**Agritourism Study Advisory Committee (ASAC) Meeting**

Wednesday, June 26, 2019

Agricultural History Farm Park

**MEETING ATTENDEES**

John Fendrick

Ellen Gordon

Thomas Hartsock

Sarah Rogers

Jane Seigler

Caroline Taylor

Mike Scheffel

Brandon Bedford, MCEDC

Eric Turner, Guest

Carrie Sanders, M-NCPPC

Atul Sharma, M-NCPPC

Jessica McVary, M-NCPPC

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Jessica McVary, project manager, welcomed the Agritourism Study Advisory Committee (ASAC) to the meeting. The meeting began with introductions of staff, Committee members and guests. Ms. McVary then provided an overview of the meeting agenda and meeting materials.

1. **Discuss and Confirm Common Themes**

Ms. McVary noted that the staff team reviewed the notes of previous ASAC meetings and developed common themes for the Committee to review and discuss. The following tracked changes reflect the discussion and final version of the common themes as determined by the Committee. The fifth theme was consolidated into the fourth theme, where adequate facilities for events are discussed.

* The Agricultural Reserve should be protected and preserved, but also evolve to enhance economic viability of farming and agricultural land, including agricultural economic development through tourism.
  + As agritourism evolves, the ag reserve’s unique ability to produce agricultural products for the region must be preserved.
* The Agricultural Reserve has evolved since its establishment.
  + Traditional farming activities have evolved to maintain economic viability.
  + Increased education and awareness are necessary to convey how and why we have the ag reserve.
  + Ongoing agritourism activities and events are increasing and evolving, with an increased demand for access to the ag reserve countywide.
* Challenges to supporting agritourism today, as well as in the future, include:
  + An inconsistent, undocumented process for agritourism businesses.
  + Adequate facilities and infrastructure to accommodate events.
  + Balancing the need for flexibility with clear regulations.

1. **Discuss Draft Agritourism Study Goals**

Ms. McVary noted that the staff team developed several goals for the study, based on the common themes. The following tracked changes reflect the discussion and final version of the study goals as determined by the Committee.

* Protect and preserve farming, farmland and rural open space in the Agricultural Reserve.
* Support existing and future agritourism activities through improved processes for agritourism businesses and promotional tools.
* Support agritourism activities with a direct nexus to agriculture, to facilitate preservation of farming, farmland and rural open space.
* Increase awareness of assets of the Ag Reserve, including education of agricultural practices and better wayfinding.
* Provide inclusive and equitable access to the Agricultural Reserve.

1. **Agritourism Study – Preliminary Feedback on Background Sections**

The Committee briefly discussed feedback on the background sections of the Agritourism Study. This feedback included:

* Clarification in the Study that the Zoning Text Amendment 18-03 occurred concurrently with – not prior to – the Agritourism Study.
* The number of farms cited in the study should be revised to clarify horse farms and horticultural operations.
* The existing conditions information should be validated based on recent data, including the 2017 Ag Census, as well as historical data. For example, it may not be accurate to state that specialty farming has increased, but rather that farming has changed.
* The study should acknowledge that farmers are attempting to regain property value through agritourism.
* The Committee agreed to delete “land use and zoning strategies” from the following sentence in the study purpose and need section: The Agritourism Study seeks to develop a comprehensive, countywide approach to land use and zoning strategies for agricultural tourism.
* The Committee agreed to delete “the integrity of the” from the following sentence in the study purpose and need section: The study’s underlying aim is to encourage activities—agricultural education and agritourism—that increase residents knowledge and understanding of the county’s Ag Reserve, enhance its attractiveness as a destination and support its farms and the families that operate them, while preserving the integrity of the agricultural culture and heritage.
* The Committee requested that the study clarify the role of the consultant in the overall study, as well as the role of the comparative analysis and code assessment as technical resources.

1. **Next Steps**

At the end of the meeting, the Committee members determined that the Committee would not meet in-person meeting in July or August but would use this time to develop the study’s menu of potential solutions. The menu of potential solutions will be the subject of the Committee’s next meeting, anticipated in early September.

Based on this direction, the staff team requested the following items from the Committee members to allow continued progress on the study this summer. These items include:

* Review and provide comments on the background information included in the working draft of the study.
* Identify potential solutions to achieve the study goals.

The Committee discussed sending the comments and the potential solutions directly to Ms. McVary for compilation and distribution to the ASAC.

1. **Adjournment**