



**ACME TOWNSHIP
FARMLAND & OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Friday, February 17, 2006, 4:30 p.m.
Acme Township Hall
6042 Acme Road, Williamsburg MI 49690**

Meeting called to Order at 4:35 p.m.

Members present: B. Garvey (Chair), N. Veliquette, B. Carstens, K. Engle, W. Kladder, R. Saylor,
Members excused: P. Brink
Staff present: S. Corpe, Township Manager/Recording Secretary
N. Edwardson, Recording Secretary
Also present: B. Bourdages, Farmland Preservation

1. **Status of GT County Farmland Board:** A very productive County Board meeting was held on February 15, 2006. We discussed state funding, drew up a timeline. All critical things that must happen.
2. **Review of Timeline for GT Farmland Board Application Round:** Bourdages stated that things at the County have been active and productive. There is a growing desire to move ahead so that a grant cycle can be run this fall. He provided a proposed 2006 application timeline based on an assumption that the state will have a grant cycle in the fall and working backwards from the anticipated date for a County application for State funding. The County Board meets on the last Wednesday of each month, so the final date should be August 30 instead of August 23. According to the timeline, the scoring criteria must be approved by the County at the end of March.

Most of Bourdages work to date has been to support the work at the County Ag Board level, but he senses that the time is soon coming when he needs to be doing less of this activity and more working directly with landowners and Acme and Peninsula Townships. This will be especially true as he helps bring applications to the County; it would be a conflict for him to also be advising the County through the process of evaluating the applications. There was a meeting on Wednesday at which Larry Inman and the County felt that perhaps they could provide some level of staffing and funding – perhaps through a revolving fund. The County Board seems to be willing to provide funding to run the program in terms of collecting applications and scoring them since these appear to be genuine County-level expenses to administer their ordinance, with local costs to be paid by the municipality generating them.

The GT County Prosecutor's office has been working well with the process, and there are indications that the Antrim County Prosecutor's office is in general agreement with the proposed bi-county agreement documents. There seems to be general consensus that the farmland assets to be protected cross governmental boundaries. The County also seemed to want to prevent any delay to Acme moving forward with a grant cycle being caused by ongoing negotiations regarding the bi-county agreements.

3. **Review of most recent scoring criteria draft:** The most recent draft was handed out includes a formula that evaluates farmland in terms of proximity to residential areas. Points can be deducted from an application if average residential density in a ½ mile radius of the

property is more than 1 residence per 40 acres. The scoring system will be “field-tested” on selected properties by a group of farm community individuals. Kladder suggested that an individual from Long Lake Township be invited to participate. Rick Sayler will be part of the test.

4. **Review of Key Elements of Acme PDR Ordinance:** Bourdages prepared a handout that highlights sections of the township PDR Ordinance that describe how the county and township interact in the process. The township essentially handles the allocation of funding, while the County is responsible for running the application process and applying the scoring system, approving the restrictions and permitted uses to be part of conservation easements, establishing purchase prices and ongoing oversight and enforcement. He particularly noted the actions that the township needs to take throughout the process.

First a landowner submits an application to the county along with an application approval letter from the township. The County scores the application according to the established criteria and returns it to the township. The township then decides how to allocate available matching funds. The ordinance says that the township shall allocate matching funds to highest scoring parcels in a manner that provides the most possible competitive advantage to those applications relative to county, state or federal matching programs. Funds can be allocated to a single or to multiple parcels. Bourdages feels that at some point in the future it may be necessary to add language dealing with what happens when the township has less funds than required to obtain a certain property, or when there’s another property in question with different relative merits.

Bourdages also highlighted language relative to the purposes for which money in the township’s Farmland Preservation Fund can be used. There is language that describes what funding mechanisms the township can use, and the tasks with which the Board of Trustees is charged relative to the program. The ordinance says that the township will run application cycles in coordination with the County application cycles. On the application applicants will indicate whether or not they desire consideration for township matching funds.

Kladder observed that it has taken a long time to work through program setup and modifying ordinances and scoring criteria that were created for different communities so that they will work here. He feels that things are moving along and that generally a process is most difficult the first time you go through it. Bourdages has been working with Gordon Hayward, Peninsula Township since he has experienced in running a PDR program. His advice is that it took them 18-20 months from the time their first millage was passed to working out the program and getting it operational – and they were one township alone, rather than a township and two counties.

5. **Discussion of next steps for Committee and Timeline:** Bourdages wants to ensure that everyone understands that many land trusts have funding and staffing for community projects. The GT Regional Land Conservancy is oriented towards helping local communities to help themselves in terms of programs such as these. They are thinking about additional resources that can be brought to bear to make the County program a success and to encourage new townships to join the program, but they also want to ensure that townships are putting in effort themselves rather than leaving it all to the Conservancy.

Bourdages feels that it’s time for an outreach effort to the local farm community that’s targeted to farm owners that already have a level of interest in participation. Even though some program details are still being worked out, it’s time to see what questions potential participants have and get the information they need to them so they can consider

participation. For instance, it might be beneficial to host a workshop with some of the farm operation lenders so landowners can learn about the impact participation might have on their financing. He suspects that most of the Acme farming community are acquainted with one another and that most of the eligible land is in the hands of relatively few individuals. An informational program doesn't have to be overly formal, and the first meeting can be for learning what questions need answering at subsequent meetings.

Engle believes that the key questions are going to be when the first application cycle will be and what the scoring criteria are. Garvey understands that the initial meeting would be to let people know that the program is moving forward and solicit questions to be answered at a second meeting. Engle wondered if farmers would have an opportunity to impact the scoring criteria, Bourdages felt this would be too complicated at this stage. Kladder feels that the public meetings need to be scheduled relative to the overall timeline and the 60-day application period. Bourdages noted that another question is how much funding the Board will be making available at this time, taking into consideration the need for reserves for processing.

Garvey asked at what point in the process the landowner and township will know what state or federal matching funds are available. Bourdage stated that the state and federal programs are based on the existence of local applications. During the last cycle there were 11 applications and \$1.3 million available; 5 of the applications received a share of the funds available. Another factor can be whether the landowner is contributing to the match by making a bargain sale. Engle believes that as long as people understand the rules and the fact that one has to apply to the County first before knowing what federal, state and local funds are available, it won't be a huge problem.

Garvey asked if we should wait to hold a meeting until the scoring criteria are complete; Engle believes this would be wise, because meeting before they are complete will encourage people to suggest changes. We also discussed the appraisal process. Engle asked where does the appraisals come in? Bourdage responded with the application. Bourdage suggested that we do this like Peninsula Township did. For \$500-\$1000 they had self contained appraisals done for the initial application. If the landowner disputed it they could pick up the cost for a new one.

We discussed the date for the next meeting. It was suggested either March 1st or the 2nd. Everyone was going to check their schedules and come back with a date.

Minutes from the January 30, 2006, meeting were not approved as there was not a quorum present.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 6:10 p.m.