

HILLSBOROUGH SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Board of Supervisors District Regular Meeting

Wednesday, April 7, 2021

4:30 PM

Meeting called to order at 5 PM

Supervisors in attendance:

Vacancy due to passing of Michael Hepburn
Kathy Eckdahl- Vice Chair
Andrew Brooks, Treasurer
Karen Cox Jaroch, Supervisor
Sonja Brookins – Supervisor

Others in attendance (some via ZOOM®)

Betty Jo Tompkins, HSWCD, Executive Director
Linda Chion, HSWCD, Computer Graphics Designer
Stephanie Collins, HSWCD, Community Outreach
Simon Bollin, Agribusiness Development
Ken Griner, SWFWMD, Farmsr
Leslie Diaz- Alvarez, NRCS District Conservationist
Matt Warren – FDACS, Environmental Manager
Jeff Whealton, SWFWMD, Sr. Scientist
Eric Challenger – visitor

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Executive Director Betty Jo Tompkins opened the meeting with a moment of silence for Chair Michael Hepburn who recently passed away.

DISCUSSION OF HOW TO PROCEED

Kathy Eckdahl, Vice Chair – chaired the meeting with election of new officers to be made at the end of the meeting.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBER(S) OF THE PUBLIC

Chair requested members and guests introduce themselves and offer public comment.

Eric Challenger stated he was interested in Michael Hepburn's board position and was there to secure additional information.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Elliot Norden, Blueberry Breeding Associate with Driscoll's presented a special blueberry variety tasting program and discussion about their business. Driscoll's has been in business for over 100 years with their main office in California. They produce and sell berries on a global scale with raspberries being their largest revenue source.

In the Dover, Florida area they are growing and researching different blueberry, strawberry, raspberry and blackberry varieties. Norden's responsibilities include collecting data from broad audiences to determine consumer preferences, including flavor. He visits local business, public events, etc. to secure honest opinions on the flavor of the blueberries they have for the trials. He currently had 45 selections and brought 6 for attendees to try. Meeting was paused as attendees tested and filled out flavor forms.

NRCS REPORT

Leslie Diaz- Alvarez, NRCS gave report. 2021 funding being worked on with 8 applications received so far.

NRCS is now taking 2022 EQUIP applications with a goal of increasing participation. The deadline is September 1st. 2021, with about 6 or 7 applications, Goal to increase program participation.

HSWCD/NRCS Local Work Group meeting is scheduled for May 27th at 3 PM, FSGA meeting room. NRCS is looking forward to hearing from partners and clients with any inputs or concerns with NRCS, so they can better serve clients.

Tompkins and Diaz-Alvarez visited Duggal Blueberry Farm, which is expanding by 24 acres. They also visited with Dr. Karen Teston who purchased 160 acres for cattle. Dr. Teston seeks available programs that will effectively help expand her cattle operation.

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 3, 2021 REGULAR MEETING

Supervisor Karen Cox Jaroch noticed her name was not on the attendee list and requested correction. Supervisor Brooks moved approval of February 3, 2021 Board Meeting Minutes with the change. Motion 2nd by Supervisor Sonja Brookins – Motion passed unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer's report presented by Supervisor Andrew Brooks. Supervisors reviewed financial statement packages from all four HSWCD account covering February 3, 2021 to March 31, 2021 Due to COVID 19 cancellation, Tampa Bay Envirothon, recorded no transactions during entire year with balance of \$295.66. Other account balances: Hillsborough 100 account, \$7,580.70; Mini Farms account \$39,633.02; General account \$24,059.03.

Executive Director Betty Jo Tompkins reviewed the Mini-Farms account. Two farmers recently received cost share funds: John Gough and Kyler Bishop. Mr. Gough passed away from COVID, but he had processed everything before he died. Cost Share is provided once certification is completed and agricultural operator has paid for the project in full. HSWCD then reimburses 75% of cost up to a maximum of \$50,000. In addition, a 5% administrative fee is paid by FDACS to HSWCD.

She reported that all other funding such as payroll is done thru the County and audited annually.

Supervisor Brookins made motion to accept. Supervisor Karen Cox Jaroch 2nd motion. Motion carried.

FDACS REPORT

Matt Warren reported that FDACS is focused on the new water bill. FDACS has to make sure BMP's are being completed and farmers are completing soil samples and following IFAS recommendations.

Nutrient management, water quality or conservation can be cost shared with two estimates.

Applications are submitted for approval. Betty Jo Tompkins, with the approval of FDACS, signs contract with the producer with 75% reimbursement (up to \$50,000. June 30th ends this fiscal year with next fiscal year commencing July 1st. FDACS can assist with NRCS and FARMS programs, but always requires the producer to have a 25% stake in project.

Supervisor Karen Cox Jaroch brought up the spill at Piney Point. Currently there is a State of Emergency in Hillsborough County because of high phosphorus and nitrogen being released. She asked if they should be concerned for growers. Warren noted that DEP is monitoring, as FDACS is non – regulator while DEP is regulator.

SWFWMD REPORT

Jeff Whealton, SWFWMD reported that he serves as an environmental scientist and with the District Ag Team. As such he provides SWFWMD and NRCS with technical assistance. He is working with NRCS in regard to the Duggal Blueberry Farm.

He thanked HSWCD staff and Board for having the meeting on ZOOM.

Ken Griner, SWFWMD, Ag Team Manager reported that Mini Farms was out of money, but just got in another \$150,000. Mr. Duggal, with the blueberry farm, is working with him on several projects.

Supervisor Sonja Brookins asked for more details. Matt Warren explained how they assist with alternative water supplies, such as water recovery ponds, pumps, piping, weather stations, moisture probes, automation and more. There is a lot of funding available for conservation projects. An example: If a grower wants to change his irrigation from overhead to drip; they can help with that too.

AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Simon Bollin, Agribusiness Development, reported it has been a busy year with the veteran's program at GREC. They have one in Immokalee for cattle and there is a program in the Panhandle. Planning to establish additional centers in Apopka and Fort Lauderdale.

Letter of support sent to UF for GREC to develop a Technology Ag Center.

HOPS research continues to go well with yields continuing to increase. Goal to develop a viable Florida crop for farmers that local breweries will use

Bollin also reported that In regards to Supervisor's question about Piney Point – he does work with Emergency Management. They do not know how it will affect ground or irrigation water, however, when 41 was blocked off, farmers were allowed to access their fields and harvest.

REQUEST FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Review of procedures for filling Board vacancies:

Executive Director Tompkins explained each County Soil Board fills vacancies different ways. In Hillsborough it is an open process and several people have expressed interest. While some counties just pick someone, Tompkins said HSWCD operates in the sunshine. She developed a form for potential candidates for the vacant seat to fill out. Minor changes were recommended and Supervisor Karen Cox Jaroch made motion to accept the form with changes. Supervisor Brooks 2nd. Motion passed

Supervisor Brooks asked where the form would be posted. Betty Jo said on the HSWCD website, In the Field magazine, Facebook and she would request the County where post also.

ELECTIONS

Due to the passing of Board Chairman Mike Hepburn, an election for Chairman was necessary. Vice-Chair Kathy Eckdahl was nominated and elected. Andrew Brooks was elected to fill the now open position of Vice-Chair and Sonja Brookins selected to fill the Treasurer's position.

UPDATES FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Executive Director Betty Jo Tompkins reported that HSWCD will be conducting an appropriate tree planting event in honor of Mike Hepburn, as well as a scholarship in his name. Details will be worked out in the next couple of months.

The HSWCD strawberry U-Pick at Fancy Farms raised over \$4,600. HSWCD is pleased to announce that Dustin Grooms and family has offered to sponsor another event in 2022.

The HSWCD Great Plant Auction at the Hillsborough County Fair will be held on October 3, 2021 with some of the funds being used for the Hepburn scholarship.

FDACS contract with truck almost resolved. If Commission approves, Tompkins will secure Title from County, provide to FDACS and they should have the truck by the following week.

Due to COVID restrictions Tompkins secured a donated office in the Brandon area in April 2020 and has recognized the donors (John and Kay Sullivan of Winthrop) as major donors for the HSWCD Hillsborough 100 program..

Poster and speech contest entries continue to go well. The theme is Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities and all entrants in the poster contest will be displayed at the Hillsborough County Fair in September and all students will receive a free ticket to the Fair and a certificate with their poster printed on it.

Supervisor Brookins and Director Tompkins spoke before the CROP student group at Hillsborough Community College – Brandon Campus.

The AFCD Area 4 Annual Meeting is scheduled for June 18th in Lake County and all Supervisors are encouraged to attend.

Tompkins then reviewed an extensive list of upcoming events including blueberry fundraising U-pick to be held at Duggal and Sons Blueberry Farm during the month of May.

Plans for the 2022 NACD Annual Meeting in February at Disney Springs were discussed. Two tours are being planned in Hillsborough County, one at the Florida State Fair and another featuring strawberry operations. Details to be presented at future meeting.

The 2021 Florida State Fair is scheduled for April 22 – May 2. HSWCD will have a larger complimentary booth (20 feet) in the Ag Hall of Fame Building for this year's fair. Although many events have been canceled due to COVID, the Fair will feature a "Roots of the Fair" opening day breakfast, Woman of the Year in Agriculture Luncheon and Champion of Champions recognition event. Director Tompkins is working with the Fair on a potential major program for HSWCD in the 2022 Fair. Details to follow.

Tompkins reviewed major activities for the 2021 Hillsborough 100 Conservation Challenge scheduled for April 17 – May 9, 2021. The Hillsborough 100 tabloid will publish on Sunday, April 18th in the Tampa Bay Times, on Thursday, April 22nd in TBT and be distributed at fairs and festivals throughout the year. H 100 projects will include road and river cleanups; recycling of paper, plastic, batteries and electronics; tree plantings; flower and pollinator gardens; and other events.

For full list of programs, projects and activities, please refer to Agenda for April 7, 2021 meeting.

Meeting adjourned; followed by Dinner.