

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ARAC) MINUTES  
Virtual Meeting  
February 1, 2023, 2:30-4:00 p.m.

Attendees In-person (I) and Virtual (V):

ARAC Members:

Steve Darcey, Chair, Soil Conservation District Representative (I)  
Pharyn Smith, Co-Chair, Citizen Member (I)  
Dan Donohue, Forestry Industry Representative (I)  
Essita Duncan, Non-Farming Interest Representative (I)  
Bill Ritchie, Citizen Member (I)  
Darren Gibson, Citizen Member (V)  
Jo-Ann Romano, Citizen Member (V)

Staff Attendees:

Fatimah Hasan, M-NCPPC (I)  
Charles Sasscer, University of MD Extension (I)  
Kathleen Canning, Prince George's County Council (V)

Guest Attendees:

Danielle Walker, Development and Communications Manager, U.S.Vets-Washington D.C., Guest Speaker(V)  
Alan Leslie, Agriculture Extension Agent, University of MD Extension (I)  
Jennifer Cross, Prince George's County Farm Bureau (V)  
Alex Hirtle, Policy Analysis and Special Projects Coordinator, Prince George's County Council (V)  
Jeanine Nutter, Land Preservation Administrator, Soil Conservation District (V)  
Julia Groenfeldt, Program Manager, Food Equity Council (V)  
Elizabeth Robinson, The Garden International (V)

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Steve Darcey invited guests to introduce themselves and provide brief remarks. Seven members were present, which is a quorum of the seven members currently on the ARAC.

2. Approval of ARAC minutes of September 7, 2022

Mr. Darcey asked for input on the September 7 meeting minutes and asked that the minutes reflect who was attending in-person and who was attending virtually. He also asked that the time of adjournment be noted. The minutes of the last meeting held on September 7 were approved; motion made by Mr. Dan Donohue and seconded by Dr. Bill Ritchie.

3. Fatigues-to-Farmers and U.S.Vets-Washington D.C. discussion

Dr. Ritchie spoke on the Fatigues-to-Farmers initiative and shared a letter to him from Dr. James Dula, USAF Retired, Office of Veterans Affairs in the Office of the County Executive, requesting his help on the initiative. The initiative focuses on getting veterans involved in the production of fresh foods for County residents and providing to them the vocational and therapeutic training that is available to those who want to become farmers. Dr. Ritchie had networked with U.S.Vets and wanted them to be part of this

mission. He then introduced Ms. Danielle Walker, who gave a presentation on U.S.Vets and their programs and projects. Her program engages veterans and, in particular, homeless veterans who account for 9 percent of all homeless adults, and recently increased to 13 percent, with 80 percent of homeless veterans having mental and physical disabilities. Her program provides temporary and emergency housing and starting in 2023 plans to provide permanent housing to veterans. U.S.Vets is currently working on establishing a lease on a 20-acre property with a residential dwelling that is to be used for agricultural purposes in Southern Prince George's County, and wants to work with groups that can help with that goal, such as ARAC and others. She stated that the acreage is slightly hilly but is primed for agriculture. She had no information on soil quality.

Questions from the attendees focused on the number of homeless veterans in Prince George's County, the location of the land, whether veterans and their families can benefit, and what funding mechanisms are available for this endeavor. Ms. Walker expressed her hope that partner organizations can help with funding as well as operations, and stated that they are not able to house families now but would like to in the future. Mr. Darcey stated that Mr. Peter Scott, Fields of Valor, could be a partner as well as Joint Base Andrews (JBA), and he offered to establish a soil conservation plan for the property at the appropriate time. Ms. Robinson suggested that ECO City Farms and The Garden International would also be a good partner. Staff agreed to send Ms. Walker's contact information to potential partners. Mr. Darcey asked if U.S.Vets had reached out to Melwood (a program advocating for disabled individuals) and stated that Ms. Kim Rush Lynch, Urban Agricultural Conservation Planner at SCD, could convene a group to pursue a collaboration. Ms. Essita Duncan asked how many veterans can be served at the 20-acre site. Ms. Walker stated that she would find out, and that the site would be emergency housing. Ms. Robinson noted that there is great therapeutic benefit to having a connection to the land, and she knows a person who has skills in land therapy. Ms. Pharyn Smith offered to reach out to her point of contact at JBA. Dr. Ritchie offered to reach out to Mr. George Owings, State of Maryland Secretary of Veterans Affairs as well. There was mention of the Transition Assistance Program as well, a U.S. Department of Defense program that provides information and training to ensure service members transitioning from active-duty have assistance transitioning back into civilian life. Attendees expressed much optimism in pursuing the collaboration with U.S.Vets-Washington D.C.

#### 4. Draft Annual Report

Mr. Darcey asked for input on the draft annual report and Ms. Pharyn Smith offered to provide a draft cover letter to transmit it to the County Executive and County Council once it is finalized. Dr. Ritchie asked about the reference to "1890 Tennessee State University Environmental Justice Academy" in the report. Ms. Fatimah Hasan and Mr. Alan Leslie mentioned the 1890 land grant institutions, referring to the designation of a group of African American universities in the timeframe of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Further confirmation of the accuracy of the year "1890" would be sought.

#### 5. High Schools with Agricultural Programs and Middle Schools

The attendees talked about the high schools' agricultural activities. Ms. Robinson mentioned the use of her organization's mushroom kits at Gwynn Park High School, the aquaponics program at the school, and the need to maintain their greenhouse and help sustain their agricultural activities during the summer. Individuals and activities mentioned were:

- Mr. Xavier Cox's activities at Gwynn Park and University of MD Eastern Shore, and his work as MD Farm Bureau Ag Ambassador
- Mr. Donald Belle's help with high schoolers and the Envirothon
- [William Schmidt Outdoor Education Center](#)

- [Alice Ferguson Foundation](#) work with 5<sup>th</sup> graders
- Janna Lavian (sp)
- [Climate Action Plan](#) and its relevancy to activities with the youth
- A possible farm fair; Botanical Gardens and Montpelier Farms as potential locations for a fair
- A planned urban agriculture fair for the Summer of 2024
- [Maryland Ag in the Classroom](#)
- [Clagett Farm-Chesapeake Bay Foundation](#)
- [The Urban Farm Incubator at Watkins Regional Park](#)
- 4-H Clubs in Prince George's County
- USDA yearbook as a source of research on potential farm activities for youth

## 6. Other Business

Attendees mentioned:

- [MD Department of Agriculture Soil Health Initiative](#)
- Ms. Sarah Vy, MD Department of Agriculture, should be requested to speak to ARAC
- Opportunities for farmers to do carbon trading, in its infancy now but as an opportunity for farmers to improve soil health and increase carbon sequestration. [Mycelium](#) is one of the largest carbon capture mechanism.
- Vacancies on ARAC, including
  - UMD Extension (Mr. Leslie has applied to the Office of the County Executive, Appointments Liaison, Ms. Miriam Brewer, has not heard anything re: next steps)
  - Prince George's County Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board Representative (Ms. Jeanine Nutter will assist in finding a person)
  - USDA Representative
  - Prince George's County Association of Realtors (Ms. Cheryl Abrams Davis is applying to the Appointments Liaison)
  - Farm Bureau (Ms. Jennifer Cross has applied and was told if the Office of the County Executive was interested they would contact her, and she has not been contacted)

Dr. Ritchie asked if there was a curriculum for the history of farming, covering ancestral farming heritage. Ms. Smith stated that she will research this question and get back to the Committee. Ms. Cross stated that her mother-in-law is a good source of farming history in the area.

## 7. Next Meeting Date/Next Steps

The next tentative meeting date discussed was Wednesday, January 4, 2:30-4:00 p.m. and it would be a hybrid meeting with a virtual option, and held at the Soil Conservation District Offices at 5301 Marlboro Race Track Road, Suite 100, Upper Marlboro, MD.

## 8. Adjournment

The motion to adjourned was made by Mr. Donohue and seconded by Dr. Ritchie. The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.