

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MEETING MINUTES

June 13, 2022

Supervisors: Kathie Becker, Andrew Mintz, and Benee Hershon

Contractors: Susan Thomas

Partners: Bob Purcell, Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) and Scott Lewis with Lewis Studios

Volunteers: Liz McGuire

Quorum: Kathie started the meeting with a quorum at 7:02.

District Conservationist Report: Bob reported that 8 projects in Middlesex County were selected in this round of funding. The five discussed in our last meeting: 2 for Upswing Farm in Pepperell for 5 high tunnels and an irrigation system (they bought the Kaiser APR and are vegetable farming and their well test indicated plenty of water on the land), Kimball Fruit Farm, also in Pepperell, submitted a CSP, Cupp and Sons applied for more thermal curtains, an Ashby farm (Rochelle Johns) applied for a high tunnel and Grisha is working with Kelsey on two applications for different programs since his leasing of the land may invalidate a CSP application, as well as one for Shaw Dairy Farm and another for Small Farm.

The Quality Assurance Review of the Holden office is being conducted this week.

Lewis Studios: Sue introduced Scott and his business to the Board, summarizing the terrific fixed price development work completed these last six months, the annual maintenance contract for hosting our online tools, providing security and software updates as well as a limited amount of support, and the expectations of an ongoing working relationship to support transitions and ongoing growth. Scott elaborated on his expertise and business model, as well as his commitment to MCD's ongoing success.

Healthy Soils Action Plan: Sue reminded the Board of this initiative, which has been tied up in the legislative process for the past year or more. A State Committee Working group developed the plan and is reconvening to develop an implementation plan now that it has become law. \$100,000 in funding can and must be spent now before July 1st or extended via legislation into next year. A lobbying effort is underway to extend the money, as well as to secure an additional larger pool of money to implement the plan now that it is law. A parallel effort is underway to allocate \$50,000 each to Berkshire Conservation District, to buy additional

equipment for their no till equipment lending program and for start up equipment for a similar program at Hampden Hampshire Conservation District.

While MCD is not well positioned to offer a no till lending program, many aspects of the Healthy Soils Action Plan are extremely relevant to landowners of Middlesex County and Sue recommended MCD plan to use part of the Innovative Grant to help promote good soil health practices through workshops and/or targeted forums based on each of the pillars outlined in the plan. Both Innovative Grant projects are designed to help preserve or enhance soil health, either through education of landowners on practices they can adopt to preserve or enhance soil health (FY 2022) and by piloting stable waste composting methods to enrich soils and prevent pollution (FY 2020 and 2021).

Kathie will try to attend the meeting at 10:00 on Wednesday standing in for Sue who cannot attend. The attendees will start to develop the implementation plan. Sue needs to draft any ideas to share with Kathie and Tom and has reached out to Patrick who was our Healthy Soils Supervisor Specialist during the development phase of the Plan to see if he wishes to reengage with this initiative.

Minutes: Andrew made the motion to approve the minutes from the May Board meeting as drafted with the noted edits, Benee seconded this motion and all were in favor.

EEA Grant Status

FY 2023 Basic LOI: After discussion with Tom, Kathie and Julie, Sue submitted a Letter of Inquiry to EEA for a Basic Grant to support District Administration. While discussion at the May meeting indicated a desire to apply for an Innovative Grant next year as well, Tom indicated that we were not as strong a candidate for the Innovative Grant as we had thought and that not applying this year would not count against us in a future year, whereas applying, and getting the money, without the ability to use it promptly, would count against us in future rounds. Given the timing and transitions going on at the moment, it was decided to take a year off from the Innovative grant program to continue building on our current administrative strengths and finish our outstanding conservation work. As discussed previously, the Basic Grant in FY 2023 will be \$9,000.

If invited, which is not unlikely, MCD needs to be prepared to draft and submit a complete grant proposal no later than 3:00 P.M. on July 22, 2022. This work will need to be assigned if Sue cannot complete it before her departure. A proposed budget for next year will be forthcoming for Board approval and inclusion in the grant application.

FY 2022 Basic and Innovative Grant (workshops) – half of the Basic grant portion of this award has been spent and will be reimbursed to the District within 45 days of Sue submitting our receipts. The other half will be billed in fy 2023, as stated in the budget for the grant.

Sue will also submit for reimbursement on money spent on her time on workshops and workshop fees this year for the Innovative portion of this bank award. The bulk of the innovative grant funding for workshops has not been spent.

Sue recommends sitting down with the grant application and establishing a calendar of workshops and associated budget for these funds for FY 2023. It may be that MCD can do something larger than originally conceived, or a pollinator educator day, if many of the workshops in the subject areas are low cost or virtual, as the FY 2022 workshops have been.

FY 2021 Basic and Innovative Grant – the second half of the Basic grant portion of this award has been spent and will be reimbursed to the District within 45 days of Sue submitting our receipts. The first half was billed in fy 2020, and reimbursed, as stated in the budget for the grant.

Much of the Innovative Grant monies have yet to be spent because Sue did not realize they had been allocated to us until May. She thought the FY 2020 money had been extended, rather than new money allocated, so she thought she was spending from one Innovative grant for manure, not two. This is good news as it gives MCD another year to finish the Stable Waste Composting Pilot Project with Grisha. You have an email with the status as of last month. This month MCD paid for initial testing of the various ingredient streams and some compost mid process. The remainder of the testing and educational programs that are derived from the pilot will be funded from this money, which Kathie and Sue were able to extend for another year into FY 2023.

FY 2020 Basic and Innovative Grant – all of the basic grant monies have been spent and reimbursed. MCD will lose any remaining Innovative monies on July 1st, so Sue will be billing as much as she can to this grant. When it was extended due to Covid, Sue confirmed that the website development work could be billed to this grant. Last month she learned other items may be as well, so the bulk of our expenses will be requested from this funding stream before it expires.

Draft Job Descriptions and Hiring Plan

District Administrator Julie, Kathie and Sue worked on a detailed, general, and paragraph job description to be used at various stages of the recruiting and contracting process. The burb and overview job description are posted on our website, and the blurb with a link to our website is posted on Facebook. Sue will continue to post the description in a variety of industry specific

places. The suggested application deadline is July 10th and the inquiries and applications have been directed to middlesexconservationdistrict@gmail.com, the District's general mailbox. Sue will provide access credentials to the recruiting committee and as part of her transition, as this email is accessible to anyone in the District from anywhere and will be used by the new District Administrator, rather than their personal address, as has been done in the past, while they await their NRCS computer.

Plant Sale Coordinator and fall Plant Sale - Sue asked for a motion to postpone or cancel the fall sale for the same reasons we made this decision last year. Andrew made the motion to postpone the sale, Benee seconded it and all were in favor. Sue will cancel our NARA Park reservation.

There is no reason to believe that plants were ordered for this sale, so there is no inventory to cancel, although recommended vendors are listed in the transition materials Carolyn prepared prior to stepping down. Carolyn was very thorough in providing instructions for the new tools, printing out emails from Scott, and detailing new job duties that evolved after she was hired with the implementation of the new website to be included in the new plant sale coordinator job description. Sue is adding materials to these files and has locked them in the office file cabinet as they contain access credentials and PII of customers from this year's sale. Kathie remarked that Carolyn was very professional in the way she documented processes prior to announcing her resignation.

The search for a new plant sale coordinator will begin after the District Administrator is on board.

Innovative Grant Contractors – Sue reminded the Board that she works 3 jobs for the District: the District Administrator and as a Project Manager for each of the Innovative Grants. While she understood the funding to be strictly separated for actual work on the grant and Admin, she discovered last month that this is actually much more fluid, as it is assumed that either the District Administrator or the Project Manager might perform tasks to support the innovative grants that might be considered administrative in nature. Since it is possible the District may attract a candidate who is also willing and able to perform both administrative and project management/conservation services, Kathie and Julie suggest the District should wait to have the District Administrator in place before defining and filling any additional contract positions necessary to complete the grants. As of right now, these responsibilities are not listed in the District Administrator job description.

Supervisors – While the District is always looking for Supervisors, and needs to actively recruit, Kathie and Julie suggest the District wait to do so until at least the District Administrator is in place. That said, everyone should keep their mind and eyes open and be talking up the District

all the time. Should an exciting interested party turn up, please refer them to our events, web site and meetings to start to learn more.

Recruiting Committee – Julie and Kathie have started to serve, with Sue, and Benee offered to help screen resumes. Sue needs to post the description on a variety of job boards as well.

Proposed Funding Strategy – If awarded, the new basic grant in FY 2023 will be \$9,000 up from \$7,000. This additional money should more than pay for a payroll vendor and contribute to payroll taxes. The three innovative grants still finishing out this year and next, in combination with reserves, should more than cover a year of expenses. However, the Board will reassess the financial position regularly and adjust grant and revenue strategies accordingly, knowing that at some point in the future the acquisition of more grant funds (probably in the form of an innovative grant in a future year) will be required in addition to revenues from plant sales. NACD grants and additional opportunities through EEA should be kept in mind.

Preliminary Transition Plan – Sue outlined the tasks, items and order that a transition to a new District Administrator might take and the types of support the Board will need to provide during the transition. She will be drafting a plan and references. Keepers of the financial computer, the District Email, and passwords to all of our accounts are required. July tasks include hiring the District Administrator, completing the Worker’s Compensation audit with the auditor, finishing the long range plan, if it is not done this month, and if invited, submitting the full EEA grant proposal by July 22, 2022 at 3:00 PM, in addition to attendance at the State Commission Meeting and Healthy Soils Action Plan Meetings.

New Business Sue mentioned that the National Conservation District Employees Association, which she only just became aware of, might be a good resource for the District. The Board discussed the 2nd June meeting date and settled on the 20th, one week from this meeting due to vacation schedules in advance of July 4th.

Andrew made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:16 p.m. Benee seconded, all were in favor.

Minutes noted and respectfully submitted,

Susan Lavigne Thomas

District Administrator

