



MINUTES

TASK FORCE ON AGRICULTURE

November 21, 2022

10:00 A.M.

County Council Chambers
Oconee County Administrative Offices
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, Stanley Gibson, 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 Pearson called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M. Ms. Alexander led the invocation and pledge of allegiance.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Winchester made a motion to accept the minutes from October 27, 2022 into the public record. Ms. Arnold seconded the motion. The minutes were updated to reflect the changed location of the meeting; they passed unanimously. Minutes will be posted on the website.

Presentations

Ms. Jones presented information about Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD) and distributed a fact sheet to the Task Force for review. She confirmed that VADs will be included as a recommendation in the final report, but that the name VAD may change because it creates confusion with regard to Oconee County's current Agricultural Districts.

Ms. Brock suggested that holding the current tax valuation of the property could be an incentive for opting into the VAD.

Mr. David Root, County Attorney, presented the South Carolina's Attorney General opinion on the Greenspace Act and interpreted it to mean that the OCCB is not a "bank structure" and the County must hold interests in easements and fee simple purchases.

Mr. Chris Starker from Upstate Forever presented information about conservation easements, including the entities that hold agricultural easements and the advantages of working collaboratively. He distributed materials to the Task Force.

He emphasized the important role that Farm to School programs should play in Oconee County.

Mr. Cain and the Task Force discussed two additional recommendations for the study: including funding and an updated job description for the Oconee Soil and Water Conservation District; and using a percentage of the fee-in-lieu for agricultural funding through the OCCB.

Ms. Jones agreed to distribute a two-page summary document of recommendations to the Task Force before presenting them to County Council.

Ms. Jones reminded the Task Force that the draft report will be reviewed at January's meeting and the final report is due to council in late March 2023.

The next meeting of the Oconee County Task Force on Agriculture will be on January 23, 2023 at 10:00 AM.

Adjourn

Ms. Alexander made a motion, with a second by Mr. Winchester, and approved unanimously, to adjourn at 12:00 P.M.