

**New Castle County Land Preservation Task Force  
Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, July 15, 2020 4:00PM  
Microsoft Teams Meeting / Conference Call**

Land Preservation Task Force Members in Attendance:

**Task Force Members:**

Lee Jarmon  
Austin Short (left at 5:30pm)  
Elena Stewart  
James White  
Sherri Evans-Stanton  
Jeff Downing  
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 – June 10, 2020 Virtual Task Force Meeting**

On a motion made by Lee Jarmon and seconded by Kendall Sommers, the Land Preservation Task Force voted unanimously to approve the June 10, 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 full Task Force will plan on meeting in early to mid-August. (More details under “Next steps” at bottom.)

## **II. Subcommittee Reports**

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

None.

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

Sherri Evans Stanton noted that the Open Space subcommittee met virtually and discussed recommendations on how reorganize the Task Force report, as well as how to cut back on some content in sections across the report.

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

On behalf of Stewart Ramsey, Rich Hall gave an update on the Agricultural Subcommittee virtual meeting. Mr. Hall also gave an update on the State of Delaware Round 24 Agricultural Lands purchases:

- Four properties this year proceeded through the bid process, three easements the State purchased and the fourth the County put funds toward to help the state purchase the farm easement.

## **III. Draft Report Discussion**

The Task Force reviewed the comments in the report, focusing on some of the specific issues and conflicts highlighted in the comments.

### Goals and Objectives:

Sherri Evans Stanton stated the Open Space Subcommittee had some concerns that the recommendations were too far into the report, so that has been reorganized. The Task Force Needs to think about if this is a blueprint that leads into further discussion on how to implement further recommendations or if it should have a lot of detail. She stated in her opinion that it should focus on what the intent of the report is; there is a lot of detail, but she wondered if it was better used when things go to be implemented, both for ag and open space.

Kendall Sommers suggested to take out duplicative information, noting the Task Force will need to make the decision as to how detailed the report should be.

Sherri Evans Stanton recommended to consolidate the maps and carefully choose what information should be conveyed in the maps in order to reduce the number of maps in the report.

### Recommendations Section:

Andrea Trabelsi outlined the recommendations for the Task Force, referencing the draft circulated Monday. Sherri Evans Stanton asked what the difference is between the list of criteria and the methodology for farmland prioritization in the ag recommendations section noting it seemed redundant. Andrea clarified that Staff hadn't received specific recommendations on them, noted that the agricultural subcommittee should make a decision on what to keep in the report. Ms. Stanton recommended moving funding-related recommendations under Goal 3 (focused on funding and coordination) from both open space and agricultural sections, as some of the objectives overlap with

funding. Kendall Sommers noted there are some recommendations under agricultural and open space sections that could be considered funding and the Task Force needs to make a decision as to where they go in the report.

Dee Durham recommended that in accordance with Objective 3.1 #5 – the Task Force should look into recommending a partnership with the Delaware Community Foundation under NCC CARES, noting she also wasn't sure of the legality of endowments. She Suggested making it a separate item on the recommendations.

Jennifer Kmiec stated the more detail in the document is better, as it makes it a more useful document instead of general criteria. She recommended the Task Force should pull out anything related to funding into its own section (under Goal 3) so that the subcommittee sections are more qualitative instead of quantitative. Jeff Downing stated there is value in removing the unnecessary background data, as it was not combed through in the subcommittee meetings and the Task Force wasn't charged with evaluating that data. The Task Force discussed rewriting the executive summary section would be helpful so that someone can read that and only that and understand what the Task Force recommended. The Task Force felt that there should be no implementation details section in the report. Jeff Downing noted that the purpose of this report is to provide guidance to the County and that the purview is not to change State laws and regulations. He stated the to be a level of specificity needs to be consistent across each topic. He stated the Task Force should address the following questions:

- Criteria: we need to focus on defining the methods, how are we going to recommend to the County how they differentiate 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, as separate funding pools remains an open question.

Dee Durham asked if the idea is to keep doing what the County has been doing for agricultural purchases and the agricultural program or if the Task Force is proposing a new approach. Andrea – there is the recommendations about the criteria to have the NCC program to piggy back on the State program but also have a way to preserve properties outside of the program. The 2006 criteria that Council had put forth through resolution (in the appendix of the current draft) as well as the state and other program methods offer a solid starting point for the criteria content in the report.

The Task Force discussed how the NCC Agricultural Board is suggested to be re-established with expanded responsibilities on the County level, but the Task Force has not fully confirmed what those responsibilities should be. Sherri Evans Stanton noted the open space committee is following the State open space criteria and noting that they did not repeat everything but the report may speak more powerfully if it outlines the changes the Task Force is proposing.

Dee Durham asked would there be two separate boards, one for conservation and one for agriculture? She stated that in her mind they are very different and have different goals. She stated that the Report should be clear on the establishment of those Boards, for example as to the Land Preservation Board or Commissions membership, what skillsets the County should be looking for, etc. She stated that there should be two separate Boards- one for Agriculture and one for Open Space. Rich Hall noted the way the

recommendations currently are written are to maintain some semblance of the current Task Force, that has an open space focus component and then on the ag side. He noted there would be two components, one serving as the agricultural board with the State of DE Agricultural program with an additional focus on other agricultural preservation aspects more generally in the County. Kendall Sommers asked the Task Force if they agreed there should be two separate Boards, to which Elena Stewart and Sherri Evans Stanton agreed that there should. Kendall Sommers noted it needs to be made clear in both the farmland and open space sections that the Task Force is recommending separate Boards. Sherri Evans Stanton noted there was discussion that the Land Preservation Task Force should continue as an advisory body, but the subcommittees would continue in a way to make detailed recommendations for implementation such as making the scoring system. of the group briefly discussed how the Task Force was formed. Jeff Downing stated that when new working groups are established, they should be established in a way that is open and transparent in a way that there is comfort with their creation.

#### Public Opinion Survey:

Andrea Trabelsi went over survey section with the Task Force and asked how much detail the Task Force thinks should be in that section (i.e. should the graphs be there? Survey distribution list?) Lee Jarmon asked why the distribution list for the survey should not be included, noting he thought it was a good thing to give the readers a chance to see who else was involved and that it was critical to show that. Dee Durham agreed, noting she shared the survey out too, but imagined it went out organically. Ms. Durham's concern was that the list wasn't complete based on who shared it out noting that it was not a scientific study. The Task Force agreed to add a note that the distribution list included certain groups but had not been limited to the distribution list listed in the report. Andrea Trabelsi clarified the text indicates it was a convenience survey, not scientific. Lee Jarmon reiterated that it is very important to include the distribution list. Elena Stewart agreed and stated that it should be incorporated as a footnote. Sherri Evans Stanton agreed and requested a note be added to indicate the full extent of how it was shared is not known She stated the charts should stay in the document as they helped indicate support for increase in funding for land preservation.

#### Action Items:

Andrea Trabelsi initiated brief discussion on how to address action items are and next steps with the recommendations. Rich Hall asked the Task Force how much information should be added at this stage and if there should there be an implementation chapter. He asked the Task Force if they can talk about the recommendations that they agree on and move to next steps. Jeff Downing asked if the Task Force should make sure that the recommendations are not overly prescriptive so that the Task Force doesn't in the administration or County Council. Sherri Evans Stanton stated that a next steps section that may not have to be as detailed as implementation. Project selection criteria would be designed on the recommendations made by the Task Force. Dee Durham noted that recommendation is another word for next steps, but it could make it difficult for things to be implemented if it is left too loose. Sherri Evans Stanton stated there isn't enough time to make very specific recommendations unless the timeline is extended for the report.

The Task Force updated the definition for open space with the help of Elena Stewart.

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

Andrea Trabelsi noted that staff would like comments on the current draft by July 27, 2020 and asked the Task Force to submit comments in email and to include Jeff Downing and the subcommittee chairs on any significant edits so staff can proceed with editing and the next draft of the report. The goal is to have the next and final draft for detailed review (including substance and stylistic editing) by early to mid-August for the Task Force to review prior to its next meeting. The Task Force would discuss any remaining comments/edits at its next meeting, staff would make those edits. The Task Force is hoping to have a draft posted to the website after the last review of the report in August. The Task Force agreed to further contemplate the potential for a public meeting due to concerns around COVID-19.

It was noted that the final report deadline is not a hard deadline on September 1. If additional time is needed by the group, the schedule can push back some.

NEXT FULL TASK FORCE MEETING: TBD