

Hopewell Valley Agricultural Advisory Committee
January 10, 2023

I. Andrei Alexeev called the meeting to order at 7 pm. He announced that John Hart has been reappointed to the committee.

II. **Present:** (committee members with an asterisk)

Lucia Huebner*

Chris Pazdan*

Laurie Butler*

George Sciarrotta*

Andrei Alexeev, Community Development Coordinator

Michael Ruger, Hopewell Township Mayor and liaison (late arrival)

Richard Park (community guest)

Joanna Slagle (guest, planner drafting PIG grant)

Absent:

Mitchel Skolnick*

Ann Caragno*

John Hart*

III. **Reorganization:**

Lucia Huebner and Chris Pazdan were unanimously voted at co-chairs.

Anne Carcagno was unanimously voted as secretary. (Laurie Butler substituting on Jan 10)

IV. **Minutes:**

The minutes of the September 13, 2022 meeting were approved. The minutes of the November meeting are not yet available.

V. **Public Comment:**

Richard Park, who recently purchased a 31-acre farm in Hopewell Township, outlined his dreams for the property and the obstacles he is facing. In addition to growing vegetables he wishes to build a greenhouse on the easement on the property. He described that the definition of a greenhouse as a “structure” (and thus not allowed on the easement) is not consistent. FoHVOS maintains it is a structure and thus, by contract, it is not allowed on the easement. The committee recommended that Mr. Park construct the greenhouse on the 4 acres of land on the property dedicated to the homesite, as it would not require re-negotiating the terms of the easement and it would put the greenhouse proximate to water and electricity.

VI. **Old Business:**

Joanna Slagle described the progress on the Planning Incentive Grant (PIG). She explained that SADC requires the grant be submitted within 2 years from the date of signature. She presented a draft map “Draft Amended Project area” showing the proposed project area for preserving farmland with the prior Hopewell Township project area outlined in bold line and the proposed project area shown in yellow. The Mercer County Agricultural Development area (ADA) was shown in cross hatch on the map. She asked that the committee confirm the

accuracy of the map as it is needed for her calculations. (The only modification we identified at the meeting was the tiny yellow area just to the left of the wording Titus Mill road, directly W of Route 31 and outside the bold black line; that should not be shaded yellow.) Ms. Slagle clarified that the township could consider including farms in their target area that did not overlap the County ADA, but then of course the township would not be eligible for any contribution from the county, though it could partner directly with the state on those properties. The township's proposed project area included such farms in the Sourlands as some of are of appropriate size and location to be of interest to the Township for preservation. Ms. Slagle then described the process of preparing the PIG submission. Of particular importance is the wording of Chapters 4 and 5 in the document. She offered to extract the prior version of Chapters 4 and 5 from the large pdf of the prior submission for our examination. Ms. Slagle asked the committee about target farms (these are not needed for her calculations but if ones are identified she could include them in the PIG submission). As the committee has not identified specific target farms, she explained that for the purpose of the PIG submission that she could write something like "Any property that is farm assessed is eligible as a target farm" but that to avoid sticker shock we may want to follow that with "We expect to preserve roughly one farm per year and 3 farms in 5 years". The wording should be finalized when the Agricultural Advisory Committee does its review of Chapters 4 and 5. Finally Ms. Slagle outlined the process for submission of the PIG grant. First she drafts the master plan and submits it to the state, the state evaluates it and the final version goes to the Agricultural Advisory committee for approval. It is then sent to the Hopewell Township planning board who adopts it, then forwarded to the Township Committee for endorsement.

After Ms. Slagle's helpful presentation, we returned to discussing Mr. Park's options with him. The discussion ended with suggesting that Mr. Park could consult with the NJ Farm Bureau to explore his options.

VII. New Business:

George Sciarrotta explained that he would be attending the Food Safety Course for Produce Farms, which involves 6 hours of instruction in food safety, and will be presented with a certificate of completion. He will report to the committee at our next meeting.

There was a short discussion of deer hunting. Chris Pazdan explained that anecdotally the deer numbers were down in their usual locations but there is the chance that they are relocating from the hunted areas. He explained that drones could more accurately assess the deer population. Coyotes are becoming a serious problem and racoons have been detected as rabies positive.

VIII. Announcements:

The State Agricultural Committee is to be held Feb. 8 and 9. Committee member John Hart will attend.

IX. Executive Session.

X. Meeting adjourned: 8:30 pm