

Minutes – Regular Meeting
Baltimore County Soil Conservation District
February 18, 2025

The regular meeting of the Board of Supervisors of the Baltimore County Soil Conservation District was called to order by Chairman McGinnis at 8:00 am with the following present:

Supervisors

Mark Duvall
Eric Hadaway
Toby Mays
Mike McGinnis
Steve Smith

Staff

Jim Ensor, BCSCD
Sam Cox, NRCS
Dave Bachman, BCSCD
Essy Frey, BCSCD

Associates

Jesse Albright
Bryan Alexander (Phone)

Others

Jessica Armacost, OOA
Erika Crawl, UME

Motion - Mays moved to approve the minutes of the January Board meeting. The motion was seconded and passed.

Treasurer's Report – Hadaway stated the December 2024 Treasurer's report had been run prior to Board member expense checks being written. The report has since been revised and was included in the Board packet along with the January 2025 Treasurer's report and REFBs for both months. Fees rec'd in January were down slightly from fees received in December 2024. Smith, Duvall, Ensor, Frey and Hadaway met to discuss our FY'26 County budget request. We have asked the County (Sidh, O'Neil, Tablada and Locher) for a meeting to discuss our budget request. The County is working on some dates they may be available for this meeting.

Hadaway noted that he, Smith and Duvall met with the County (Sidh, O'Neil, Tablada and Locher) back on Friday, January 4, 2025. At the meeting the County offered, and the Board accepted (via informal vote) to accept an additional \$80K to be paid in two installments: one in January and another in April. Their offer was contingent on our retracting our plan review Rate Increase Notice of 11/26/24.

Motion - Smith moved to accept the County's offer of an additional \$80,000.00 to be paid in two installments, one in January and another in April in return for the District retracting its plan review Rate Increase Notice of 11/26/24. The motion was seconded and passed.

Motion - Hadaway moved to accept the revised December 2024 and January 2025 Treasurer's reports and pay the bills. The motion was seconded and passed.

District Conservationist 's Report – Cox stated that a lot has happened since she last attended a Board meeting. Ashley McAvoy was terminated from the Baltimore County office and two additional employees were terminated in the Carroll County office because of the Federal Government firings. Barnes and Kemp are left in the Baltimore County office and may be needed to help in Carroll County. At this point, it's unclear whether Cox or Kemp will retain their positions as they are both considered new employees.

Things in the Federal Government are very unstable right now, but we're still determined to move forward and get the job done. Farm Bill funds are locked in and IRA funds are on pause and will hopefully be released soon. Five contracts in Baltimore County were obligated with IRA funding. We cannot pay anyone doing these projects until at least April 30, 2025. No new contracts are being obligated currently with IRA monies. There is a new ranking deadline which has now been moved up to February 21, 2025. Chelsi Lewis' and Jeremy Stevens' positions are funded through Western MD RC&D, these funds are being looked at, no guarantee of these positions being retained. CREP re-enrollments for 2025 & 2026 are still being worked on. The Quality Assurance Review (QAR) was done February 3 – 7, 2025 by NRCS state office staff. The review team was particularly impressed with the quality of work on the conservation plans, especially Ashley McAvoy's plans. The final report from the QAR is due out in April. NWQI rankings are being done. These funds are not as competitive, and payment rates have increased for all practices due to being in the DC/Metro area. Annual practice reminder letters have gone out reminding participants to complete 2025 practices scheduled. Telework for all USDA employees has been revoked starting February 18, 2025. We've received numerous requests from remote workers looking for space to sit in local USDA offices across the state. Many of these employees were hired during COVID as remote workers and never had office space or desk. Baltimore County's Soil Health Day scheduled for February 20, 2025, has been cancelled. Frederick's Soil Health Day is scheduled for February 26, 2025, from 8am – 3pm at the New Midway Volunteer Fire Company. Federal employees who were terminated do have the right to appeal. Thus far, 14 positions have been lost in Maryland NRCS and more cuts are coming.

District Manager's Report – Ensor stated his report was in the packet and asked if there were any questions. We've spent all our Chesapeake Bay Trust funds which were used to pay for Jared Wagner's Cover Crop cell phone. Ensor talked to Hadaway prior to today's meeting regarding using the State General Funds (GF) to continue to cover the monthly cell phone expense of \$33.00. Ensor asked if the farmers on the Board felt the cell phone was worth the \$33/month to be able to reach Wagner on the days he works from home. The consensus of the Board was to keep the Cover Crop cell phone and pay for it with GF funds. Ensor reported that he, Armacost and Crowl had attended the 2025 Taste of Maryland event on Thursday, February 6, 2025 where the Deford family was inducted into the Maryland Governor's Agriculture Hall of Fame. Ensor, Kemp, Michaels and Alles met with representatives from Roseda on February 12, 2025. They will develop a plan to address the current erosion and water quality issues out on the farm. The farm staff wants to continue their current farming practices until they are confronted by MDE. Some talk of moving some animals onto different farms to solve concentration issues. Ensor will apply again in July for the grant to fund the 2027 National Envirothon. The state mileage rate was increased to \$0.70 per mile effective January 1, 2025. Brenda Strohmer spoke at the February 17, 2025 Farm Bureau meeting regarding 4H having a pee wee class for ages 5-8 where kids will show an animal already on the premise. Asking Farm Bureau for sponsorship funds and be the insurance as 4H cannot insure anyone under 8 on their insurance. This was modeled after Howard County program. Farm Bureau will continue to sponsor the Hereford FFA program and asked if the District would continue to partner with them.

Motion – Duvall moved to continue to support the Hereford High School FFA with a donation of \$500.00 per calendar year for a minimum of 50 hours of documented agriculture related work. The motion was seconded and passed.

Ensor passed around copies of the 2024 Annual MACS report. Baltimore County installed 25 practices last year. A farmer on Ensor Road in White Hall has been accused of burying a stream. Agland Preservation staff visited the farm to do an annual inspection, then turned the matter over to MDE. When MDE visited the site, they were asked to leave. MDE will hold a hearing on this matter. The farmer did not wish to work with the District. Some discussion on HB741 which is aimed at altering the definition of "hunt" to no longer exclude the sport of fox chasing and establishing certain exemptions and requirements for any person who participates in the sport of fox chasing to have a hunting permit.

Motion – Hadaway moved to accept the District Conservationist's and District Manager's reports. The motion was seconded and passed.

Staff – No report.

Extension – Beginning Farmer's Training has started; this is an 8-week training session. The Baltimore County Noxious Weed Board meeting is scheduled for March 10, 2025 at 7:00am.

Baltimore County Office of Agriculture – The County has been busy reviewing leases of the Ag. Center tenant agencies as management of the Ag. Center is shifting back to Baltimore County Property Management. The District's conference room cannot be found on anyone's lease and therefore has to be treated just like the other conference rooms in the Ag. Center. A Conference Room Meeting Request Form must now be submitted for each meeting to be held in any of the conference rooms at the Ag. Center. Armacost stated that Forest Harvest Permits do not cover taking forest land and converting it to farmland. Some discussion on the difference between a forest harvest permit and a logging permit. Bachman asked for clarification on farmers clearcutting trees and if he should be requiring real engineered sediment control plans from these farmers. This will be discussed further at the Inter-Agency Workgroup meeting scheduled March 3, 2025 from 10:00am – 12:00pm. Armacost asked if there was any interest in continuing the County's annual Rural Roads meeting as a separate meeting or holding it in conjunction with the Budget Town Hall meetings. The purpose of the roads meeting is to have the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback to the County on certain roads. The consensus was that the on-line complaint/request form was adequate, and there was no need for an additional roads meeting. On February 7, 2025, the Ag. Advisory Board approved a 98 page report of recommendations. On March 12, 2025, Paul Goeringer, with UME Ag. Lawn Initiative will hold a "So You Want To Own Farmland in Maryland" seminar from 9am until 3pm. We continue to help folks navigate the ag. building permit process.

Committee Reports

Urban – Bachman reported that the average time until review for January was 16 working days with one new priority requests for a large BGE project.

Personnel – No report.

Agriculture – No report. Albright asked why someone from the Ag. Department does not give a monthly report similar to the report given by the Urban Department. This report could include how many plans were written during the month, how many bmps were installed, and the number of conservation plan requests or plans pending. Cox noted that when conservation plans are written, they are written to deal with existing problems and how farmers agree to deal with the problems. She added that a farmer does not have to agree to a Cadillac version but still has to agree to meet standards when addressing erosion and water quality issues. Smith asked why the numbers reported in the 2024 MACS report for Carroll County were so much higher than the numbers for Baltimore County. Carroll County has three District employees, two District planners and a District technician. MDA also has Carroll staffed with more planners and technicians. Cox believes that with Jen Kemp now in the office giving the staff one on one attention, those numbers could come out of Baltimore County and expects them to. As far as Federal work goes, for 2025 we have had 30 cost share applications and 35 active contracts.

Finance – Hadaway noted that we continue to work with Baltimore County to make sure we're funded for FY'26 and beyond. We're going to need additional grant money in addition to a fee increase. In addition, we've included a "Competitive Wage Adjustment" as a transparent line item in our FY'26 County Grant request. This adjustment includes a 13% increase over a 3-year period to try and bring our employee salaries up on par with the surrounding Districts. Hadaway has requested a meeting with the County to discuss our FY'26 Grant, and thus far he's received no reply. He will inform the County that we plan to submit our grant request and full rate increase before the end of February unless we can meet prior to March 1, 2025.

Old Business

Approval of Agreement on County Budget - Discussed previously during this meeting.

New Business

FY '26 County Budget – Discussed previously during this meeting.

National Envirothon Support – Discussed previously during this meeting.

2025 MASCD Winter Meeting – Mays and McGinnis gave a summary of this meeting.

Being no further business, the regular meeting adjourned at 9:30am at which time the Board entered an Executive Session to discuss personnel matters.

Respectfully submitted,

Esther L. Frey
Administrative Assistant