

FINAL MINUTES

Board of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Virginia Beach City Hall
Building 1, 2401 Courthouse Dr,
Virginia Beach, VA

Friday, August 4, 2023

The meeting of the Board of Agriculture and Consumer Services (Board) convened at approximately 9:05 a.m. on Friday, August 4, 2023, at Virginia Beach City Hall. President Horsley called the meeting to order.

ROLL CALL

The Board Secretary called the roll:

PRESENT

Donald Horsley
Raymond Keating
Jacquelin Easter
Kailee Tkacz Buller
James S. Huffard, III
Tyler Wegmeyer
Richard Sellers
Neil Houff
Charles Church
Dr. Robert Corley

Lonnie Johnson

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2nd
3rd
7th
8th
9th
10th
11th
Pesticides – Commercial Agricultural
Pesticides – Commercial Structural
Representing Dr. Makola Abdullah, President,
Virginia State University
Representing Dr. Timothy D. Sands, President,
Virginia Tech

ABSENT

Keith Harris 1st
Clifton Slade 4th
Cecil Shell 5th
Margaret Ann Smith 6th

STAFF PRESENT

Joseph Guthrie, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS)
Kevin Schmidt, Secretary, Board of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Nicolas Robichaud, Policy Assistant, VDACS

OPENING REMARKS

Patrick Duhaney, Virginia Beach City Manager, welcomed the Board to Virginia Beach and acknowledged the Board's efforts to support the city's agricultural infrastructure. He acknowledged City Councilman Rocky Holcomb and Delegate Barry Knight. He remarked that Virginia Beach has exceeded its goal, set in the 1980's, of preserving 10,000 acres of agricultural land, with 10,500 acres preserved through the Agricultural Reserve Program. He thanked VDACS and the Board for providing \$2 million over the past 10 years to assist the city in achieving this goal and mentioned that agriculture had a \$200 million impact in the city over the past year. He also thanked VDACS for bringing the Ag Expo back to Virginia Beach.

Delegate Barry Knight also welcomed the Board to Virginia Beach. As the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, he thanked the Board for its work promulgating regulations and commented on the need to look out for contentious regulations, such as the pet shop regulations.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Church moved that the draft minutes of the meeting on May 18, 2023, be approved as distributed. Ms. Easter seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

REPORT FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Jacquelin Easter

Ms. Easter remarked that her district has recently gotten much needed rain. Ripple effects of the Tyson plant closure continue to be felt, especially by truck drivers. As corn harvest begins, work should increase for those drivers most impacted. She thanked everybody for the research into possible long-term solutions.

Kailee M. Tkacz Buller

Ms. Buller thanked Mr. Horsley and the city for their hospitality. She reported on Congress leaving for its August recess without funding the government or passing a Farm Bill. Government funding is likely to be the top priority when Congress returns on September 6 given the expiration of the federal budget on September 30. A short-term Farm Bill extension is likely, though no drafts have been issued yet. She commented on the unlikelihood of workforce reform in the short term, despite the efforts of a bipartisan group of legislators, and mentioned that soybean exports to China are high. She called the Board's attention to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) need for increased authority over recalls to promote food safety. She will continue to track several proposed reforms and regulations from FDA.

James S. Huffard, III

Mr. Huffard thanked Ms. Buller for her extensive work and mentioned the ideal weather in his district this year. He indicated he is expanding his dairy operation to meet the southeast's demand for milk. He reported on his work as a member of the National All-Jersey Board, particularly on the need for immigration and H2A reform to support year-round labor needs. He reported that no significant progress has been made in this regard for several years and that he will continue working with National Milk and the Farm Bureau to advocate for dairy industry reform, especially regarding pricing. Duchess Milk processing has enjoyed a successful year, landing new customers and strengthening relationships with schools.

Tyler Wegmeyer

Mr. Wegmeyer also thanked Mr. Horsley for his hospitality. He reported a desperate need for rain in his district. Strawberry season was very successful, with the season elongated several weeks and resulting in increased sales. He reported on the success of the Virginia Tourism Corporation's event celebrating the new sub-slogan "Virginia is for Strawberry Lovers" and thanked the Commissioner for his attendance. He referenced a visit to his farm by the Rt Hon Mark Spencer, Minister of State for Food, Farming and Fisheries for the United Kingdom. He said they shared stories about agritourism experiences and trade opportunities and discussed impacts of the UK's exit from the European Union.

Mr. Wegmeyer reported on the Virginia Christmas Tree Association's meetings to discuss increases in demand. He also stated that several crops in his district do not have the requisite supply to meet increases in demand, providing further economic opportunity for growers.

Richard Sellers

Mr. Sellers thanked Mr. and Mrs. Horsley for their hospitality. His district experienced strong spring rain, with farmers' markets and personal gardens flourishing. Farmers' market exhibitors have increased roughly 40 percent in his area. Temperatures have recently warmed, and rain has remained steady.

Dr. Robert Corley

Dr. Corley remarked that the week's events showcased a different aspect of Virginia Beach and he appreciated the hospitality. Virginia State University (VSU) welcomed back former U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Secretary and VDACS Commissioner Dr. Jewel Bronaugh, who will be leading the new Center of Transformational Leadership and Community Impact. VSU held a USDA/1890 taskforce meeting to continue discussing partnerships. A USDA strategy meeting in Arlington focused on components of the Farm Bill. He commented on the strength of VSU's relationship with Virginia Tech (VT) and reported on the recent Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching meetings in Knoxville, Tennessee, which also focused on the Farm Bill. VSU received a portion of an \$18.1 million NextGen grant from USDA to help create a highly talented and diverse workforce. VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program received an additional \$10 million to support small farmers, with new initiatives focused on urban agriculture programs. This program will kickoff in Atlanta and continue to work in 17 communities nationwide. VSU has worked alongside VT and the Department of Environmental Quality to research the environmental impact of solar rays and solar farming. Dr. Corley concluded by reporting that construction of VSU's new Food Sciences Building is nearly complete.

Lonnie Johnson

Mr. Johnson remarked on the success of both VSU and VT's booths at the Ag Expo. VT recently welcomed Dr. Mary Burrows as the new Director of the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station and Associate Dean for Research. Former Director Saied Mostaghimi was awarded emeritus status. Dr. Michael Gutter has continued working on engagement missions across the state, with recent visits to Mecklenburg and the Northern Shenandoah Valley. Through a new extension budget process instituted by Dr. Gutter, additional funds were reallocated back into the field and toward agent positions. There are about 12 agent positions currently in the hiring process, with an additional 10 positions to be posted during the fiscal year. VT has had trouble attracting qualified applicants to fill these positions. A new agent onboarding process and training program has been implemented, which he hopes will help VT retain agent positions long term. He concluded by reporting VT will likely complete its updated Civil Rights Review with USDA this month.

Charles Church

Mr. Church reported that the Virginia Pest Management association held its training sessions in June, training over 130 people. There are labor shortages across the pesticide industry, which is especially felt in the summer months. The State Technical Meeting and Training in December will be in Virginia Beach.

Neil Houff

Mr. Houff expressed his enjoyment of the Ag Expo, noting the soil pit demonstration as particularly interesting. The Ag Retail Group is focused on the Endangered Species Act, as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has come under increased scrutiny to better enforce the endangered species regulations in place. EPA has released a new strategy, which includes stricter labeling and other requirements that will put more pressure on agricultural retail operations, restricting their ability to operate. These drafts are currently open for public comment. Mr. Houff also mentioned that the Virginia Crop Production Association has set its Crop Summit Meeting for January 16-18 in Midlothian.

Raymond Keating

Mr. Keating remarked on the success of the Ag Expo. He is originally from Minnesota and has worked in grain operations for over 50 years. He is the Head International Merchandiser at the Perdue AgriBusiness Chesapeake Export Facility, the only deepwater export terminal in the U.S. This facility exported 2.6 million tons of grain in 2022. Mr. Keating commented on Virginia's unique position to take advantage of market instability due to the port and the stability and diversity of Virginia agriculture. Mr. Keating also extended an invitation to the Board to come tour Perdue's Chesapeake facility.

Donald Horsley

Mr. Horsley commented on the success of the Ag Expo at Land of Promise Farms as a showcase of the strength of agriculture his district. Some areas have had more rain than others, though the whole area should have a strong crop this year. Mr. Horsley concluded his report by welcoming former Board Members Shelley Butler and Bryan Taliaferro, Jr. and, alongside Commissioner Guthrie, presented them with plaques commemorating their service. Both Mr. Taliaferro and Ms. Barlow expressed their appreciation, with Ms. Barlow stating her commitment to continue advocating for Virginia agriculture, particularly in Suffolk.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Guthrie delivered his report to the Board. During the presentation of this report, he briefed the Board on personnel changes, recent events, and other matters relating to VDACS. A copy of the written report on which his presentation was based was included in the Board meeting agenda and materials.

NOTICE OF INTENDED REGULATORY ACTION – 2 VAC 5-455 – (REGULATION FOR TRADESPERSONS INSTALLING INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES)

President Horsley called on David Gianino, VDACS Office of Plant Industry Services Program Manager. Mr. Gianino briefed the Board on the proposed stage for 2 VAC 5-455. Following Mr. Gianino's presentation, Mr. Sellers moved that the Board of Agriculture and Consumer Services authorize staff to take any and all steps necessary to file a notice of intended regulatory action to promulgate 2 VAC 5-455, *Regulations for Tradespersons Installing Invasive Plant Species*, for public comment.

Mr. Huffard seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

BUDGET UPDATE

President Horsley called on Dr. W. Dewey Jennings, VDACS Director of Administrative and Financial Services, to provide a budget update to the Board. Following Dr. Jennings's report, the Board asked several questions, which Dr. Jennings, Commissioner Guthrie, and Deputy Commissioner Charles Green addressed.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business brought before the Board.

FUTURE BOARD MEETINGS

President Horsley announced that the remaining Board meeting date for 2023 in Richmond will be December 7 at the Patrick Henry Building in the East Reading Room.

President Horsley announced the 2024 meeting dates: March 21, May 23, and December 12, all in Richmond. A summer meeting and tour will be announced at a later date.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

There were no public comments.

CLOSING REMARKS

David Trimmer, Director of the City of Virginia Beach Department of Agriculture, delivered closing remarks, thanking the Board for its support in preserving agricultural land in the city. He communicated the success of local farmers' markets in Virginia Beach, especially YNot Wednesday. He also thanked VDACS staff for its work supporting the citizens and government of Virginia Beach. Before closing, he invited the Board to attend Virginia Beach's Agriculture Week in March 2024.

President Horsley extended his gratitude to Mr. Trimmer and the City of Virginia Beach for their hospitality and assistance in hosting the Board.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Board adjourned at approximately 11:10 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,



Margaret Ann Smith
Board Vice President



Kevin Schmidt
Board Secretary