

Minutes

**Agricultural & Natural Resources Advisory Committee
Thursday, March 17, 2011, at 9:00 am
Charlotte County Administrative Center
18500 Murdock Circle, Room #B-106
Port Charlotte, FL 33948-1094**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mike Jones, Chairman
Andy Dodd, Vice Chairman
Chris Hencher
Fred Walters, Secretary

MEMBERS EXCUSED

Arnie Sarlo
Wes Brumback

MEMBERS ABSENT

Orrin Webb
Dan Ryals
Matthew Sullivan, Jr.

GUEST

Ron Hamel, Gulf Citrus Growers

STAFF

Commissioner Bob Starr
Inga Williams, Principal Planner
Matt Trepal, Staff Liaison
Gayle Moore, Recording Secretary

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL/DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

The **March 17, 2011**, meeting of the **Agricultural and Natural Resources Advisory Committee** was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by **Chairman Jones** who noted that there was not a quorum present. **Chairman Jones** welcomed Commissioner Bob Starr to the meeting.

ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO AGENDA

None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Jones noted that, due to the lack of a quorum, it would not be possible to approve the January 20, 2011 minutes at this time.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Starr addressed the group, describing his desire to be the Commission liaison for this Committee because he is very interested in this segment of the county economy. He spoke about the importance of agriculture in the area and described a recent visit to Lady Moon farms, mentioning how impressed he was with the operation and the jobs provided. **Commissioner Starr** indicated he intended to be present for the committee meetings and to assist the committee wherever possible.

NEW BUSINESS

Initiatives (Putnam administration):

Chairman Jones reviewed the Putnam Administration and offered general comments on the relevance of activities in Tallahassee to local needs, especially in terms of the need to track programs that will require public comment, in order to have a voice in the process. **Chairman Jones** asked for further comments from guest **Ron Hamel**.

Mr. Hamel stated that Adam Putnam would be taking a futuristic look at agriculture in the state so that while many were focusing on current woes (water, pests, diseases, etc.,) Commissioner Putnam was arguing that the industry is still vital and quite progressive. His agenda has put the focus on three items:

- water policy (quality/quantity) and assembling a water management team;
- energy crops and the potential opportunities represented by available land not currently in use;
- school food and nutrition programs; in particular, to move that from the Health Dept. to AG as it is with the Federal program (USDA).

Mr. Hamel offered further general comments about Commissioner Putnam as an energetic new addition to the administration, reminding people that his position is a Cabinet position, giving him a great deal of influence.

Chairman Jones offered comments in response; **Commissioner Starr** reminded the group that Commissioner Putnam has Charlotte County ties including a home on Little Gasparilla. He said that Charlotte County AG people can become more involved and more vocal about their needs; then the County can lobby the legislature (since action will need support from more than just Putnam.) **Commissioner Starr** offered several additional comments on problems that he sees in how the County interacts with the State government and ideas he has for improving that process. **Mr. Hamel** also offered further comments about improving the process.

Statewide Citrus BMP Manual

Chairman Jones introduced the next new business item, the Citrus BMP manual, which sets forth the coming numeric water quality standards, and new stormwater rules from DEP. He offered the floor to Mr. Hamel for comments from the citrus group. **Mr. Hamel** wanted everyone to be aware that the state is rewriting policy along with the citrus groups, creating BMPs to be unique to the various different regions; it will all be combined into one set of rules, but will recognize the various conditions and logistics throughout the state. The draft is anticipated to be completed in the next month or so, at which point it will be workshopped around the citrus industry for final input; then it will go back to Tallahassee for the final rule-making. He wasn't sure if it was working the same way in other fields, but that was the focus for water quality.

Commissioner Starr indicated that one thing he thinks is critical is that while a BMP manual may be great, it is imperative to keep the federal government out of Florida; he commented that, if you think the situation involving scrub jays are bad, it will be much worse if there is federal involvement in water quality. While noting that perhaps the state's DEP hasn't done a good job up to now, **Commissioner Starr** stated that Florida can get better at it and can handle the job. He felt it would be appropriate to sue the federal government to prevent interference with water policy at the local level. He expressed particular concern that the economic burden of cleaning the local waters would fall on the taxpayers.

Chairman Jones offered a further footnote on the BMPs: In matters a little closer to home, not driven by the federal government, is the need to be compliant with the state's own unified stormwater rules, to be deemed compliant under the BMP programs.

Community Gardening endorsement

Chairman Jones said the final item of new business was a new approach to a continuing item, and gave a short re-cap for the benefit of the Commissioner. He noted that the committee had been involved in discussions on community gardening, food banks and related items, largely with a single citizen driving this discussion, compared to the larger focus of ANRAC group. He suggested that ANRAC could lend their endorsement to a program with specific details and then leave implementation to others in the community. He offered the floor to the Planners for their comment.

Mr. Trepal referred to the ongoing comprehensive review and revision of the Land Development Regulations (LDRs) and noted that one item being considered would be provisions in the code for small-scale ag in residential areas. He pointed out that home or community gardening is becoming more common throughout the country, and there seemed to be no reason not to allow it locally, understanding that it won't happen everywhere. There is the potential to use vacant lots with permission from the owners, though it is understood that the need to clear the lots might be a barrier to extensive participation. **Mr. Trepal** acknowledged that there are some internal issues in the county: e.g., the subject of ag exemptions and whether they would apply in this situation or not; how to allow for irrigation without impacting the potable water system. He noted that the intention is not for such gardening to be mechanized, with the possible exception of the initial land clearing/plowing. The overall subject includes the possibility of also allowing small livestock (chickens, bees, and the like) to be kept in residential areas. This is all in addition to the backyard chickens ordinance which is also being considered (not just because of Ms. Goodheil, but also the because of a matter which has come before the Board of Zoning Appeals.) The time horizon for completion of the revision of the LDRs is late summer or fall, after which it will be available online for comment, plus there will be public forums scheduled.

Mr. Andy Dodd had a question about how these options will be offered in the code; **Mr. Trepal** suggested that within the RSF districts, the options will be available by special exception or conditional use. **Mr. Dodd** asked about whether the high Special Exception application fee, would be waived; **Mr. Trepal** noted that the argument had been made that the fee makes people more serious about maintaining and running a good operation than if it were just a permitted use. He pointed out that the Code already permits you to garden in your backyard and even to sell that produce through a recognized outlet, just not to garden on an adjacent vacant lot.

Commissioner Starr asked how much time is being spent on this effort; **Mr. Trepal** responded that it was part of the overall Code revision so there is not a lot of separate time allocated to it. **Commissioner Starr** pointed out that in his neighborhood, chickens were common so he saw no need to have anything in the Code; the same with gardens. He expressed concern that community gardens would not be properly maintained, noting that he can't grow produce due to the pests; he finds buying produce to be the better solution. **Commissioner Starr** felt that there was one very persistent person on this issue, which he felt was a socialist program of growing food for the masses, and that having corn growing in the subdivision would not work out very well or be very popular. He felt the department should reconsider how much time they are spending on the matter. **Mr. Trepal** responded that the time allocated was minimal in the context of the overall rewriting of the Code, and he noted that the program under discussion was not something that would be required of citizens, but merely an option for those desiring to participate; he reiterated that the barriers to this activity are significant (e.g., clearing land) so it's not something that would happen everywhere. He also noted that the one persistent person is not the only person who has inquired about the possibility. Staff understands these suggestions will be further refined in public discussions and by the Board.

Mr. Dodd agreed that the expensive part of the concept is the implementation; he asked if this is smaller scale than community-supported agriculture? **Mr. Trepal** responded that community-supported agriculture is more like a condominium, e.g., dealing with ownership issues. He said that the draft language has a limit of 3 acres, which could be a small cooperative or a

single individual growing for themselves, or to take to farmer's markets; there are permits required by the state for items for sale, and those permits would still be required.

Commissioner Starr asked if residents of the AE district couldn't just do this anyway; **Mr. Trepal** responded that was correct, but because there will be no more AE district inside the Urban Service Area, that's why it would have to be permitted. Further discussion ensued on the intention to reduce the number of districts in the Zoning Code.

Commissioner Starr restated his opinion that he would not want a lot of time spent on an initiative driven by a minority. **Mr. Dodd** suggested that language could be adopted from other locales which have made this effort already. **Mr. Hamel** suggested using IFAS because they have statewide materials; **Mr. Trepal** confirmed the Planning Department is working with our Extension agents who are tuned to developments in Sarasota County.

Chairman Jones stated the consensus of committee is they would not like to see a new program that county has to staff up for but if it is just accommodating language within the Code, that is fine.

OLD BUSINESS

East County Plan and Smart Charlotte 2050 Update

Mr. Trepal stated that an agreement on the challenge to the Smart Charlotte 2050 Comp Plan has been reached; a brief description was given, noting that the challenge itself had no effect on east county area. In other news, the EAR found to be sufficient; 18 month time frame has started and the amendments are anticipated to go forward in the November Large Scale window, for adoption in early 2012.

EPA/DEP Numeric Standards and Statewide Stormwater Rule Update

Chairman Jones noted comments earlier in the meeting on the development of the rule.

Cooperative Conservation Blueprint (CCB)

Mr. Dodd turned the discussion over to Mr. Trepal who had met with Christine Small from the CCB. **Mr. Trepal** noted that Ms. Small presented some maps, one of which is the "moderate connectivity model for integrated habitat network"; their purpose in presenting their material was to see how it would fit into the Comprehensive Plan. **Mr. Trepal** stated that he and Ms. Williams had countered with the actual adopted Comp Plan, and noted the two sets of maps overlap a great deal; during the meeting, their incentive plans for preserving land in the corridors were discussed and CCB spoke about using the Charlotte County maps for their work. He said that the group was having a regional meeting on April 20th and that he and Ms. Williams had been invited to present Charlotte County material there for consideration.

Mr. Dodd noted that he had participated with the group on their landowner incentives subcommittee and kept them up to date on work in Charlotte County, and also on work done for Babcock, and all that work got folded in together and this accounts for the good match-up in the various plans.

CORRESPONDENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS

None additional.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ron Hamel noted his appreciation for Commissioner Starr's participation.

STAFF COMMENTS

None further.

MEMBER COMMENTS

None.

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

Commissioner Starr offered a few observations, beginning by asking how many members were on the Committee, how many vacancies and how often there was not a quorum; **Chairman Jones** responded on these matters, noting the committee was doing well this year generally.

Commissioner Starr asked if there was an attendance rule, and whether someone could be dismissed for failing to attend. **Chairman Jones** responded on this and on the question of the current vacancy (the seat formerly held by Arnie Sarlo) and the nature of the committee structure that requires the vacancy be filled by someone from within that specialty, not an at-large member.

Commissioner Starr also stated that he wanted to see resolutions and recommendations coming out of the Committee, that would eventually come before the Board of County Commissioners. He noted that the Board can then send such matters to the legislature or to the governor, and gave examples of matters that would be important to make a contribution on.

Commissioner Starr also noted that he needs help understanding the farm pond program; specifically at the Brumback farm and Lady Moon, where the pits are dug, what is required to get them finished, especially in view of the fact that there's no market for the fill right now? **Chairman Jones** agreed with that assessment, and noted that the current rules arose out of producers trying to stay aware of the County's mining ordinance. **Commissioner Starr** said he felt that there is a market for the material and invited Committee members to contact him to discuss it further. **Principal Planner Inga Williams** offered comments to the group on available exemptions for certain size pits, but noted that if they are selling the dirt they need to be a Group IV; **Commissioner Starr** stated that he felt that should be changed; **Chairman Jones** noted that ANRAC was involved in the update of the mining ordinance and it was through their involvement that the Group IV category came about. **Mr. Dodd** elaborated, noting that if excavated fill stays on site, the county is not involved; material for sale becomes a type of excavation. Further discussion ensued, with **Chairman Jones** commenting on the need to understand what the obstacles actually are and what the background issues are that may be driving the situation; it may not be a county policy that is affecting it. **Commissioner Starr** calls for this to be an agenda item for a future meeting.

NEXT MEETING

May 12, 2011 at 9:00 a.m. in Room B-106

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:59 am.

**Approved by the Committee on:
May 12, 2011**