



**Meeting Minutes**  
**Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board**  
**July 1, 2020 – 7:30 p.m.**

**Present:** Pete Fellers, Don Gardner, Sam Gardner\*, Chuck Grove, Dorothy McIntyre, Jeff Powers, Joy Powers

**Absent:** Matt Baumgardner, Ronnie Gross, Ken Newman, Lindsay Tomlinson, Pam Willoughby

**Staff Present:** Pam Bailey, Scott Baker, Traci Blido (via phone), Amanda Kaufman (via phone)

**Staff Absent:** None

**Transcriber:** Julia Peters

**Guests:** John Graham - Graham Bass Farm; Mickey Johnson, Board of Supervisors, District 1; Erika McFaden, Bedford Farmers' Market

\* Arrived 7:45 p.m.

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**(1) APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the July 1, 2020 agenda. There were no objections.

A motion and a second were made to approve the July 1, 2020 agenda, as presented.

**Adopted unanimously**

**(2) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - May 6, 2020**

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the May 6, 2020 meeting minutes.

A motion and a second by were made to approve the May 6, 2020 meeting minutes, as presented.

**Adopted unanimously**

**(3) ADMINISTRATION REPORT**

Ms. Kaufman reported that broadband was still moving forward and on track to complete the physical portion of the project by August 14. Then testing will commence and it will be brought before the Board of Supervisors for final acceptance and approval. Once complete, Briscnet will be able to sell and install internet to individual homes. Chairman Powers noted that broadband is not only important for agriculture, but also very important for education in the County. In response to a question regarding when the schools will open again, Ms. Bailey said she believed the decision would be made by July 9. Mrs. Blido said the date has not been set yet, but teachers have called every student household and surveyed parents. One of the questions asked if adequate internet was accessible at their home. She was pleasantly surprised to hear that 75% of the households said yes. She credited the work of the county and local providers. Parents were also asked if they were comfortable sending their children back to school and 75% responded yes. There will be an option for 100% online school for any family not comfortable with sending their children back to school. However, it was a small number of parents, as a whole, whose children would not return to school. School staff are working on all the different aspects of the situation and more information will be forthcoming.

#### **(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT**

Mrs. Blido reported that lots are selling in New London Business and Technology Center and in the Montvale Center for Business. She and Ms. Bailey are working with companies to help them stay in business and they are also actively pursuing companies that may be interested in the Teva property. She said there is much happening behind the scenes, even through the ongoing pandemic. They are also in the early stages of planning for a business grant program funded by the CARES Act money that is coming to the County and expect roll out of the program in August.

Ms. Bailey said the grant program through the EDA for businesses that need to buy PPE is still available as well. Companies can receive up to \$300 toward the purchase of face masks, hand sanitizers, and other PPE products. She can be contacted for further information. Ms. Bailey also noted the silicon spatulas she brought today were given out at the farmers' markets as a free gift from the Ag Board. The Bedford ONE tours she plans for students are on hold until the school schedule and routine is known.

#### **(5) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT**

Mr. Baker stated that the USDA has a COVID-19 assistance program for farmers with direct payments, not loans, but he has found many farmers are unaware of the program. Farmers that qualify can sign-up through the end of August. The USDA has said it is not a first-come, first-served program, so anyone who signs-up will get something. He will send out the information again this week and Ms. Bailey said it is also posted on the EDA website. Tractor safety/road safety banners are going up in highly visible spots and cooperation from the County and Sheriff's Office has been appreciated. Work for tractor safety billboards continues. With the new fiscal

year now starting, funds are available through the stream exclusion fence line weed management cost-share program. A total of \$5,000 is budgeted and farmers can apply for a 50% cost-share, up to \$125. It is more of a pilot project to see how it goes. The application is very straightforward and can be completed quickly. Applications will be accepted now through the end of July for approval and then the program will be kept rolling and open. He will send an application out to all Ag Board members who can then forward it to other farmers.

The next feeder calf sale is scheduled for July 31 at Springlake Stockyard but the number of participants is not known. Tobacco Commission cost-share grants have been done for many years and they will proceed with filing again this Fall with Campbell County as the fiscal agent. Mr. Baker would like the Ag Board members to think about what type of management enhancements they want to address. Hay barns, cattle working equipment, and grain bins have been done in the past and any new ideas can be sent to Mr. Baker who will be meeting with representatives from other counties.

The Virginia Department of Agriculture has had a grant for many years called the Agriculture and Forestry Industry Development Fund (AFID) which has been used before for strategic planning. Agents are looking at possible grant money or an opportunity to help the local meat processing issue or lack thereof since it is a growing problem. Discussion followed about the difficulties in obtaining animal butchering and processing. If a planning grant could clearly document the need, it might bolster their case for other grants dealing with actual brick and mortar issues. Discussion continued about the costs of animal processing and regulatory issues inhibiting the sale of local meat and fish.

**(6) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU/YOUNG FARMERS REPORT**

Nothing new to report.

**(7) COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**a. Education & Events**

**1. Upcoming Events**

Nothing new to report.

**2. County Fair Update**

Ms. Powers said the County Fair has been stalled. In watching the fair industry as a whole, most of the Midwest have cancelled their state fairs. In Virginia, some counties cancelled early but some are going forward with adjusted fairs. No one knows what to expect in October because no one knows what the pandemic will look like at that time, but a decision on the Bedford County fair must be made soon. A meeting will be held in the next couple weeks to see if the fair will be held and if so, what changes must be made to keep everyone safe. Since safety must be the number one concern, there may be just a photo contest and an essay contest. One precursor to the

fair was whether the Centerfest event would be held, but Centerfest announced today that it is cancelled. The Virginia State Fair is still happening as of now, which is run by the Virginia Farm Bureau.

### **3. School Ag Programs Update**

Ms. Powers reported that 4-H has tried to do virtual practices and meetings. They just received clearance for practicing for livestock and stockman again in person. A couple virtual contests have been done. One contest with 30 states and 200 kids participating was won by Bedford County's Charlie Moser. In another contest, Charlie finished in the top six. The State 4-H Stockman's and Livestock Contest might be held but there has not been any official ruling yet. At last resort, it may be held digitally.

On the FFA side, it has been a good Spring. There have been three State Proficiency winners; Samantha Holdren in the Beef Placement Category, Makenna Garrett in the Diversified Crop Category, and Josh Powers in the Agriculture Education Category. There were about five State Degree recipients which is the highest award the Virginia FFA gives. Both Liberty High School and Staunton River High School won a National Chapter Award which recognizes the good work the chapters are doing. Samantha Holdren placed second in the virtual State Public Speaking contest. Josh Powers was elected Vice-President of the Virginia FFA Association. However, for the first time in its history, there will not be an in-person national FFA convention. This year the convention will be held digitally.

#### **b. Marketing & Production**

##### **1. Farmers' Market Update**

Mrs. McIntyre said opening the Forest market during this pandemic has been a challenge but it is now moving smoother. The market averages 30 vendors per week with great sales and strong demand for local products continues. She thanked the EDA for the PPE grant which helped pay for the great amount of signage that is required. The Presbyterian Church next door to the market has granted permission for their parking lot to be used for overflow market parking. Vendors are being compliant with the Governor's orders and are wearing masks when dealing with customers. Many customers are using masks but it is not required at an outdoor farmers' market, only suggested. There will not be a celebration of the 10 year anniversary of the market this year. She noted to the meeting attendees that she would love to be part of any committee that may be created to address the animal processing issues discussed earlier in the meeting.

Mrs. McFaden said many vendors are still calling her about the Bedford market and she has some vendors that are shared with the Forest market. On June 26, the Bedford market saw 327 people attending which was an uptick of 100 people from the week before. The market is averaging about 260 people per week from May 1 through July 3 . Each week there has been an average of 13 to 15 vendors. Two new producer vendors will be coming in mid-July and early

August. Discounts will be given in honor of our military service men and women on July 3. Both vendors and customers have been practicing social distancing and everyone attending have been kind and gracious with following the guidelines. The Bedford market is growing slowly but doing well and she has received positive feedback.

Mrs. McFaden gave a quick update from Ronnie Gross who said the fruit crop is good and is being delivered to a wide part of the state. There was a little weather damage to the peach trees this year and he is happy to see how well the Bedford market is running.

## **2. Coyote Lottery Update.**

Dr. Gardner reported that Cline Lynch won the \$2,000 Grand Prize. Jeff Williams received the Second Prize of \$500. He sent an article to the paper and sent a similar article to Mrs. Blido for the website.

Regarding the discussions in past meetings about the Asian Longhorn Tick, he wanted to say that this tick does not need to fall off the animal to change its life-cycle stages, thereby multiplying rapidly and completely infesting the host. However, a good fly control program will also control ticks and is the best defense at this time.

Dr. Gardner also noted that it is difficult for Bedford County to keep qualified conservation personnel and he is not sure why this occurs. Discussion followed.

## **c. Land Protection & Conservation**

Mr. Fellers reported that the U.S. Senate has passed what is called the Great American Outdoors Act. The U.S. House of Representatives is expected to pass it as well and the President is expected to sign the bill. It will give the overall park system \$9.5 billion within five years and the Blue Ridge Parkway will receive \$213 million for improvements.

## **(8) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS**

Mr. Mickey Johnson stated that the Board of Supervisors (BOS) had a meeting recently and voted approval for a wedding venue located between two black angus cow farms in the County. It would have been beneficial to the BOS to have had some input and insight from the Ag Board before that vote occurred. He asked Ms. Kaufman to help facilitate this when a similar vote comes up moving forward. Ms. Kaufman said she will contact the Community Development Director to include the Ag Board's opinions before future approvals get to the BOS agenda.

Mr. Baker noted that the 4-H All Star is the highest and most prestigious award one can receive in 4-H and last week four Bedford students were tapped as All Stars, including Josh Powers, Andrew Tuck, Ethan Jackson, and Samantha Holdren.

A motion and a second were made for the Ag Board to compose a letter of congratulations to the four All Star recipients.

**Adopted unanimously**

Mrs. McIntyre stated that there is a potential farmers' market possibly coming to Moneta. The new property owner of the former Mayberry Drive-In has contacted Economic Development and they will be meeting for a brainstorming session.

Curry Martin is hosting a "Breaking Bad" event on July 11 on the fairgrounds and it will include a one-day farmers' market.

**(10) ADJOURNMENT**

8:47 p.m.