

Approved 6-12-20

MONTGOMERY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETING  
MINUTES  
May 8, 2020

Due to COVID-19 meeting restrictions, the regular monthly meeting of the Board of Supervisors, Montgomery Soil Conservation District (MSCD) was held remotely through GoToMeeting. The teleconference meeting arrangements were provided by Pam Saul, and a public meeting notice with access details was posted 7 days in advance of the meeting on the District's website. The remote meeting was held on Friday, May 8, 2020. Prior to the meeting, officially starting, John addressed guidelines and instructions for Board Members and guests with meeting protocols for Public Meetings held remotely. The meeting officially started at 9:08 a.m. and the Chairman, Robert Butz called the meeting to order and ordered a roll call. Robert Butz, Chair, present; Robert Butts, Vice-Chair, present, Pam Saul, Treasurer, present, Tim McGrath, Member, present. The Chair acknowledged that the Board of Supervisors had a quorum and proceeded with the meeting. Tom Linthicum, Associate Supervisor dialed in later and joined the meeting after the roll call. The first order of business was the introductions of guests. Present were: Adam Lyon, MDA, Kelly Nichols, Extension, Jeremy Criss, Office of Agriculture, Mike Scheffel, Office of Agriculture, Karen Walker, MSCD, Paul Meyer, MSCD, J. Harne, MSCD, Travis Gorleski, MSCD, Mark Gormley, NRCS-MSCD, Charlotte Brewster, NRCS/MSCD and MSCD District Manager, John Zawitoski. After the introduction, the chair moved to the Agency Reports and asked Adam Lyon to provide his report.

**AGENCY REPORTS**

**MDA-** Adam Lyon reported that Paul Meyer, MDA Engineering Technician, is on a 2-week stay-at-home quarantine order as result of a potential exposure issue at the District office. Adam thanked John for notifying him immediately that a person at the Agriculture History Farm Park (AHFP) tested positive for COVID-19. Adam shared the new policy for MDA-RC employees detailing conditions under which some field operations could resume. He further explained that this will be implemented on a limited basis and further revised as conditions warrant. More specifically, an email from the employee is required the day before any field visit and the Area Coordinator and District Manager must give approval. Adam noted that the office entry policy remains the same, with employees being allowed access to their offices one day per week. As a result of COVID-19, MDA vehicles are required to be wiped down. MDA is working on acquiring disinfectant and PPE. John asked about the status of new MDA vehicles? Adam responded that the District is slated to receive a new vehicle and that it will be assigned to Paul. The vehicle delivery is scheduled to take place sometime in June.

**Extension -**Kelly Nichols of the UMD in Frederick County provided the report and she noted that upon Chuck Schuster's retirement, Kelly became the interim educator for Montgomery. Kelly thanked the Board of Supervisors for the invitation to attend the meeting. The University is scheduled to telework through May 22<sup>nd</sup> and are following the guidelines of CDC. While Kelly is assigned to Frederick Office, she is hopeful that Chuck's position may be filled by the end of the year. She noted that having Doug Tregoning on-site is a good resource for Montgomery and shared details about several online webinars that are available for producers. She encouraged everyone to contact her and let her know of any needs and she would like to continue to join the monthly Board of Supervisors meetings. John welcomed Kelly to the meeting and indicated that she is welcomed to participate in upcoming Board Meetings. Robert Butz thanked her for acting as the interim for the vacant position. Kelly took a few minutes to explain to the Board her background and area of expertise and assured the Board if there was a question she could not answer, she would pull from the U of MD resources available to get an answer.

**Office of Agriculture -** Jeremy Criss provided his report that was sent to supervisors in advance of the meeting. This report was also on display as part of the shared desktop screen feature of GoToMeeting for the benefit of

the meeting guests. Jeremy explained that the Office of Ag staff are mostly working remotely but occasionally he does go into the office to work on those things he cannot do remotely. Jeremy assured the Board, that Office of Ag is coordinating with County Health Department officials and agency partners on the latest incident involving a COVID 19 exposure at the AHFP and he is hopeful the office sanitation will be completed soon and the building will be opened back up to staff. The building remains closed however to the public.

Listed below are the items that Jeremy presented and where appropriate, are links to information he discussed, and they have been incorporated into the Minutes:

- The Office of Agriculture continues to update our COVID-19 Agricultural Business Resources procedures that is published on the OAG website. Last week, the OAG added a page devoted to several on-line platforms designed to help the farmers with on-line sales and orders of agricultural products. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ag/services/boards-committees/guidance-for-ag-business.html>
- As reported earlier, the OAG was informed that the custodian who cleans the Agricultural Activities Center tested positive for COVID-19. We developed a calendar that shows which agricultural agency staff have entered the building for the month of April and May. We are recommending that all these staff implement self-quarantine for the next 14 days. We have informed the MNCPPC and the County government of our recommendations.
- We received the guidance from the Maryland Department of Agriculture regarding guidelines for pick-your-own operations under COVID-19 restrictions. We are working with Butlers Orchard, Homestead Farm, Rock Hill Orchard to help them to better understand the interpretation of the requirements. All employees are required to wear cloth face coverings including all customers age nine and above. The pick your own guidelines are 8-9 people whereby guests can sign up online with a 2-hour window as well as being required to read and sign a form releasing the operation from any liability from COVID-19 exposure. The OAG is still working to assist the owners of retail agricultural businesses as the County and the State begin to open the economy. <https://mda.maryland.gov/maryland-products/Documents/Maryland-Pick-Your-Own-Operations-During-COVID-19-State-of-Emergency-FAQs.pdf>
- There is a new Telework Assistance Program on the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) website, and they will be administering the program. The Office of Agriculture has asked if additional language could be added that would allow farmers to be eligible for these grants for COVID-19 related expenses-purchasing masks and cloth face coverings, signage, etc. Jeremy indicated that a producer has used this program to purchase a new computer and noted that the grants are up to \$2500. **Applications will open this Wednesday at 10 am.** More specifically:
  - Grants are available up to \$2,500.
  - On a weekly basis, approved/eligible grant applications will be awarded through a lottery process.
  - Applicants not receiving funding during the first week will remain eligible for the remaining weekly lotteries until funding is exhausted.
  - MCEDC plans to notify awardees within 2-3- days after each of the lotteries
  - Jeremy conveyed to the Board, that if an organization has already applied to the PHEG for telework funding they can still apply to this program, although you cannot receive funding from both programs. People who applied for PHEG and haven't heard anything yet can apply on the MCEDC website they must fill out their application to be considered.

The provided and incorporated into the Minutes provides more information about this program:

<https://thinkmoco.com/telework-assistance-fund>

- 2020 Maryland Legislative Session -**No update from the April meeting.**  
<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2020RS/bills/hb/hb0848F.pdf>- HB 848- passed and we are waiting for the Governor's signature. The HB 848 directs proceeds from the County Agricultural Transfer Tax for Ag Land Preservation Easement purchases and other ag programs. It was noted that County's action on this Bill will be delayed due to the fiscal crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic.  
  
<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2020RS/bills/hb/hb0805F.pdf>- HB 805- passed and we are waiting for the Governor's signature. The HB 805 creates a new occupancy of 100 people under Public Safety Section 12-508 and allows Montgomery County to use agricultural buildings for agricultural tourism for occupancies up to 100 people.
- The Montgomery County Office of Agriculture was awarded a Rural Legacy Program (RLP) Grant of \$2,704,500 on January 8, 2020. The Grant Agreements were executed in March however, COVID-19 pandemic may negatively impact the County receiving these Grants. The County informed the State that we will require an extension of the RLP Grant Agreements if the State delays action on the RLP Project Agreements.
- Update from Tuesday' County Council Work Session on the Office of Agriculture FY21 Operating Budget. The savings from the MAEF Contract is \$18,250 and OAG has asked if we could use this funding for agricultural initiatives under COVID-19. The OAG is continuing to work with the Food Security Task Force to assist with developing plans for COVID-19 including opportunities for expanding local food production. Several local farms have seen big increases in CSA customers as well as on-line sales for curbside pickup of local food.
- The OAG is working with the Council on suggested changes to the definition of agricultural education and tourism. The Councilmembers are talking with Drew Baker from Old Westminster Winery regarding the farm his family purchased on Burnt Hill Road to provide opportunities for off the grid overnight farm stays. Tim inquired about the sanitary needs for the overnight stays at the winery. Jeremy said that the overnight stay would be an accessory-use to the farm and there will be no permanent fixtures associated with the structures.
- Update on Coronavirus-COVID-19. Montgomery County Public Health Emergency Grant (PHEG) program. The Montgomery County Executive and County Council together have set aside \$20 million in funding to support small businesses and nonprofits who are struggling to survive the economic impact of COVID-19. The application and details are still pending.  
<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/ag/services/boards-committees/guidance-for-ag-business.html>
- During the MCFB meeting on Tuesday, Todd Greenstone told everyone how he was turned away at the County Transfer Station with debris from the farm. When we investigated the situation, we learned that Todd's employee did not have a letter explaining that he works for an essential farm business. We followed up with Todd and explained the OAG has a template of this letter on our COVID-19 Agricultural Businesses Resource page.

#### **Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

Montgomery County Farm Bureau Board of Directors- May 5, 2020  
 Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors-May 8, 2020  
 Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board-May 13, 2020  
 Agricultural Advisory Committee-May 19, 2020

## **SECRETARY/ TREASURER'S REPORT**

Due to the requirements associated with having a virtual meeting, the Chair, Robert Butz requested that there only be one motion for the Minutes and filing the Financial Report. The chair noted that everyone has received the March Minutes and the Financial Reports. The Chair asked Pam if she was comfortable with approving the abbreviated/limited Financial Reports. Pam responded that the report is sufficient, and the Board should consider its approval. Although the MDA Financial Report was not available for review, the cash statement report reflects the MDA financials. Karen explained that MDA report would be available for the next meeting. Karen then explained that the bank statement and the checkbook reconciled for both March and April. Karen indicated that the District has received the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarterly MDA Payment as well as not receiving any upcoming invoices for payments. Robert Butz made a motion to approve the Minutes and the filing of March and April Finances. The Board votes were recorded as follows: Robert Butts, voted yes; Pam Saul, voted yes; Tim McGrath voted yes and passed approving the March Minutes and filing the March and April Finances.

## **APPROVALS, RATIFICATIONS AND REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE**

Before presenting the District Conservationist Activities Report, Charlotte provided the agency update. Currently, Brandy is on 14-day quarantine due to an in-office potential exposure risk and she indicated that the majority of NRCS employees are teleworking. NRCS is open for business but the allowance to go into the office is a challenge for some NRCS technicians. Because of Paul's efforts in the field, Montgomery was in pretty good shape up until this latest in office COVID 19 exposure risk.

Charlotte then introduced the new contractor technician with NRCS, Mark Gornley. She noted that he has been on board for about two weeks and will be working with Paul on doing surveys and conservation design. Charlotte asked Mark to introduce himself to the Board and provide a few minutes to highlight his background. Mark shared his background and Charlotte shared that she is excited to have Mark on board and all the Supervisors welcomed Mark.

Charlotte moved on to some program deadlines and explained that the deadline for CSP is May 29<sup>th</sup>. The program is designed for operators that are doing a great job and are willing to try something new. There must be a limited amount of resource concerns on the land and the operators will receive incentive payments. It is a five-year contract. The operator does not have to own the land but must have control of the land for 5 years. She encouraged the Supervisors to let operators know about the program. John explained that District staff is looking to reach out to several cooperators that have done a great job and encourage them to apply. It would be nice to showcase the benefits of this program through examples implemented by other cooperators. Charlotte then explained that having an approved Conservation Plans is a requirement to receive Cost- Share.

She then moved on to Request for Assistance. The request came from the Office of Agriculture and it is for Ben Perry. John explained, the request to supervisors, as it involved the design of a composting pad. Tim asked if they would be bringing in material or only using what is on site. John provided more details and invited Mike Scheffel to provide additional information. Mike shared some specifics on food scraps and composting, and he noted that this could be viewed as a pilot program. Following the discussion, the Chair Robert Butz asked about the protocol to sign off on conservation plan approvals and asked Mark is there a safe way to look at the soils in Montgomery. Charlotte then explained that the Activities Report outlines assistance provided on other Requests for Assistance over the past two meetings and provided information she had on the assistance provided. Charlotte responded that she and John are working on setting up guidelines for electronic conservation plan approvals and as field operations return to normal, she will coordinate with Paul to take Mark out into the field.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**COVID-19 and the Office** – John shared that we have acted and have adopted the procedures provided by MDA that employs a COVID-19 prescreening questionnaire that must be completed before any District staff is permitted entrance into the building. John shared details on the process that is being used. John explained that

the District is trying to operate as normal as we can under very unusual circumstances. He explained that we have been able to maintain District operations to a great extent, even while most of the staff are working under situational telework agreements. The continuity of the operations plan we put together prior to COVID-19 has helped us tremendously to maintain our operations. While the next two weeks will be challenging, Charlotte and John will be working together to keep things moving ahead. Adam reaffirmed that Paul is on a 14-day self-quarantine and Charlotte explained she would engage Sam Tyler for field work when Paul is not available and explained Brandy is also on a 14-day self-quarantine. John noted that it is the Parks responsibility to sanitize the building and the office is closed until Monday. MSCD has implemented weekly staff meetings to discuss the weeks workload and upcoming items to make sure things do not fall through the cracks and we are providing assistance to our cooperators.

**1st Draft SCD Strategic Plan Discussion** – John explained that while the WIP has been a large part of the District workload over the past decade, it is by far not the only workload item addressed by the District. To capture these workload matters, John drafted a long-term strategic plan, that he put a great deal of thought and time in putting the draft together. Never having drafted a long-term strategic plan before, John is seeking input from staff and supervisors. A copy of the plan was sent electronically, and John's hope is that when we reach the right point, the Board would be willing to formally adopt the draft later this year. There is no rush and John was thinking that between, now and perhaps, our next board meeting, the Supervisors can look over the document and share their thoughts.

**MSCD Annual Report** – John explained that this past month has been busy with the development of the strategic plan and District awards, as well as the time of the year for publishing our Annual Report. John explained that a copy of our Annual Report was included with the material that was sent electronically. The Report covers calendar year 2019 and is also part of the submission of the MASCD award's packet. This report details major accomplishments of the District for 2019. We first published the report to our website, provided copies to MASCD and the SSCC and subsequently published for the public to have in our June newsletter. John is very proud of what we accomplished this year. The Chair, Robert Butz commented that the Annual Report was excellent and would like the Board to consider voting to approve this Report. The following represents the votes for approval of the Annual Report. Robert Butz voted yes; Robert Butts voted yes; Tim McGrath voted yes, and Pam Saul voted yes approving the 2019 MSCD Annual Report.

**MASCD Conservation Awards** – John explained to the Board that the District team has completed 6 awards for submission to MASCD. They were originally due by COB today but MASCD extended the deadline to June 1<sup>st</sup>. While we are appreciative of the extension, we were prepared to submit them on the original submission deadline. John explained each award submission is comprehensive and he believes each represents a strong submission. The following awards will be submitted to MASCD: MASCD Attendance, Newsletter, District Education, Cooperator of the Year, Outstanding Employee and the MAFC District Awards. The entire staff participated in the development of the award submissions and John thanked Karen and J. for their effort. The following represents the votes for approving the 6-MASCD award submissions. Robert Butz voted yes; Robert Butts voted yes; Pam Saul voted yes, and Tim McGrath voted yes approving the submission of all 6 awards.

**SSCC- MD SCD Leadership Self-Assessment Discussion** – John directed Board members to their agenda packets to view the SCD Leadership Self-Assessment document that was included in the material that was sent electronically to Board Members. The SSCC has requested that each district participate in a Leadership Self-Assessment Tool. The Tool is designed for the Soil Conservation Districts (Districts) to make an internal evaluation of four essential aspects of a District's functional capacity. These four areas include: 1) organization and governance; 2) work planning; 3) program delivery; and 4) community engagement. The SSCC asks that we complete this assessment thoughtfully and honestly, as the leadership team reflects on the abilities of your District. The assessment is to be completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> and will be used by the SSCC in the development of

trainings for Supervisors and staff. The Chair, Robert Butz suggested John use his discretion in working with staff to complete the assessment and after working through the assessment with staff, present to Board Members for review and discussion at the next Board meeting.

**New Staff Addition: Mark Gormley Information RC&D Technician Mont/Howard** - This was covered under the District Conservationist Report and Mark provided a brief introduction of himself. Although this position is shared with Howard SCD the position is housed in Montgomery SCD. John indicated once conditions improve, he and Charlotte will get his workstation set up for his use.

**2020 Cooperator's Dinner and Award Recognitions** -John explained that we still have September 9<sup>th</sup> reserved for this year's cooperators dinner. John explained that while no action needs to be taken on this item today, he felt that it is something we should, at least, begin thinking about, including potential alternatives if events limit participation this fall. John also noted that MASCD is considering delaying the 2020 summer meeting to later this fall. The Chair, Robert Butz thinks it is too early to decide on the Annual Cooperators Dinner but recognized that we should monitor the situation and look towards the July meeting as a deadline to decide on the dinner. John agreed with the July timing to make the decision to have the Annual Cooperators Dinner and was glad that the Board had this discussion.

While there are still many unknowns concerning what we will be able to do later this year for the Cooperator's Dinner, John felt this should not prevent the District from recognizing those cooperators and individuals that had made a difference in promoting soil and water conservation. Each year the District selects several worthy cooperators and individuals that are making a difference in the soil and water conservation. Based upon discussions with staff, they would like to recognize the following cooperators for recognition.

**Cooperator of Year-** Laytonsville Landscaping; **Equine Cooperator of the Year-** Dave and Ellen Quirk; **Urban Ag Cooperator of the Year-** Casey Spears. There was acknowledgement from the Board that the nominees selected by staff represent good choices for recognition.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

**MASCD Endowment Grant Status Information** - During the March Board of Directors meeting, the MSCD was awarded a \$1,500 grant to help support our local Envirothon program and a new junior conservationist program for the District. The Grant was developed by all of the District staff with contributions by our Earth Team Volunteer. MSCD was among 5 Districts who applied and received funding. This was a team effort and very proud of our team collaborating to get this grant award.

**Cover Crop Spring Certification Update Information** - June 3<sup>rd</sup> is the last date for Spring Cover Crop Certification. Because of COVID 19, farmers are being asked to provide self-certification information to the District by snail mail, email, or calling. Farmers just need to mark up a map and detail the date they killed the field down. Signatures for payments are going to be captured during the next program year sign up. For supervisors, J. Harne is putting See Signature Page (SSP) on their forms. Normally, we are supposed to have a Board Member sign their claim whenever possible; however, this might not be until sign up for this fall's program. MDA expects some changes to this year's program, including cost share payment amounts. Adam shared that spot checks are not required, and that satellite imaging can be used to verify the kill down. Adam noted that operators should anticipate program changes and that information will be available in a couple of weeks. It was also reported early in May, MDA would be sending out letters to producers that did not submit their annual AIR report and if a producer fails to report, the fines for not filing AIR forms could be levied. The fines have increased from \$250 to \$1,000.

**MACs Program Cost Share Update Information** - John noted that COVID-19 has created a game changer for MDA programs. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 health emergency, submitting new MDA Cost-Share applications to the State office was placed on hold. We have been notified that we can resume sending

applications to the State office and ultimately for approval by the Board of Public Works. Moving forward, MDA will be servicing Cost Shared applications on a first come, first served basis. John shared that it is good to know that the previous approved applications are being processed for payment because MSCD has an operator, who's project is almost complete and will be anxious to receive his cost share payment. Charlotte shared that Federal programs are open, and she is hopeful the operators will sign up funding from CSP. Charlotte will encourage planners to promote the program to potential producers in the upcoming staff meeting.

**UCA Update Information** - During the April SSCC meeting there was substantial discussion on the UCA. Only 4 Districts have executed the agreements. The Districts that signed the UCA agreement do not drive Federal vehicles so there was no concern on liability. John learned that the reason we have not received an updated UCA, because there has been no official response from National Headquarters on our initial review, where we submitted comments in December. John has asked for a revised UCA for the supervisors to review. If the vehicle insurance issue cannot be worked out, he is suggesting striking it from the UCA and the District will just not drive Federal vehicles. John explained that he is still exploring alternatives for transportation, leased vs rentals. COVID-19 and other program deadlines interfered with this. He will focus on the leased vs. rental options for the next meeting.

After John reported on the UCA, Pam asked if anyone has received PP loans and that farmers qualified for the first round. She shared that she thinks the surplus will be spotty and she encouraged good record keeping. The loan covers rent, mortgage and payroll.

#### **ADJOURNMENT AND NEXT MEETING**

Before the meeting officially adjourned, John thanked Pam for hosting the Board meeting. John shared that we may be able to use Microsoft Teams and noted that he has secured a G5 level license. The G5 level license provides the District the means to publish a call-in number for guests and enables the District to meet public notice requirements and access to the meeting under the Open Meetings Law. Pam indicated that if we needed to use GoToMeeting again, that she had no problem with making the arrangements for the June Board of Supervisors Meeting.

Respectfully submitted,



Karen Walker, Administrative Assistant

<b><u>MEETINGS ATTENDED</u></b>	<b><u>PERCENTAGE</u></b>
Butz	90%
Butts	100%
Saul	100%
Stabler	90%
McGrath	100%
*Linthicum	30%
*Joe Lehman	70%
*Chris Miller	90%

\*Associate Members