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BENJAMIN L. SPINELLI, ESQ.
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

To: Agricultural Advisory Committee
From: Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq., Executive Director
Subject: Committee Meeting Minutes – January 26, 2023
Date: February 2, 2023

The fourth Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting was held on Thursday, January 26, 2023, at 3:07 pm at the NJ Highlands office in Chester.

The following were present:

Committee: Highlands Council Vice Chair/Committee Chair Alstede, Jamie Bourgeois (Riamede Farm); Peter Melick (Melick Farms).

Highlands Staff: Benjamin Spinelli, Gabrielle Gallagher, Neda Hartman, James Humphries, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Corey Piasecki, and Karen Castanhas.

Present via phone: Thomas F. Holl, Associate Counsel, Governor's Authority Unit (GAU) and Dr. Brendan Furlong (B.W. Furlong & Associates); Michael Beneduce (Beneduce Vineyards).

Committee Chair Alstede opened the meeting at 3:07 pm.

Committee Minutes of March 14, 2022

Committee Chair Alstede asked the committee if they had any edits to make on the March 14, 2022, minutes. There were no edits.

Introductions with new Executive Director, Ben Spinelli

At this time Committee Chair Alstede introduced Mr. Spinelli.

Mr. Spinelli thanked everyone for their time and for being part of the Agricultural Advisory Committee. Agricultural policies are very important for the future of economic sustainability in the Highlands. Agriculture accounts for the largest amount of land use in the region behind residential. The Agricultural Advisory Committee is important to the work on agricultural solutions related to economic growth.

Mr. Spinelli pointed out that food production capacity may be impacted by climate change, and we should be prepared to address rising issues. Agricultural sustainability is dependent on both the land base and the practitioner base in the form of the farmer.

Mr. Spinelli noted that Highlands staff has put together a resolution requesting an allocation of a portion of the New Jersey Corporate Business Tax (CBT) for the purpose of funding the Highlands open space preservation programs. The resolution was discussed and approved at the January 19th Council meeting.

Sustainable Economic Development

At this time there was conversation focused on how the Committee can support the agricultural community with economic initiatives in Highlands municipalities. Suggestions are listed below:

- Request For Proposal (RFP) to identify an eligible partner to manage a grant program to support farmers and agricultural projects.
- County or municipal contacts to support a potential grant program.
- The Food Shed Alliance and the RC&D were mentioned as organizations that may be effective in managing agricultural grant funding.
- Coordination with the NJ State Department of Agriculture.
- Coordination with the NJ State Tourism Bureau.

Ms. Haddock-Weiler added that the County Coalition, the group focused on implementation of the Economic Sustainability Plan, is working on strategies to support the agricultural industry in the Highlands. Ms. Haddock-Weiler suggested the Agricultural Advisory Committee and the County Coalition schedule a joint meeting to discuss agricultural initiatives.

Mr. Holl indicated he needed to leave the meeting but wanted to assure everyone on the Committee that the Governor's Authorities Unit is committed to helping with agricultural priorities and its effects on people in the Highlands.

Mr. Holl left the meeting at 4:10pm

Food Processing Facility

Mr. Piasecki stated there is a need in the region for a food processing facility. A possible location for this facility has been identified and a grant has been provided to a municipality to review the potential for the siting of a facility.

Mr. Melick pointed out such a facility would need an entity to take ownership as a business model and be able to satisfy all relevant regulations. He also noted that local zoning should allow food processing facilities in many places throughout the Highlands.

Next steps

Mr. Humphries stated the Highlands staff will follow-up on:

- Grant information.
- County Coalition.
- Food processing facility.
- Model Ordinances.

Committee Chair Alstede would like the next meeting scheduled for the end of March.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:21pm.