



MINUTES

TASK FORCE ON AGRICULTURE

October 24, 2022

10:00 A.M.

Oconee County Administrative Offices
in the Council Conference Room
415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC

Oconee County Task Force on Agriculture met at 10:00 A.M. in Council Chambers, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC with District 3 County Councilman Paul Cain, County Administrator Amanda F. Brock, County Planning and Zoning Director James Coley, Lisa Jones with LJC, and Members of the Task Force on Agriculture as follows: Natalie Arnold, Bob Winchester, Emily Hitchcock, Kim Alexander, and Frankie Pearson.

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting, date, time, place of meeting and agenda were posted on the bulletin board at the County Administrative Offices, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC, and the County Council website [www.oconeesc.com/council]. In addition, it was made available [upon request] to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens.

Call to Order and Invocation

Chairman Frankie Pearson called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M. Natalie Arnold led the invocation. Pledge of allegiance.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Winchester made a motion to accept the minutes from September 27, 2022 into the public record. Ms. Hitchcock seconded. Approved unanimously. Minutes will be posted on the website.

Discussion

Ms. Jones reviewed the results from the outreach plan and survey with Task Force members.

Feedback from the survey included recommendations about education, land use, governance, and miscellaneous topics—broken out in a document in the back-up materials.

The Task Force agreed that it is important to connect with Mr. Gibson, a Task Force member who was not present, to assess school participation, FFA and farm education programs.

Ms. Alexander offered to follow-up with the young farmers association to be present at the next meeting and provide feedback.

Task Force members agreed to follow up with partners who agreed to participate but did not provide feedback, including but not limited to the Cattlemen's Association, Chattanooga Conservancy, Farm Bureau and poultry farmers.

The feedback on the need for meat processing infrastructure was discussed. Ms. Jones agreed to look into existing facilities and further research this topic for a potential recommendation.

The discussion moved into tools for agricultural production and opportunities.

Ms. Jones reviewed the purpose of the Task Force as laid out in Resolution 22-15:

- To study the issue of current and projected agricultural decline, specifically the loss of viable farmland in Oconee County
- To develop potential solutions for the issue
- The report the findings to Council

Mr. Cain reminded the Task Force to stay focused on agricultural land that is used for food production.

The group turned to the Large Parcels map produced by Mr. Coley and discussed the value of large parcels to agricultural sustainability and community. Mr. Coley outlined bottom-up zoning and existing land use tools in the county.

Ms. Jones reviewed the informational resources in the packet to let the Task Force know that she will be using this data and information in the final recommendations.

The discussion turned to funding options for conservation efforts. The Task Force discussed including all options in the recommendations to County Council, even if politically unpopular.

Ms. Hitchcock asked for an opinion from Mr. Root on whether the OCCB could receive the funds from the Greenspace Tax.

The Task Force agreed that that speakers would be helpful at the next meeting to speak about:

- Voluntary Agricultural Districts (Ms. Jones will identify or speak)
- Impact Fees (Ms. Brock)
- Agricultural Easements and Funding Opportunities (Upstate Forever)

Ms. Alexander agreed to reach out to the Farm Bureau and invite young farmer guests.

Ms. Brock reminded the Task Force to pick up tickets and attend the Agricultural Appreciation Banquet on November 17 at 6:00 P.M.

The next meeting of the Oconee County Task Force on Agriculture will be on November 21, 2022 at 10:00 AM.

Adjourn

Mr. Pearson made a motion, with a second from Ms. Brock and approved unanimously, to adjourn at 12:10 P.M.