



Meeting Minutes

**Agricultural Economic Development Advisory Board
Peaks Conference Room at Falling Creek
1257 County Farm Rd., Bedford, VA 24523**

June 2, 2021 – 7:30 p.m.

Present: Pete Fellers, Don Gardner (by phone), Chuck Grove, Dorothy McIntyre, Ken Newman, Jeff Powers

Absent: Matt Baumgardner, Sam Gardner, Ronnie Gross, Joy Powers, Lindsay Tomlinson, Pam Willoughby

Staff Present: Scott Baker, Traci Blido

Staff Absent: None

Transcriber: Julia Peters

Guests: Andy Dooley, former County Supervisor; Mickey Johnson - County Supervisor District 1; Ryuga Kasper, Owner of Kasper UAV and Gauntlet winner; Josh Powers

(1) APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Powers called the meeting to order and asked for a review of the June 2, 2021 agenda. There were no objections.

A motion and a second were made to approve the June 2, 2021 agenda, as presented.

Adopted unanimously

(2) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES - February 3, 2021

Chairman Powers asked for a review of the February 3, 2021 meeting minutes. He updated attendees about the Gobble-Levine Farm fence issue that was reported under

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS in the February minutes. He expects some action by the winter and a guard rail installed before the roads gets slick from bad weather.

With regard to the \$5.00 fee to be paid to access waters at Hales Ford Bridge and Bay Rock Marina, which was also noted under February 3, 2021 minutes under **INFORMATIONAL ITEMS**; Supervisor Johnson said the fee was hidden in a different bill that received approval but action is being taken to fix the oversight. However, he had no further information.

A motion and a second were made to approve the February 3, 2021 meeting minutes, as presented.

Adopted unanimously

(3) ADMINISTRATION REPORT

Mrs. Blido said she did not have a report but there would be a pop-up Covid vaccine clinic this Saturday at the Forest Farmers Market. The one-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine will be administered from 8am to 12 Noon.

(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Mrs. Blido reported that there is an active prospect for the Teva building. There is a contract with a private investor which is expected to close and the investor is negotiating behind the scenes with the prospect. It is a complicated transaction and fingers are crossed. The shell building is coming along nicely and Belvac should be in the space in a matter of months. The EDA received a Tobacco Commission grant for grading two more lots in New London Business and Technology Center. An EDA meeting will be held tomorrow night, where the budget for the new fiscal year should be approved.

The Tobacco Commission also awarded Buckingham County a cattleman's beef hub grant for \$186,000. It is in partnership with Seven Hills in Lynchburg and will establish a beef brand.

Roanoke sees Bedford County as part of the LEAP Zone and Bedford is already doing what Roanoke wants to do at their local farmers' markets, such as creating a brand like "Bedford Grown" and connecting local people with local customers for beef and chicken. They also mentioned composting to reduce waste. Mrs. McIntyre noted it was reaffirming to hear others talking about doing things that Bedford has already done and these counties can look to Bedford for guidance in establishing their own agricultural goals and ideas.

(5) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT

Mr. Baker reported that this region has received Tobacco Commission grants in the past, generally cost share programs for ag producers. Another proposal will be turned in for the July round. Feedback from the Tobacco Commission calls for new ideas, although the region's farm

community has been most pleased with the hay barn grant and the livestock handling equipment grant. He will submit for these things again but also for GPS-type needs for farm equipment and irrigation equipment for producers wanting to expand. Approval will not be known until sometime in the fall. He sent out the updated application for the vegetation management cost share program that the Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Board of Supervisors (BOS) help fund. Last year, about 20 farmers participated and he would like to see that number higher this year. Producers can apply each year and it doesn't have to be only for stream exclusion projects that farmers have done in cooperation with a government program. The new fiscal year runs from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. The Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation office will have more cost share funds to use for projects this year so it is a great opportunity for those that qualify.

The next special feeder calf sale will be held July 30 at the Springlake Livestock Market. Sellers will bring cattle in on Thursday, information will go out to buyers Thursday evening, and the sale will be Friday morning. Brandy will be moving to South Carolina and her last day is July 30, 2021. Alicia Roach has been hired to replace Brandy. She has trained under Brandy for several years so she has experience and they hope for a smooth transition.

The Central Virginia Livestock Show (CVLS) was in-person this year with some modifications due to Covid restrictions. They had close to 70 exhibitors with a smaller group from Bedford but the kids did very well.

Mrs. Blido added that Pittsylvania County got an extension for their cost share program which includes Bedford County as well. It involves new and expanding vineyards and \$135,000 is still available.

Nothing new is being done about the meat processing facility issue. Green Valley no longer does USDA grade inspections and the ripple effect impacts the Virginia market and economy. Discussion followed about meat processing and the difficulties, expansions of existing facilities, and start-ups of new processing plants.

(6) BEDFORD COUNTY FARM BUREAU/YOUNG FARMERS REPORT

Nothing new to report.

(7) COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Education & Events

1. Upcoming Events

Josh Powers reported that the State Convention is June 21 through the 24th. Three days will be held virtually with a live event at Rockingham fairgrounds on the 23rd, which will also be livestreamed. Some Bedford County students will receive their state degrees on the 23rd.

Two students are running for state office, one from Staunton River and one from Liberty. The Liberty Middle School FFA is up for Middle School Chapter of the Year which is a big accomplishment since Ms. Tomlinson started that chapter just a few years ago.

Josh was able to visit Costa Rica and explore its sustainable agriculture. He spoke of his experiences and the farms he visited while in Costa Rica, including a sustainable dairy, pineapple farm, and a coffee farm.

2. County Fair Update

Chairman Powers said there are new members on the Fair Board and the dates for this year's fair will be October 15 through 17, 2021. It will be held at the Moose Lodge on Route 460. Mr. Dooley spoke about some of the plans being made in organizing the fair. The educational tours for the school students will take place on the 14th. A pageant will also be held on October 10. Carnival rides and fireworks are being planned. Volunteers are needed.

Chairman Powers thanked the Fair Board and said he would like to invite Fair Board members to possibly the next meeting of the Ag Board. He thanked the Fair Board for all the work they have done to plan the fair and looks forward to the future of the County Fair.

3. School Ag Programs Update

Josh Powers attended both banquets held by both chapters of Young Farmers and FFA. Many new kids are interested in 4-H programs and some are interested in livestock judging. The 4-H Club has been revamped and is all-inclusive now and meets in a central location in Bedford. Bedford students have done very well in competitions both in-state and out-of-state.

b. Marketing & Production

1. Farmers' Market Update

Ms. McIntyre reported that she now has close to 40 vendors each week and many are new. They will be planning some community events at the market this season. The Covid clinic will be held this weekend and music will return this year. Dairy month is coming up. Meat vendors are challenged either in supply or in processing. EcoFriendly Foods has helped with chicken processing for some vendors. Jeff Vittone is doing hydroponics for a Smith Mountain Lake Farmers' Market and Mrs. Blido attended his grand opening and has offered him some cost share advertising as well.

Mrs. Blido said that Mrs. McFaden reported the Bedford Market is steadily increasing with 66 vendor applications. Each market day has between 23 to 30 vendors scheduled. There will be a second Saturday market and hopes to move the market to Saturdays. The May 8 market was well attended. Live music will play three times per month and the SNAP program has seen more new

patrons in the first month of the season than in the entire season last year. The market continues to grow and thrive.

c. Land Protection & Conservation

Mr. Fellers said that as of March, there was a new easement in the County. Lynn Spradlin put 330 acres up on Suck Mountain with the Land Trust in Lynchburg, which now has five easements.

(8) INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Dr. Gardner wanted to speak to attendees regarding the ongoing problem of short staffing and a low pay scale for veterinary positions at the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Diagnostic Laboratory in Lynchburg. However, the phone disconnected and he was unable to present his information. After the meeting, he emailed a letter to Ag Board members for their review, additions, and corrections. He would like the Ag Board to advocate on the lab's behalf and the importance of the lab's work to area farmers. Discussion during the Ag Board meeting brought consensus that the Ag Board would support such advocacy.

Jason Johnson with the school board reached out to Chairman Powers and wanted to know if Ag Board members or ag teachers would like to meet the new school superintendent. Chairman Powers would like to invite the teachers and have the superintendent speak at possibly next month's meeting. As suggested, if he is able to attend next month's meeting on July 7, the meeting will begin at 7 p.m. instead of 7:30 p.m. Since Covid restrictions are lifted, the Ag Board will hold its regularly scheduled monthly meetings and July's meeting will be considered an ag education meeting.

Mr. Baker said there will be a pasture walk at Tuck's Farm on June 15 at 5:00 p.m. He will send out a flier to the Ag Board members.

Mrs. Blido introduced Ryouga Kasper, a Bedford County winner in the Gauntlet Program. Over 50 businesses participated in this program and Ryouga won \$12,000 worth of in-kind prizes which included manufacturing consultations and an accelerator program from the Advancement Foundation. He provides a commercial drone service, and agriculture has a need for drones on occasion. He just graduated from high school and is taking a year off to build his business so when he goes to college, he can continue running this business. He plans to attend Liberty University and major in finance. A main service he can provide that is related to agriculture would be mapping and general plant counting through the mapping software. He would also like to add a multispectral camera which could count plant health. Through the Gauntlet Program, he will be adding a new course to help people obtain their commercial drone pilot's license and he would like to expand that to the Bedford One Program. Mrs. Blido said she would also like to

hire him to do some drone photography for the EDA. She congratulated him on his awards and his graduation. Ryouga brought business cards for those interested in his services.

(9) ADJOURNMENT

9:05 p.m.