

**New Castle County Land Preservation Task Force  
Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, June 10, 2020 4:00PM  
Microsoft Teams Meeting / Conference Call**

Land Preservation Task Force Members in Attendance:

**Task Force Members:**

Councilman Tim Sheldon (joined at 4:30)  
Councilwoman Janet Kilpatrick  
Sherri Evans Stanton  
Michele Gioffree  
Jeff Downing  
Elena Stewart  
Stewart Ramsey (joined at 4:30)  
Austin Short  
Jim White  
Jim Metzger (left meeting at 5:00)  
Lee Jarmon  
Michelle Giofre Pyle  
Betsy Hatch  
Kendall Sommers  
Jennifer Kmiec

**New Castle County Staff:**

Richard Hall  
Tracey Surles  
Andrea Trabelsi

**The following members of the public were in attendance:**

Dee Durham  
Peggy Schultz

**I. Housekeeping Items**

**Meeting Minutes – March 25, 2020 Virtual Task Force Meeting**

On a motion made by Councilwoman Janet Kilpatrick and seconded by Elena Stewart, the Land Preservation Task Force voted unanimously to approve the March 25, 2020 meeting minutes.

## **Future Meetings & Meeting Logistics**

Andrea Trabelsi outlined the upcoming schedule for the Task Force, as the Task Force is expected to produce a report by the end of August. The Task Force subcommittees will plan on meeting in late June or early July, with a full Task Force meeting in July and August. The committees should schedule any other meetings deemed necessary to address specific items that are unresolved before the next Task Force meeting (July 15) .

## **II. Subcommittee Reports**

### **Funding Subcommittee (Jeff Downing, Chair)**

The funding subcommittee had met via phone and reviewed old meeting minutes in order to form the recommendations that are now included in the draft report document.

### **Open Space (Sherri Evans Stanton, Chair)**

The open space subcommittee, upon recommendation, looked at programs from other states. The open space subcommittee incorporated comments received from the Task Force and Peggy Schultz in their recommendations and they remain open to further recommendation.

### **Agricultural Subcommittee (Stewart Ramsey, Chair)**

Andrea Trabelsi gave a summary of recent agricultural subcommittee activity, on behalf of Mr. Ramsey. There has been no formal meetings; however the group discussed preliminary recommendations in the PowerPoint at the last subcommittee meeting. Those recommendations were incorporated into the draft document. The subcommittee had also received comments from the public, which the committee is taking into consideration and will deliberate on in further detail at the next subcommittee meeting.

## **III. Draft Report Discussion**

### **General Notes:**

- Jeff Downing:
  - Purpose of this report is to provide guidance to the County. Purview is not to change State laws and regulations, so the Task Force should be focusing on
  - Level of specificity- we need to be consistent across each topic.
  - Criteria: we need to focus on defining the methods, how are we going to recommend to the County how they differentiation between opportunities
  - Future need for this body: should there be a need for an ongoing standing or occasional committee? Include a recommendation in the report
  - Collectively determine what the body would do if it is recommended and the degree to which they are involved in ranking and prioritization
  - Is there an overarching strategy? Are there values or principles that we should focus on, how should we coordinate, separate funding pools remains an open question (see notes above)
  
- Andrea Trabelsi: In this full task force meeting we're wanting to address overarching items (spanning all three committees) for the report. The committees will delve into specific items in their upcoming meetings, so some items that arise and require more detailed discussion will be noted and shared for the pertinent

committee (see below). Directive for review of the rough draft report at this point is high-level with focus on content and overall substance (rather than stylistic editing).

- Jeff Downing: Overall approach to land preservation- is there anything we want to say regarding how the County should look at land conservation?
- Kendall Sommers: We are at a point where we have had a lot of discussions regarding passive and active- and how the County uses funding towards parks. Up to this point, the County's focus has been primarily towards active recreation- there would likely need to be a shift in the parks department to add substantial focus on conservation and preservation. We need to dig down and figure out if a recommendation of shift and focus is needed.
- Sherri Evans Stanton- those are good points (in response to Kendall)- what are these recommendations trying to accomplish? There may need to be changes in order to implement these changes. Should there be a definition section to help all three subcommittees? Definition of open space, passive, active, ag definitions, funding definitions, etc. (seemed to be agreement to add a glossary, though it was noted that some definitions already exist in the backmatter of the doc); suggested adding an introduction that puts the recommendations up front.
- Lee Jarmon- opinion survey- mention the other organizations that helped share the survey ie Colonial School District, churches, elected officials, etc. provide a list of organizations that helped disseminate the survey. We need to work with the subcommittees in order to accomplish that. Andrea asked everyone to help forward to us, by way of the committee chairs.
- Stewart Ramsey made a point regarding open space funding, and how ag lands have been purchased using open space funding.  
  
Ag money could be used to supplement the State program- but Open Space could be handled differently. The Open Space subcommittee discussed the potential of exploring an option that would enable open space funding, similar to the agricultural program at the County. This would include outright purchase by the County and / or an approach where State and local funds are combined.
- Discussion of partnering with the Open Space and Ag Pres programs on the State level- Elena recommended more partnerships.
- Sherri made the point of pursuing partnerships with conservation groups, and that the report should reflect that.
- Andrea- Task force needs to discuss of what the future would be for this body. Ag had recommended an Ag Board that is part of the DALPF program- could incorporate into the future of this body's recommendation. Should there be one body? One body with subsets? What are its roles?
- Task Force provide a ranking of categories rather than detailed items [Jeff]. Jeff Downing made a point that this report should be high level that will allow for the better development of land acquisition so that we don't hamstring those who will be carrying out these recommendations.
- Sherri Evans Stanton- the Task Force should consider recommending staffing for preservation activities in the County, which could include the creation of a land preservation planner position.

The following are the specific topics that arose during the meeting, pertaining to specific committee discussion in accordance with the enclosed outline:

### Open Space Notes:

- Active v. Passive
  - Draft recommendation that is in the document recommends having a separate pot of money for acquisition for preservation – a new program for preservation in NCC. We are hesitant to keep it in the same pot of money as parkland- we don't want to pit active vs. passive. Perhaps we should make the recommendation that conservation and preservation should be funded.
  - Sherri- The task force needs to decide this.
- Sherri Evans Stanton- use the State program as guidance and then the County.
  - Scoring system or rubric to follow should be established.
    - How do we rate based on the criteria
  - Identify where we would find resources and data that would help rank the topics outlined in the report
  - Subcommittee needs further discussion on these items
  - Do you develop a method that blends identifying eligible areas and then further step that is more a numeric, quantitative scoring that gives you further prioritization?

### Agricultural Notes:

- Rich Hall- should the County be making recommendations that they should also be purchasing their own agricultural easements?
- Councilwoman Janet Kilpatrick- Ag land advisory Board- individuals on the ag sub comm could be on that board or recommend who would be on it.
  - Stewart Ramsey agreed and said it should be back up and running. He said the reason all three of the county board went defunct was because there was not much for the Counties to do in regard to the State program.
  - Austin Short said it is a five-member board pointed by the County, one member from Council and then four farmers or ag business folks. Austin confirmed the other counties don't have active boards- the role is to review regulation changes or proposals for the State program, and they review ag district applications that are over 200 acres- there are 3 bodies, two must approve an ag district application- ag pres board, county ag board, and county planning and zoning body.
- Rich Hall- what does Austin Short think about what we should do with the County Ag Board Group? Should they have a dual purpose, subset of Task Force if they decide to move forward in a more official purpose. This is something the Task Force should decide.
  - Austin Short stated it is good to have an active board- could help promote the program.
  - Stewart Ramsey agreed- this Board could serve multiple roles to inform the State program and also a County advisory board, could provide them with feedback as well. May not be able to speak to open space.
  - Dee Durham said that it is logical and easier to reinstate the ag board and then create a NEW board to deal with open space with a different pot of funding.
  - Stewart Ramsey, others – general agreement that two separate bodies with linkage/communication is desirable approach.
- Stewart Ramsey- we have the dimensions or coverage of what the important factors would be. More detailed discussion should happen at a subcommittee meeting.
  - Discuss in further detail the establishment of the County Agricultural Board and what their role will be (see minutes of discussion above)
  - Incorporate local markets as a priority to look at
- Jeff Downing: Should the idea that there would be a pot of money within the County (i.e. a County program in addition to the State program that would have its own criteria but also help as a supplement to the State program) be included in the report?
  - Stewart Ramsey says perhaps **put an example of what the money looks like when you buy an easement in NCC** – what the farmer gets, what he gives up, what is contributed by the County,

what is contributed by the State. Often times there is County money there- buying down the discount as one of the ways that County money can be used, we should show an example of how that works.

Prioritization discussion:

Refer to the LESA scoring and determine what categories are missing (Austin noted that “local markets” metric is something not reflected in the LESA score)

Stewart Ramsey – need to strike a balance between flexibility in criteria/methods and confidence in outputs

Jeff Downing – for the task force report, aim to provide a ranking of the categories but not specific individual items/weighting/equations

### **Funding Notes:**

- Discussion if funding of Ag Lands and Open Space- should be two boards with two pots of money

### **General Comments:**

- Peggy Schultz noted in the chat box: “Please remove from the Ag Land recommendations the item on “Seek refinement to the State Ag program to get a more proportionate share of funds towards New Castle County. If we want to divvy up the money really well we need to note that we get a lot of money for open space that we should maybe return?” Peggy responded the Stewart’s discussion stating that NCC should increase its share of money to leverage the State Ag Land Fund.
- Rich Hall: Draft report should also address the role of smart growth and land preservation.
- Councilman Tim Sheldon: Have we discussed putting the survey in the sewer bill? Kendall Sommers clarified that there were issues with sending in the sewer bill as it may not get to people due to sewer bills going straight to their escrow accounts. Staff will continue to explore putting a survey into the next property tax bill.
  - Councilwoman Dee Durham had a recommendation from elected officials regarding this subject and adding a line item to the property tax where a person could opt into making a contribution toward the County program.
- Stewart Ramsey: Sample from a County in upstate New York that floated the idea of a bond to preserve land. Idea of using a bond mechanism to create funds now and preserve land before it’s too late. American Farmland Trust is a good resource to utilize [farmland.org].
- Janet Kilpatrick noted that there’s a cap on how much County can issue in bonds.
- Stewart Ramsey: what we can add to the County process for lands that may not make it into the State program (i.e. a complementary mechanism to get farms that may fall through the cracks). A TDR program, which can also serve as an incentive for agricultural preservation, should be handled in a separate effort.
  - Councilwoman Janet Kilpatrick: If we go back many years, some of the things that council has discussed how much money should we put into an easement or preservation that public can’t use. What we have looked at over the years and the State has a certain pot of the money and once they have used all that money, we have been sent a list of what is remaining- sometimes we purchase farms and other don’t. We don’t want to/can’t become the default for agricultural preservation (or replace the State’s program); we need to define:
    - How much do we spend above/beyond the State’s \$ amounts?
    - How much public \$ to spend on an easement?
    - How to select the farms? In other words, need to establish the criteria for the left over farms that we get after the State’s annual program \$ have been expended. How do we figure out which to choose- if we are not changing the State process. I.e. development potential, environmental, etc. Also noted that as far as financing, once Council has authorized money

and it's codified, then Council does not subsequently make Y/N decisions about individual properties (removes some of the politics)

- Stewart Ramsey: This would be a compliment to the State program helping use their mechanism and steering it towards our objectives as a County.
- Councilwoman Janet Kilpatrick: Make it very specific criteria for the future.
- Sherri Evans-Stanton: We should discuss the structure of the report- we may want to flip some things around to include some of the recommendations up front. Definitions should be up front so that people reading the document can understand what they are reading. Key points and recommendations should be moved to the front of the report.
  - Councilwoman Janet Kilpatrick- useful for ordinances and resolutions that will go before Council won't include Council, so whatever is easiest for staff to pull out information to be included in legislation.

#### **IV. Next Steps & Task Force Action Items**

Andrea Trabelsi reiterated the timeline. Next meetings should be late June or early July for the subcommittees so more detailed recommendations can be included in the report. Middle to late July should be another full Task Force meeting, final draft and more detailed review would be in early August. There is a thought of having a press event after the Task Force has presented their recommendations at the beginning of September.

NEXT FULL TASK FORCE MEETING: JULY 15, 2020 @ 4:00PM

SUBCOMMITTEES:

FUNDING	TBA
AGRICULTURAL	TBA
OPEN SPACE	TBA