

**New Castle County Land Preservation Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 5, 2019 4:30PM
Gilliam Building Multi-Purpose Room
67 Reads Way, New Castle, DE 19720**

Land Preservation Task Force Members in Attendance:

Jeff Downing, Chair
Jack Coleman
Doreen Fletcher
Lee Jarmon
Steward Ramsey
Jennifer Kmiec
James Metzger
Ginger North (outgoing, to be replaced by Jim White)
Jim White
Michele Giofre Pyle
Janet Kilpatrick
Timothy Sheldon
Austin Short
Elena Stewart
Betsy Caufield
Kendall Sommers

New Castle County Representatives:

Councilman David Carter
Andrea Trabelsi
Richard Hall
Tracey Surles

The following members of the public were in attendance:

Gary Warren
Kent Messer
Marianne Cinaglia

I. Housekeeping

Jim White, Delaware Nature Society, was introduced to the Task Force as he is taking Ginger North's position on the Task Force.

Members of the Task Force voted to approve the meeting minutes from the October 2, 2019 Full Land Preservation Task Force Meeting.

II. Task Force Subcommittee Report-Out

A. Agricultural Subcommittee

Stewart Ramsey, chair of the Agricultural Subcommittee, gave a brief update of the November 13, 2019 meeting. Gary Warren and Bill Powers contributed to the meeting. Mr. Ramsey outlined how the use of TDRs were discussed as a tool to preserve farmland. He stated that he would like to plan an agricultural summit to discuss policy, tools, existing and visit farms in New Castle County. Mr. Ramsey stated he has also researched other agricultural land preservation programs in different states to help compare with efforts in Delaware, as well as to further establish well-defined goals for an agricultural program.

B. Open Space Subcommittee

Ms. Sommers provided a brief update on the previous Open Space subcommittee meeting. She stated that the subcommittee are working on developing criteria of what open space should be protected and how it should be protected. She stated that they subcommittee has begun drafting questions for a survey in order to assess what the residents of New Castle County think should be preservation priorities. The subcommittee has discussed open space protection for parks, habitat, wildlife, water quality, and other environmental aspects.

C. Funding Subcommittee

Jeff Downing, chair of the funding subcommittee, gave a brief update on the October 30, 2019 meeting. He stated at the last meeting, the subcommittee discussed a number of different funding mechanisms, including park districts, referendums, land trusts, preservation grants and preservation easements. He outlined how different types of land preservation may be handled through different mechanisms, however many of these mechanisms are largely tied to open space preservation. Mr. Ramsey offered that as funding is considered, so should the changing characteristics of farmland and farming technology. Mr. Short stated the task force should also consider the future of lands owned by the State and County that are currently farmed, but may not always remain farms.

D. Overall Status of Task Force

The Task Force discussed the handouts provided by the New Castle County staff, which included a GANT Chart and draft outline for a task force report. Mr. Downing described the timeline proposed for the Task Force and asked the members to take a look at the overall work plan and provide feedback. Mr. Sheldon indicated interest in public surveys, as he eager to know what his constituents think about land preservation and how it should be funded. Ms. Sommers and Ms. Caufield directed the Task Force to review the items in the DropBox, and indicated that as information is received, it will be uploaded to the DropBox.

III. Preservation Criteria and Selection – Presentation by Kent Messer

Prior to his presentation, Mr. Messer stated that a number of detailed surveys had been completed in recent years by Josh Duke. The surveys were funded by the Department of Agriculture and outline many of the potential survey questions the Task Force has been discussing.

Mr. Messer gave his presentation, which included best practices and economic strategy in regards to developing a prioritization and selection approach for land preservation. Such practices included identifying what you want to preserve (the criteria that's important to the task force/public in terms of achieving program goals), putting it into a numeric scoring method, and optimizing the selection to achieve best ROI (how to spend the limited funds). He noted that the examples and strategies presented should be utilized as tools, not

Discussion following the presentation included:

- David Carter - What about the landowners? It's important to develop the relationship with those potential property owners who would be interested in and willing to participate in the program. He stated the preservation program needs to be appealing to a significant number of people/the target audience to ensure it's successful.
- Jeff Downing – How do you factor in timing of acquiring land when they are available at different points in time?
 - Mr. Messer stated that aspect is always a challenge. The examples he presented use an enrollment period in year to year cycles. This part of the process is probably the spot where non-profits can step in to bridge between years to ensure priority areas can be protected and then transferred to the government if that's needed/desired.
- How should the County use optimization to preserve land
- Importance of criteria to be established to target preservation areas
- Agricultural report from the DE Dept. of Agriculture

IV. Public Input & Survey Discussion

The Task Force discussed how to approach and develop a public survey in hopes to gather data and priorities for the residents of New Castle County. Andrea Trabelsi provided an update on survey services from the University of Delaware, which would take roughly five months and cost roughly \$30,000 at a minimum. Other services such as Survey Monkey could be utilized, as well as putting a survey in a sewer bill. Mr. Jarmon stated the importance of ensuring the survey reaches everyone in the community.

The Task Force discussed developing questions and deciding what sort of information they want to know. What does the public really value (parks, wild open spaces, etc.)? The Task Force members recommended the use of civic associations, the library system, and the master planning process.

Jennifer Kmiec stated that the Task Force should review existing surveys, in particular the surveys that Mr. Messer had mentioned previously in the meeting, and decide where to fill in gaps in regards to information sought from residents. The Task Force concurred.

V. Wrap Up & Action Items

Next Meeting Dates:

Ag Subcommittee January 8, 2020, 4:30pm @ DE Wildlands or other

Open Space Subcommittee TBD

Funding Subcommittee January 9, 2020, 4pm @ Mount Cuba

Full Task Force Subcommittee February 6, 4:30pm @ Gilliam Multi-Purpose Room