



St. Joseph County Conservation District
693 E. Main Street
Centreville, MI 49032
(269) 467-6336 x5

Board Meeting Minutes for February 21st, 2024

3:03pm Call to Order by Howard Avildsen

Directors Present:

Howard Avildsen, Board Chair
Todd Hironimus, Vice Chair
Chad Clark, Board Treasurer

Board Members Absent:

Carol Higgins, Member
Dan Blasius, Member
Nelson Evers, Associate Member

Staff Present:

Shaun Grace, CISMA Coordinator
Harlie Miller, MAEAP Technician
Ashley Waltke, Program Specialist
Kaitlin Renehan, Conservation Specialist

Introductions / Visitors:

Justin Jacobs, NRCS Soil Conservationist

Additions / Deletions to Agenda: 1 item added - C. Clark motioned to add Annual Meeting Event to New Business, T. Hironimus second, Motion carried.

Public Forum: None.

Approval of January Board Minutes: C. Clark motioned to approve the January Board Minutes as they stand, T. Hironimus second, Motion carried.

Treasurer Report: C. Clark motioned to approve January Financials to be placed on file, T. Hironimus second, Motion carried.

Correspondence Reports:

- **Administrator:** Written.
- **MAEAP:** Written, Spoken - H. Miller reviewed progress made since assuming MAEAP Tech position in January; she discussed upcoming trainings, farm visits, and presentations scheduled in February; she mentioned attending the zoom meeting hosted by MACD on Feb 20th regarding proposed budget changes for FY 2025.
- **CISMA:** Spoken - S. Grace reported attending this year's Winter Field Trip; he announced that he had submitted a grant proposal to MDARD to survey for Spotted Lanternfly a second year, the

application is said to be in the final stages of approval; he disclosed that he submitted an article to Lake Access Magazine highlighting SJCCD's efforts assessing road-stream crossings under the GLFT grant, the article is expected to reach 2,000 – 20,000 readers; Shaun announced that GLFT surveys have now been completed across the entire Prairie River Subwatershed; he mentioned having conversations with Don and John from the SJC Road Commission, the District may be asked to continue treating traffic signs in 2024.

- **CTAI:** Written, Spoken - A. Waltke reported on her visit to Branch in January for an NRCS support meeting; she spoke on challenges the District encounters with the current Tree Sale ordering process, she suggested looking into Squarespace as a potential alternative website management system; Ashley answered questions regarding the NRCS Fence Training she attended on Feb 5th; she clarified that her position differs from CTAI Conservationists and suggested Farm Bill Specialist or Program Support Specialist as a more accurate title to use under board Correspondence Reports to distinguish from CTAI Allison Marshall. C. Clark proposed that future Agenda and Board Minute documents include employee names alongside program titles.
- **MDARD:** Written.
- **Board of Directors:** Spoken - T. Hironimus mentioned attending the MACD zoom meeting regarding budget recommendations, he relayed insight on challenges endured by Board Members when communicating advocacy for St. Joseph County needs to State representatives; C. Clark brought up a phone conversation he had with a gentleman named Alex from Lansing who inquired about the MAEAP Program and wondered how to get more farmers to participate; the Board spoke on NRCS providing the District with a new shed.

Old Business:

- **Conflict of Interest:** None.
- **Staff Bonus:** C. Clark discussed the budget standing and a need to prioritize funds for payroll, benefits, and other necessary expenses; he expressed the importance of guaranteeing that there's enough cushion in the District's financial status to support potential staff bonuses, he then referred to a staff-made document print-out which outlined funding details accepted under each SJCCD grant contract, Chad spoke on a need to sustain up-front project costs while awaiting delayed reimbursements as well as a need to account for changes in costs over time under multi-year grant contracts (e.g. increases in federal mileage rates or employee wage increases), he suggested waiting to discuss staff bonuses until the end of FY 2024 in order to first account for all financial commitments. C. Clark motioned to postpone discussion regarding staff longevity bonuses until the September 2024 Board Meeting, T. Hironimus second, Motion carried.
- **Used Vehicle:** S. Grace shared that Carolyn has been in contact with a local dealership who is currently searching to find us a used vehicle that can tow or otherwise transport kayaks, etc.

New Business:

- **FY 2025 Budget Recommendations:** H. Miller conveyed further details relating to the MACD zoom meeting which addressed recently proposed state budget amendments, she explained that approval of these changes would effectively decrease Conservation District funding from \$3 million to \$2 million by turning MAEAP into a State-managed program, she mentioned that all current MAEAP technicians would be required to re-apply for the position; she communicated that Conservation District personnel are asked to refrain from endorsing a legislative outcome but Board Members and other citizens are welcome to advocate for County needs, Harlie is waiting for MDARD to provide meeting attendees with follow-up resources and will be happy to provide interested Board Members with those materials once they're shared.
- **Annual Meeting Event:** K. Renehan announced that the District's Annual Meeting Event will be held at the ISD Building on April 10th from 6:00 – 8:00pm, she confirmed that food will be provided by Yoder's Country Market and this year's guest speaker will be arborist/beekeeper Mike Connor,

she handed out annual meeting flyers for Board Members to pass out to local establishments/members of the community at their own discretion, she reported that a gentleman named Richard Livermore would be accepting the award of Volunteer of the Year for noteworthy attempts to remain involved with SJCCD during 2023. A. Waltke proposed that Ryan Clark be considered for the Farmer of the Year Award, she referenced admirable efforts he's been taking to incorporate conservation practices into his more recent farming ventures. K. Renehan mentioned Pheasants Forever as a possible candidate for the Partner of the Year Award, attendees agreed to bring forth ideas for other potential candidates if any come to mind.

- Though not formally added to the Agenda, K. Renehan presented to the Board a product flyer and price list provided by Dairy Doo for their part in the upcoming Tree Sale event. Board Members discussed the absence of an official confirmation that the District will receive \$1.00 from the sale of each bag as previously agreed upon. C. Clark asked K. Renehan to reach out to the Dairy Doo representative and request signed documentation to be returned within 10 business days stating the terms of the agreement, copies of the anticipated document will be provided to Board Members at the time of the March 20th Board Meeting.

PA116: None.

Adjournment: T. Hironimus motioned to adjourn at 4:35pm, C. Clark second, Motion carried.

Next Meeting: March 20th at the St. Joseph County Conservation District Offices at 3:00pm.

Board Chair Signature: _____

Date: _____