



Buncombe County
Soil and Water Conservation District
Board of Supervisors
Meeting Minutes
August 11, 2022, at 10 am

Board Members Present: Gary Higgins, Louise Scruggs, Tyler Ross, and David Snelson

Staff Present: Jennifer Harrison (virtual), Ariel Zijp, Anthony Dowdle, Avni Naik, Rose Wall, Jen Knight, Michael Frue, Sybil Tate

Others Present: Cayle Aldridge, David Williams, Amanda Buchanan, Mattie Rourke, Jessica Hocz

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 am.

Conflict of Interest Statement: Gary Higgins stated the conflict-of-interest statement, “In the interest of preserving public confidence in the actions of this Board, the chair reminds members of their duty to avoid any conflicts of interests and inquires as to whether any member knows of any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest with respect to matters to come before the Board.”

Approval of Agenda: Tyler made a motion to approve the August 11th agenda, and the motion passed on the vote.

Approval of July 14, 2022 meeting minutes: Gary Higgins requested to have discussion around edits to the July minutes. He presented the requested edits and Ariel Zijp stated that she would make those edits to the minutes.

Louise made a motion to approve the July 14, 2022 minutes as amended, and the motion passed on the vote.

Supervisor Reports: There were no supervisor reports at this time.

Memorandum of Agreement: Gary Higgins stated that he is okay with the changes that have been made to the MOA, but he still disagrees with the part of the MOA that references personnel. Higgins believes that the board should still have decision making ability for personnel. Higgins mentioned that he does not know exactly what the director does, and would like to request the Ag and Land Resources director job description. Sybil Tate mentioned that HR has recently completed an extensive compensation study and has reviewed all county employees job descriptions. The Ag and Land Resources Director has been reviewed and edited as part of the compensation study. Tate mentioned that she sent Higgins the job description and Higgins mentioned that he also received one from HR. Higgins asks the other board members if they want to approve the MOA as it is written. Tyler Ross, Louise Scruggs and David Snelson all say that they are ready to move forward.

Gary Higgins makes a motion to approve the Memorandum of Agreement, and the motion passed on the vote.

Board Funds Update: The Board fund was presented by Jennifer Harrison.

FY22 Starting Balance \$ 40,057.00

FY22 Revenue \$ 16,012.00

Seedling Sale
Equipment Rental

FY22 Expenditures \$ 18,423.43

Seedling Sale \$ 7,571.62
Equipment Maintenance \$ 4,207.54
NCDEA \$ 50.00
Organic Growers School \$ 2,000.00
NC Association \$ 600.00
Education Program Support \$ 3,994.27

Carry over to FY23 \$ 37,645.57

Director's Report: Jennifer Harrison reported that the STRAP contract for match came in from the division a couple of days ago and has been submitted into the Cobblestone contract management software to start the approval process. Once the approval process has been completed, then she will be able to collect signature for the contract. Harrison plans to attend CET and the commission meeting next week, as well as the rest of the soil and water staff. Harrison mentioned that they have been able to post the Administrative Assistant position with HR and they have 64 applications for the position, that she plans to review and interview in the next coming weeks.

Buncombe County has received 2.75 million from ARPA funds for Barnardsville Recovery. Resource Institute has drafted a proposal for the work, but the project cost is much higher than the funding available from ARPA. Harrison mentioned that they have submitted a letter of intent to show interested in reserving the 2.75 million for stream work. Tyler Ross asked if the district has looked into using the Federal Lands Access Program as match for this project, and Harrison and Dowdle said that they have not but would look into it.

Harrison was pleased to announce that the FY23 budget approved the request for an additional Soil Conservationist to be added to the district staff to assist Anthony Dowdle with Cost-share programs, disaster response and technical assistance. Harrison mentioned that once the Administrative Assistant position is hired, she plans to work with HR to get the Soil Conservationist position advertised with the hopes of hiring a highly qualified person to join the team.

NRCS Report: Amanda Buchanan stated that EQIP deadline has been moved up this year to October 14th. She mentioned that she would like to work with district staff to advertise on the county website and Facebook about NRCS programs in order to drum up some more projects. Ariel Zijp said that the staff would help her get that information out into the county.

NRCS Update:

Emergency Watershed Protection Program:

Buncombe County has returned their signed agreement to NRCS. Initial meeting between NC NRCS SO officials and Buncombe County is forthcoming to discuss timeframe and next steps.

Programs Update

EQIP:

	EQIP	CSP Classic		CSP Renewal
Application Deadline	October 29, 2021	March 11, 2022		April 15, 2022
Eligibility Determination	January 14, 2022	April 15, 2022		
Screening/Priority Deadline	January 21, 2022			
Assessment Deadline	March 11, 2022	July 1, 2022		November 12, 2021
Ranking Deadline	March 11, 2022	July 1, 2022		November 12, 2021
National & State Fund Pool Obligation Deadline	March 25, 2022			
Obligation Deadline	May 6, 2022	September 9, 2022		December 17, 2021

To date, 8 applications for funding have been preapproved for EQIP. 7 have proceed forward with contracting.

We currently have 43 active federal contracts in Buncombe County.

Obligations: \$2,293,208.38; Payments: \$249,301.56 Acres: 1275

CSP:

For FY22 program year 1 preapproved application for CSP Classic signup period.

Other:

MOA Approval

Amanda Buchanan explained the CSP program process to the board and that there is always more funding for the project then applications. Ariel Zijp mentioned that it could be a good idea to send some information about the CSP program to some of the conservation easement landowners to see if they are interested. Buchanan explained the payment rates and conservation practices included in CSP.

Mountain Valleys RC&D Update: Jess Hocz joined the board in order to provide updates on what projects Mountain Valleys RC&D is currently involved in.

Hocz shared that Mountain Valleys RC&D has a program called Share your stream to encourage landowners to restore healthy streamside vegetation to their land. They provide the plants and contract out the installation. Hocz said that their Energy CAP program provides opportunities for renewable energy production on WNC Farms through installing solar, lighting improvements, insulation, and more. In addition to this the Energy CAP program can help replace high tunnel plastic that is 5 years old and needs to be replaced. In addition to this, Hocz mentioned that they have a Mitigation Cost-share assistance program to reduce wildfire risk within 10 feet of homes and 10 feet of driveways, as well as other wildlife resources for landowners.

Gary Higgins mentioned that Mountain Valley's RC&D helped fund the Barnardsville Elementary Wetland. Anthony Dowdle mentioned that Mountain Valley's RC&D Shade your stream Program helped with the planting at the Guthrie EWP project once the construction was completed and helped make that project possible with using that as match. Anthony Dowdle asked David Williams if the District could use the shade your stream program to help with the Spring Mountain Community Center CCAP project landowner match. Spring Mountain Community Center is operated by donations only and will have difficulty to raise the required cost-share landowner match. Dowdle asked Williams if Spring Mountain could use the Shade Your Stream program as part of their Match. David Williams confirmed that it would be fine for them to use that program to help with their match.

David Williams was asked to give an updated-on engineering from the Division. Williams reported that they still have a significant backlog of engineering work. The western part of the state's engineering office is fully staffed for the positions that they have available. Anthony Dowdle asked Cayle Aldridge what the plans are for bringing back Basics of conservation training and Boot camp. Aldridge mentioned that they are trying to do a mini version of Basics by offering a series of conservation classes at CET focused on new employees but agreed that it didn't replace the need for Basics training. David Williams, Cayle Aldridge and Amanda Buchanan confirmed that they haven't heard any official plans of when these trainings would be brought back and that there is a difficulty of finding teachers for these trainings.

NCACSP & AgWRAP: Anthony stated that the Cost share Programs ranking would be in next month's report, it was not currently complete.

The second item was a meeting at the WNC Ag Center over the preliminary drawings for the AGWRAP contract, those drawings were approved by the staff and the Board will need to send one member to the next commission meeting to seek final approval of the AGWRAP contract before any construction can begin.

Anthony also made the Board aware that Jake Stokes had left the Area 1 Engineer position with NRCS.

No Board action was taken on any of these matters.

Farmland Preservation: Ariel Zijp presented the farmland preservation report below:

- Easement Purchase Criteria Process for LCAB And AAB
- LCAB mapping update and ranking update process
- Prepping New Possible Projects for AAB Approval Process- Farm visits, and board visits
 - Scott Fisher, Russ Roberson, Will Harlan, Mary Ann Brigman, Roger's Family Trust, David Rogers, SAHC Garrett Cove
- Updating VAD system and mapping
- Upcoming Trainings – CET, LTA Training, Farmland Succession Certification Training
- **Easement Project Updates**
 - Survey & Deed work
 - Clark Easement –Survey work
 - Berner Easement –Survey Work
 - SAHC Teague Property Easement – finished survey, SAHC Baseline, Closing 9/12

- Splendor Valley LLC Easement –survey in review, deed work, baseline/maps
 - Closing Easements
 - Rosseter Easement –Closed easement July 8th
 - McCurry Easement – closing easement July 18th
 - Sneddon Easement – closing easement July 18th
 - Harvey Easement – Closing scheduled for August 4th
 - Waiting on Grant Funding –
 - Sluder Easement – NCDCA approved, waiting on USDA funds
 - Ramsey Easement – NCDCA approved, final stages of USDA approval
 - Anthony Cole Farm 38.2 acres– Grant funds awarded - \$172,500
 - Gary Cole Farm 28.9 acres– Grant funds awarded - \$129,000
 - Jasperwood Phase 1 - 113 acres – a Grant funds awarded - \$440,778.80
 - Jasperwood Phase 2 - 98 acres– Grant funds awarded - \$376,171.91

Environmental Education: Rose Wall and Jen Knight presented the Environmental Education report. They shared the exciting new programs that they are starting to offer this summer.

- Ongoing community needs assessment
 - Held meetings with other S&W educators, NC Extension, CAPE, Community Engagement, Planning Committee, NCEE Director, SMIE educators
 - Hoping to connect with school system administrators and after school groups as summer season wraps up
- Community Programming
 - ecoExplore programs for young families, applied to be a an ecoExplore Hotspot
 - WILD Excursions (Wonder, Investigate, Learn, Do!) programs for middle and high schoolers
 - Ag & Land Resources Campus BioBlitz scheduled to jumpstart iNaturalist project
 - Adult program at Fairview Library
 - Project Explore
- Flagship Programming
 - Arranged to shadow Field Days planning with Henderson and Haywood counties with plans to host 1st Buncombe field days in late October
 - Reaching out to community centers and afterschool programs regarding Envirothon clubs
- Education Resources
 - Organizing/cataloging Envirothon study materials and other supplies
 - Acquired new animal ambassador team members - Maizey the cornsnake and isopod/springtail/millipede tank
 - Working on Outdoor Classroom proposal to host Envirothon and other groups and maximize the stormwater wetland resource for educational purposes

Rose Wall said that Swain County Soil and Water send them an Education Resolution and requested she share it with the District Board. The resolution was to bring back the Education Coordinator position at the division. Tyler Ross mentioned that he thought that the funds should be going towards helping the engineering backlog. David William mentioned that he thought the association would be a better place for this position to be housed. Several board members and staff members agreed that could be a better solution. After discussion amongst the board, the

board decided not to vote on the resolution since Swain would be bringing it to the fall meeting and there would be more discussion amongst the Area on a solution.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:33pm.

Secretary

Date