

Oconee County  
Farmland Preservation Committee

Planning Meeting

**Wednesday, July 6, 2016**

**Meeting Minutes**

Attendance:

**Committee Members;**

*Beverly Rollins, Thomas Verner, Sam Mitchell, Keith Odom, Carole Ludwig, Henry Hibbs*

**Invited presenters and guests:**

*Sharon Holbrooks, Kyle Williams, Gerald Grace, Robert Keeton, Blake Giles*

The Oconee County Farmland Preservation Committee was called to order at 3:00 p.m.

New Committee members Carole Ludwig and Sam Mitchell were welcomed and retiring members Mac Hayes and Henry Hibbs were recognized for their past three years of service to the committee.

Committee meeting minutes from the 10-23-15 meeting were approved and signed by committee members.

Sharon Holbrooks, USDA NRCS Easement Specialist shared an ACEP-ALE program update. She indicated that Carole Ludwig's farm is within weeks of closing on the 51.2 acre conservation easement approved by Oconee BOC as its 2014 applicant for state consideration. Sharon explained that the extended process involved in finalizing a farm for ACEP-ALE funding toward a conservation easement typically takes 18 months, but because of federal NRCS holdups, the Ludwig farm has taken longer. She also announced that Athens Land Trust, because of its long and successful history with conservation easements has recently gained the title of Certified Entity with NRCS which will eliminate much of the oversight typically required by NRCS. The result; shorter time interval for processing ACEP-ALE funding approval for conservation easements from this point forward. Beverly Rollins' farm, Oconee County's 2015 state application, is moving more rapidly toward a closing on a 60 acre conservation easement. Ian McClure's farm, Oconee County's 2016 entry was the highest scoring farm entered in state competition this year against several competing farm entries from Georgia. Athens Land Trust and NRCS are moving forward with the McClure farm's 51.2 acre conservation easement.

Kyle Williams, Conservation Director with Athens Land Trust shared an update of the progress and the processes with Oconee County's latest 3 farm conservation easements. The committee members requested Kyle's help in setting a reasonable time line that would allow the 2017 top scoring farm more time for appraisal gathering and the completion of

the packet of information A.L.T develops on this top farm which accompanies the state application. Kyle further answered various questions by the committee related to the economic return for various sized acreages farmers submit.

The Committee next discussed the need to fill the Committee Chair position since Henry Hibbs' 3 year term on the committee has ended. Following discussion, Thomas Verner nominated Carole Ludwig for the chair position. Sam Mitchell seconded the motion and following Carole's consent, she was unanimously elected.

The committee then finalized its 2016 timeline discussions with the following dates:

**August 2** (Tuesday)

Oconee Farmland Preservation Committee **Public Informational Meeting**  
UGA J. Phil Campbell Center conference room at **7:00 p.m.**

**August 15**

**Deadline for Farm Applications** to be turned in to Gerald Grace, NRCS.

**August 18** (Thursday)

**Farmland Committee meeting** to review applications/ maps  
Oconee County Government Annex Conference Room at **3:00p.m.**

**August 23, 24, and 26** (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday)

**Farm Visits**

Meet at Government Annex parking lot each day at **10:00 a.m.**

**September 15** (Thursday)

**Final Committee Meeting** to complete the farm scoring  
Oconee Government Annex conference room at **3:00p.m.**

**September 27** (Tuesday)

**Presentation to Oconee BOC** of final farm scores  
Oconee County BOC Chambers at **7:00 p.m.**

**November 1**

**Deadline for top scoring farm to have appraisals complete and all information required in to Kyle Williams at Athens Land Trust.**

**December ??**

**NRCS deadline** to receive completed ACEP-ALE farm applications.

After completing our 2016 timeline adjustments the committee discussed several topics including:

1. The Aug. 2 public informational meeting program contents
2. The scoring criteria to be used in 2016 will remain the same as past years
3. The need for the offered farm acreages to be in productive blocks of land and not odd shapes for the sole purpose of maximizing prime soils and cropland scores.
4. Historical and archeological categories of the scoring criteria
5. Adjust committee's title to Oconee County Farmland Preservation Committee
6. Adjust new committee members' start date to June 1 instead of August 31

On July 19 Henry Hibbs and Carole Ludwig will make a brief report at the Oconee County BOC regarding these topics:

1. Announce that the committee has elected Carole Ludwig as its new chair.
2. Recommend that new committee members start their cycle June 1 vs. Aug. 31.
3. Recommend that "Oconee Co. Farmland Preservation Committee" be new title.
4. Progress Report on past 3 years of Oconee farms selected for ACEP-ALE

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Henry Hibbs