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## **Cecil Soil Conservation District**

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### **Board of Supervisor's Meeting March 19, 2025**

The Cecil Soil Conservation District held a Board of Supervisors meeting with a Zoom call-in option. The meeting was called to order at 8:31AM by Chairman – Bruce Yerkes. Attendees Supervisors – Willie Ewing, Van Funk, and Jonathan Quinn. Associate Supervisor – Alice Crothers. Other attendees: District Conservationist – Rob Weaver, District Manager - Chris Brown, and Administrative Assistant – Patty Pierce. Visitors: Darren Alles, Maryland Department of Agriculture Area Coordinator, Eric Hines, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist, and John Gonzales.

- Visitor: Darren Alles provided an MDA update. Agricultural Assessment Planner candidates' interviews completed and selection package is in process. Position will be housed in the Harford SCD office. The position will service both counties. Conservation Grants MACS Technical Advisory Committee meeting was March 4<sup>th</sup>. Dan Polite provided flat rate presentation creating hybrid flat rates used across the state. Yvonne Roe assisted with the presentation. Darren shared the FY25 Central Region BMPs under component-based rates. A sub-committee will be convened to further discuss the component-based system. Cover Crop Technical Advisory Committee meeting was March 18, 2025. The 2025 small acreage cover crop program sign up period is March 3<sup>rd</sup> – April 25<sup>th</sup>. Conservation Buffer Initiative applications are due March 31<sup>st</sup>. Manure Transport Program reminder. Annual Implementation Reports were due March 1<sup>st</sup>. MDA continues to respond to High Path Avian Influenza incidents. Darren is contacting district offices to inventory bio-security supplies. MDA to provide bio-security supplies for the district employees and trucks.
- Visitor: Eric Hines, NRCS – NRCS has resumed all payments to farmers for conservation program contracts that are funded through the IRA. New contracts with farmers are moving forward with traditional (EQIP) Farm Bill program funding. All terminated probationary employees were returned to pay receiving administrative leave pay and received back pay from the date of termination. USDA is working to develop a phased plan for return-to-duty. USDA State office lease terminations were discussed. USDA is optimizing building capacity and consolidating underutilized offices to prioritize customer service for farmers Maryland NRCS state office continues to operate in Beltsville.
- Willie Ewing made a motion to accept the February 26, 2025 Board meeting minutes. Van Funk seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- Bruce Yerkes asked if the board had reviewed the treasurer's report, expenses, and supplementary emails. There were no questions. Willie Ewing made a motion to accept the treasurer's report and pay bills. Van Funk seconded the motion. Motion carried.

## Old Business

- Envirothon Spring Training occurred on March 13<sup>th</sup> at the Fair Hill Nature Center. There were about 78 students in attendance with over 20 from the School of Technology. The county competition is set for April 24, 2025.
- As a reminder the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Ag Education Day is scheduled for April 29<sup>th</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup>. The district will have all staff participating either as a presenter or volunteer. Chris will be organizing the volunteers and Tracey is the Association Treasurer as well as holding positions on other committees within the organization. The Planning Association is moving forward with establishing a 501(c3).
- Ag Day at the Dupont Farms has been approved and scheduled for April 9<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. Tracey has an approved agenda by Maryland Department of Agriculture to offer 1.5 Nutrient Management Credits. The presentations by speakers will be held in the barn and the School of Tech students will be attending as well. Registration will be offered by calling the district or a Google forms registration link. The lunch will be offered to those attending which will be sponsored by the district. The Cecil Land Trust will assist in distributing flyers to the Amish community to build support there.

## New Business

- Rob Weaver presented the District Activities Report. Staff visited three farms for Inventory & Evaluations for pipe drop damage. Three projects were surveyed. One design was reviewed “in-house”. Eight projects are in progress. Two applications for best management practices were submitted to MDA/MACS. Two approvals for best management practices were received from MDA/MACS. One tax subtraction for manure injector and pump was submitted to MDA. One agreement transfer was submitted to MDA. Rob Weaver shared NRCS financial assistance conservation program activities. Farm Conservation Plans Completed annual goal and year to date acres information was shared with the group. Twenty-four urban E&S plans were reviewed and seventeen urban E&S plans were approved. Two 378- Small Pond plans were reviewed and approved. Two urban meetings were attended. Staff visited two Inventory & Evaluations’ including an existing pond dredge request and an ag fill plan. Staff attended two Agricultural Erosion & Sediment Control/Stormwater Management meetings. Staff attended two trainings and eleven-monthly meetings. Van Funk made a motion to accept the activities report as presented. Willie Ewing seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- Rob Weaver and Chris Brown presented the District Project Tracking/Planning Report and NRCS Updates. Most project reviews in-house.
- Willie Ewing made a motion to accept David G Stoltfoos as new cooperators. Van Funk seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- The Annual Report for 2024 has been completed and will be utilized to share during the County Budget Meeting and as part of the MASCD District Awards submission. The report was attached with the meeting agenda.
- Chris Brown discussed with the board the need for an Agriculture Economic Impact Study. Chris researched and received examples from Ariel Balog, Ag Coordinator at the Cecil County Economic Development office. Information for the impact of agriculture is minimal and the information is based upon the Ag Census. The county’s current economic growth story has primarily highlighted factories and warehouses. Agriculture is being lost but the community has no numbers to defend it or to show its importance. If we want to be the voice of Cecil agriculture, we should develop a metrics. Economic development is job growth and financial growth across all sectors. We should engage



community leaders and other community stakeholders. We should support economic development but letting them know what agriculture brings. The last study that was done related to agriculture's financial impact was done in late 90's. We should be working hand in hand with the County to include Ag. The group discussed how an update should be done to County Comprehensive Plan to include Ag. There should be an Ag Advisory Committee – advocating and educating about the economic importance of agriculture. Including agriculture in the current RFP would be a big ask to the county and an uphill battle. Separately from this discussion, the District is in need of an Outreach Education Coordinator. This person could advocate and educate by sharing current photos of full working farms as that is what connects with the public. A suggestion was made to invite Ariel Balag and Sandra Edwards from Cecil County Economic Development to a future district meeting to work with them to develop our agriculture economic impact study. An outline should be used and other agriculture stakeholders should be invited to attend the meeting. We can't just focus on numbers but rather, define success other than just dollars. The landscape of agriculture has changed with farm markets and ag lands and severely affects quality of life within the county.

- MASCD winter meeting minutes were reviewed. Chris Brown discussed House Bill 140 – Agriculture – Soil Conservation and Water Quality Plan – Uses of Information. This bill would authorize the Department of Agriculture to use information from a soil conservation and water quality plan for certain enforcement actions. MDE has similar enforcement related laws in place. We believe this will change what we do and how we are perceived. The group discussed how we have a current MOU between MDE/MDA/District. To correct a couple violators, MDA should do a rightful approach and not shotgun approach. Why should it be written in law if there are only a couple violators. Our office is here to help cooperators not to regulate and enforce. Chris has a form letter that other districts have developed for legislators and will draft a version for Cecil and email to the board for review.
- MASCD Annual Meeting Endowment Fund – Auction Item or Cash Donation was discussed. Our office usually sponsors with an auction item. Chris Brown asked if we should sponsor with a cash donation? Further discussion will be held once sponsorship levels have been released.
- NACD fly in is March 26<sup>th</sup>. Chris Brown reached out to MASCD to get game plan. Bruce Yerkes (Cecil), Lee McDaniel (Harford), and Chris Brown plan to attend. Missy Cannon Helgason has arranged legislative meetings for the group.
- WIP Progress Meeting is April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at 9:00am with Alisha Mulkey and Elizabeth Hoffman. It is a virtual meeting. Chris will forward the meeting invite to the board.
- MASCD Board Meeting is March 25, 2025. Chris Brown, Bruce Yerkes, and Van Funk will attend the meeting in person.
- Van Funk shared an SSCC Meeting update. The meeting is March 20, 2025 and will be held at the Washington County UME office, 7303 Sharpsburg Pike, Boonsboro, MD 21713. The forest clearing committee continues to meet and work through processes.
- The Cecil County School of Technology Agriculture Sciences teacher Rachael Coffey was nominated as one of the top three finalists for the Golden Owl Award, a national recognition for agricultural educators who go an extra mile for their students.

The next meeting will be held on April 23, 2025 at 8:30 AM. The meeting will be held at the office with a teleconference option. The teleconference option will continue to be offered for those working in the field.

As there being no further general business, Bruce Yerkes called for a motion to adjourn the general meeting. Willie Ewing made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Van Funk seconded the motion. The general meeting adjourned at 9:49AM.

Respectfully submitted,



Patricia A Pierce  
Administrative Assistant