



CLACKAMAS COUNTY

## Soil and Water Conservation District

Approved 11/19/13

### ***SWCD Special Board Meeting Minutes for October 16, 2013***

#### **Present:**

**Directors:** Roger Fantz, Don Guttridge (Secretary), Jan Lee (Treasurer), Jesse Nelson, Ron Oberg (Chair), and Joan Zuber (Vice-chair, by phone)

**Associate Directors:** Jeff Becker, PK Melethil

**Staff:** Clair Klock, Lisa Kilders, Cathy McQueeney, Tom Salzer

**Guest:** Mike Weinberg

#### ***1 – CALL TO ORDER***

Chair Oberg called the meeting to order with a quorum present at 9:04 a.m. on Wednesday, October 16, 2013 in the Clackamas County SWCD conference room at 221 Molalla Ave., Suite 102 in Oregon City.

Chair Oberg noted that the purpose of the special Executive Board Meeting was to provide an opportunity for the Board to consider and explore ideas for the use of the Pleasant Avenue property and the Beaver Creek farm. Manager Salzer facilitated the conversation at the Board's request.

After a short discussion, the decision was made to use the first hour of the scheduled three hour meeting to discuss the Pleasant Avenue property, the second hour to discuss the Beaver Creek farm, and the third hour to discuss implementation of ideas and challenges. Three over-arching ideas the Board was asked to keep in mind as they moved forward with the discussion were:

- What are the reasonable cost expectations versus benefits to our taxpayers?
- How will potential uses of the properties impact staff time?
- What are the benefits of developing the properties for demonstration versus investing more money into Dollars on the Ground (DOG) projects?

#### **Pleasant Avenue**

This property was purchased because the Board saw it as an opportunity to relocate the District offices as an alternative to renting and because it was a good financial investment. The District believes the value of this property will grow faster than we would earn interest on bank savings. The property has been improved by the District by removing invasive weeds and shrubs, trash, and several structures in very poor condition.

Several comments and ideas were posed during the discussion:

- The property has a beautiful, large, old oak tree worth saving.
- The public is used to visiting the District offices in this neighborhood – it's a convenient location.
- Urban voters passed the District's tax assessment, not the rural voters. Should this action be rewarded by having a District presence in town?

- Urban voters voted for the tax assessment because they liked what the District was doing in rural areas of the County and wanted the rural areas around them to be healthy.
- The property is zoned MUC suitable for retail, office, and apartments.

Ideas for this property included:

1. Create a little park with a raingarden, a pollinator garden, or similar conservation practice installations and amenities for the community.
2. Build a commercial or multi-use commercial building – this would most likely be restricted to two stories in height due to grade of the property. There would be very limited space for parking, just as with our current office location.
3. Develop a multi-site service center/environmental service center – have our conservation partners join us in a “one-stop shop.” Parking would be limited by the City to approximately 15-20 cars, enough for staff but probably not enough for visitors or cooperators.
4. Monitor the real estate market and sell the property – Revenue could be used to help finance development of the Beavercreek farm. Approximately \$150,000 has been invested in this property, including the recent demolition. The property is owned free and clear and the District is not paying taxes on the property. The only cost associated with the property moving forward, should it remain undeveloped, is maintaining it. This would include controlling weeds, periodic mowing, trash pick-up, and tree-trimming.
5. Create an Urban Conservation Center - House part of the District staff on this property and the rest at the Beavercreek farm, giving the District both an urban and rural location and presence. Concerns were expressed about fragmenting the conservation planning team, creating an “us” versus “them” situation.
6. Make a public meeting space for other groups in the community – however, there are already many such venues available locally.

Concerns were expressed about a large fir tree on the property that may need to be removed or at least pruned. A local organization may be willing to remove the tree at zero cost in exchange for the lumber in the tree.

Manager Salzer restated points where the Board seemed to be in consensus as follows:

- The District will not develop the Pleasant Avenue property at this point in time.
- The District will hold on to the property and monitor the real estate market.
- When deemed appropriate, the property will be sold or a decision will be made to move forward with a new plan to be determined in the future.
- Revenue from the sale of the Pleasant Avenue property could be used to develop the Beavercreek farm.
- The large fir tree needs to be evaluated.

The summary was accepted without dissent.

## **Beavercreek Farm**

Some basic information about the farm property was shared by Manager Salzer:

- It was purchased by the Board with the desire that a new District office building would be built on the site. (The new, five-year office lease at 221 Molalla begins in February 2014. In summer 2017, the District may get out of the lease without penalty.)
- The property is zoned Rural Area Residential 2-Acre District (RA-2).

- As a government entity, the District would be able to build on the site. This would require a conditional use permit which would give the community an opportunity to weigh in on the project. Efforts are already underway to build healthy relationships with community members by attending monthly hamlet meetings, working with local service providers, and being a positive presence in the community. ***(Question that requires follow up – How long will the conditional use permit be valid once it is granted?)***
- There are many commercial operations in the immediate area surrounding the farm.
- Cooperators and the general public have good access to the farm – it’s only 10 minutes from our current office location.
- Installing an office at the farm will not significantly impact the use of the farm, little acreage would be lost.
- The farm has probably not been self-sustaining for quite some time and it is unlikely that this will change in the future. The farm CAN generate revenue, but there are implications for the existing farm deferral status and property taxes.
- The farm house, old barn, and tree-lined driveway are considered important landmarks in the area and it would be preferable to preserve these historic aspects of the property. (NOTE: The house is not on the historic record, has been heavily modified, and is not true to period.)

There were many possible visions and goals for the property, including:

- Building a new, state of the art, high efficiency, unobtrusive, one story office for the District
- Maintaining the open, pastoral look of the farm
- Demonstrating many conservation practices; showcasing various conservation technologies and techniques
- Showcasing various technologies and techniques
- Offering a wide variety of on-site workshops
- Developing permaculture designs and practices
- Installing urban conservation practices around the farm house
- Obtaining county carbon credits for good composting practices
- Installing solar panels
- Providing hands-on learning opportunities for the public
- Establishing riparian features such as stream-side restoration, ponds, plantings
- Utilizing Master Gardeners, Master Recyclers, volunteers, Clackamas County Community College and Job Corps students for on-farm projects
- Providing opportunities for Future Farmers of America (FFA), the Home Orchard Society, or 4H
- Creating a public meeting space for the community
- Partnering with the Farm Service Agency and National Resource Conservation Service

Some overarching considerations the Board suggested be kept in mind included:

- What kind of personnel will the District require to bring these visions to fruition?
- Should District conservation planners dedicate their time to the Beaver Creek farm to create demonstration practices or spend their time working directly with cooperators, and if so, how much time?
- How much conservation money does the District invest in the farm as opposed to investing in Dollars on the Ground (DOG) projects?
- Do the existing farm structures, including the farm house, fit in well with the District’s long-range vision?

- A conservation plan cannot be developed for the property until the Board determines what their goals for the site are going to be.

There were five items into which the Board invested significant discussion: 1) the existing driveway and a new road and driveway access to Ferguson Road; 2) living space for a caretaker; 3) how the existing farm house could be utilized; 4) ideas for the new office building; and 5) current maintenance and upkeep issues.

### **The Driveway & Ferguson Road Access**

Manager Salzer mentioned that staff had suggested that the District add an additional driveway access to the property off Ferguson Road because of safety concerns for vehicles re-entering traffic on Beaver Creek Road.

- The driveway that exists on Beaver Creek Road is too narrow for simultaneous incoming and outgoing traffic.
- There is no space for cars to pull in and wait when trying to access the property if another vehicle is exiting, leaving them stopped on Beaver Creek Road which creates a hazard.
- The limbs on the trees lining the driveway are too low to allow passage of delivery trucks or fire safety vehicles.
- High traffic volume on Beaver Creek Road, which will only increase over the next ten to twenty years, makes it very difficult to turn left out of the property onto Beaver Creek Road.
- Low traffic on Ferguson Road, which has a stop sign at Beaver Creek Road, would allow easy and safe egress from the property for staff and District visitors.

The Board felt that developing another road on the property to create access to Ferguson road would open up the property to increased security concerns, would cut the property into quarters and would take away land already in production. The money used for road construction would be taken away from other building or conservation projects that could be implemented on the property. Instead, the Board suggested that the existing driveway could be widened. A wider entrance/exit at Beaver Creek Road would allow a vehicle to pull off the road should another vehicle be exiting at the same time. Existing trees lining the driveway could be replaced with apple trees or other native trees to improve drivability for tall vehicles.

### **Living Space for an Eventual Property Caretaker**

A great deal of work will initially be required on the property to bring the Board's visions into reality. Once a plan has been developed and implemented, it may be useful to have a caretaker on the property to maintain it. The existing farm house could be used as caretaker housing. It may be appropriate for a family. The home is in suitable condition to lease as is, but some improvements would be made to make it safer and more efficient. The living space over the garage could be modified to create an apartment. This would be convenient for one to two people and would be more efficient than the house, but would be inadequate for a family. The caretaker may need to be a contract hire, rather than an employee, to maintain the farm house as a private residence versus a public building, which would require extensive and expensive modification.

Concerns were expressed about the District becoming involved in a landlord-tenant relationship with a caretaker.

### **The Original Farm House**

The farm house is over 100 years old, has five bedrooms (four upstairs) and one bathroom. It currently has base board heat and a few in-wall electric heaters. It has wood siding - not asbestos - and a good roof. If it were to be

used as a public building, it may need reconstruction to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Ideas for the house included:

- Using the original house as part of the new facility by extending wings off of it. This could help cut down on construction costs
- Using the upstairs for storage and the downstairs and decks for informal, seasonal meeting space
- The home could be reconfigured much like a bed and breakfast with living quarters upstairs and general meeting/public space downstairs
- Demolish the structure and build a new farm-style facility in its place. The inefficient current structure may absorb a lot of cash over the next ten to twenty years in operating costs and repairs
- Modifying the existing structure to make it more efficient and rent to a caretaker
- Bring the home up to current County building code and add insulation and storm windows

### **The New Office Building**

One of the main purposes in purchasing the Beaver Creek Farm was to have a better site for the District offices, and eventually to eliminate the expense of paying rent. The District currently spends up to \$90,000 per year in monthly rent plus fees at the Mollala Avenue location. Cost for the new construction may be as much as \$3 million dollars. Financed at 4% interest, this would result in a monthly expenditure of approximately \$14,000, roughly double what the District is paying now, but the land and building would be owned free and clear in 30 years. Manager Salzer provided a map so Board members could better visualize where a new building might be located. Ideas for the new construction included:

- New building should be unobtrusive, with a very low impact/profile on the property
- A two-story building would have a smaller foot print and would possibly be more energy efficient
- Envisioned building size estimated to be up to 10,000 square feet and could be built in Apple Field 1 and 2 and lambing pen areas (see map)
- Building cost is estimated to be \$150 per square foot, for a total cost of \$3 million dollars
- Lumber salvaged from removal of the chicken shed or repair done on other buildings could possibly be incorporated into new structure or elsewhere on the property
- One possible building style: concrete long walls, bermed, with a pitched roof
- Property has access to the Clackamas River Water mainline so the building would not be reliant on the well
- Some trees would need to be removed
- Public parking for the structure could be accessed off the main driveway with parking to the west and the building to the south
- A financial planning professional might be helpful in determining how best to approach this project
- The sale of the Pleasant Avenue property could help finance cost of new construction

### **Current Maintenance and Upkeep Issues**

- For the coming year, the Building Committee recommended that the District cut and mow the hay fields, mulch in place, and continue to lime and fertilize to help mitigate years of nutrient depletion
- Bio-solid fertilizer was explored as an option but deemed not desirable due to the fields' proximity to water sources and neighbors
- The District currently has a "hand-shake" agreement with the llama owners whose animals are on the property - a formal agreement needs to be established to limit District liability
- Staff suggests strip grazing the animals with temporary fencing as part of a pasture management demonstration
- The newly installed gate will be too small if the Board decides to widen the tree-lined driveway

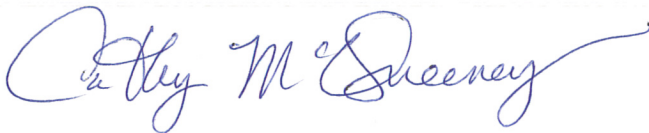
- Hedgerows are the next "easiest thing" - they can be installed one area at a time, starting with planting along fence lines that won't interfere with future uses - a sunflower hedgerow is planned for next spring
- Temporary pollinator gardens can be easily installed
- White Oak Savannah plantings would take many years to establish
- Invasive maples on the tree-lined driveway could be removed and replaced with apple trees – new trees could be planted "outside" the white fence, and in a few years, the invasive maples could be removed and the driveway widened
- Buildings that are not structurally sound should be removed immediately
- Rotten cherry tree near house should be removed before winter storms arrive
- Dead limbs and limbs resting on the barn roof should be removed
- Trees in wood lot could use some thinning
- Staff visits, on-site work and drive bys, along with monitoring by neighbors across the street, provide adequate property supervision for now -- there is no immediate need for a care taker
- Gutters need to be cleaned and maintained
- An energy audit should be performed on the farm house and the District should investigate what it would take to bring the structure up to current County code

The Board will meet to continue their discussions on the District properties for one hour immediately following the next regular board meeting on November 19, 2013.

## **2– ADJOURN**

There being no other further business, Chair Oberg adjourned the meeting at 11:26 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Cathy McQueeney, Administrative Assistant