resource	The unknown of the unknown and accounting for time associated with it
Highest users of ALE funds in the Northeast	Inaccessible/confusing process for applicants	Stable funding	Aging lawyers and dwindling appraisers and surveyors
One of the oldest programs in the country	Many steps to closing	Communication	Family/title problems
Stable funding	Not a singular agency POC for the landowner	External partners/contractor	SPRB is a time constraint
External partners/contractor	Communication		Lack of appraisers and surveyors
Staff	Dependency on external partners/contractors		

Deconstruction 1

Rolling application acceptance

Reconstruction 1:

Annual application acceptance period.

Annual application acceptance period from ??

This will be communicated in:

1. The Ag Report
2. On our website/program page
3. To our partners via email – WLA, CFT
4. With the Farmland Preservation Advisory board

Thoughts/comments on date?

Why a pause for an annual acceptance?

Deconstruction 2

FLPP & CFPP Eligibility

Reconstruction 2:

Establish separate tracks for the FLPP and CFPP

- By mid-October, our online presence will clarify that applications is to the Farmland Preservation Program and the award letter with specify what program they've been accepted into.
- A confirmation email/letter will be provided upon receipt providing input on the status of the application and again at confirmation of acceptance/denial confirmation.
- Regulations

Questions on application scoring process?

Questions on communications to the applicant?

Why can't someone apply to CFPP directly?

Deconstruction 3

Procedures and Processes

Reconstruction 3:

Procedures and processes

- Revise the procedures and processes of the program to address the Governor's recent Executive Order 21-3, to shorten the duration of the process from application to closing.
- Document in writing each step of the application intake and review process which will include approval by agency leadership as required under the new procedures.
- Reestablish and utilize a checklist/excel spreadsheet for the processes, tracking dates, etc.

Questions on establishing procedures and processes in written format?

Questions on checklist?

Where can we save time (and money) by noting the task.

Working Toward the Objective

Obtain agency staff, partners, and program user feedback and input on the process and experience.

Hire a research firm to collect feedback from industry partners, farmland owners, and hired contractors on their experiences with the current program.

Research RFP

The results of the research will inform us on themes and trends to consider and apply in our revised procedures.

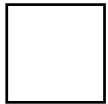
The anticipated timeline for release:	Before August 1
Anticipated research start date:	September 1
Research concluded:	Before Thanksgiving
Report and presentation on findings:	December 1

Engage the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (FPAB) to review and comment on the proposed Farmland Preservation Program processes and procedures

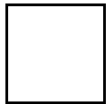
Regulations Review:



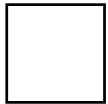
Research RFP Review:



Solutions to the Known Challenges:



Input into a Strategic Plan:



And of course,
the revised
regulations!



Engagement of FLPA



Engagement of SPRB

Working Towards the Outcomes

Outcome 1: Develop/finalize written policies and procedures which engage program partners, uses staff time efficiently and support a 24-month turn around.

Outcome 2: Develop a strategic plan for the farmland preservation program

Challenges to be Addressed

Challenge

- Limited, price competitive, surveyors
- Extremely limited number of appraisers
- Aging lawyers
- External reviews/approvals

Working towards a solution

- ??
- Amending PSA's
- Work with OAG, CT Bar Association, etc; can we increase the cost/hour paid?
- ??

December 2022: The one year anniversary of
the Executive Order

The addition of the Climate Smart Ag Unit

Next Steps and Take Aways

Think, email, provide feedback

Determine who's doing what by August 3

Commit to the deadlines with a plan