

**Van Buren County Land Preservation Board**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**  
**May 8, 2024**

1. **Call to Order:** Julie Pioch called the meeting to order at the Human Services West Building, 57418 CR 681, Hartford, MI 49057 on May 8, 2024 at 6:11 PM

Land Preservation Board members present: Julie Pioch, Richard Godfrey, Carl Druskovich, Chris Rickli, William VanTassel, and Michael Matheny. Members Absent: Emilly Hickmott, Scott Cedarquist, and Dave Foerster. Public in attendance: Alyssa Hosbein, VBC Planning Commission, John Krohn, MDARD, and Lisa Ransler, Van Buren County.

2. **Approval of Minutes:** Rickli, supported by Godfrey made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 13, 2024. Minutes were approved as presented.

3. **New Business:**

- a. **Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program:** John Krohn, MDARD Local Grants and Easements Analyst presented information on the State's Preservation programs to detail various methods aimed at preserving farmland and open spaces through voluntary initiatives. The primary approaches include:

- i. **Agricultural Preservation Fund:** The fund assists local governments in acquiring development rights to preserve agricultural land. Initially, an appraisal estimate is sufficient to apply, but a full appraisal is needed upon approval. The first three parcels from each county approved by the State can receive up to \$6,000 for title and appraisal costs, addressing potential financial barriers to applications. Properties are prioritized based on the proportion of arable land, soil quality, MEAP verification, or an NRCS Crop Plan presence. A minimum of a 25% funding match is required from applicants, with payments made to landowners in exchange for relinquishing their development rights.
- ii. **Agricultural Conservation Easement Donations:** These are permanent land restrictions agreed between the State and landowners to preserve their land for open space or agriculture.
- iii. **Purchase of Development Rights:** This program involves a permanent land restriction in exchange for a cash payment, ensuring the land remains dedicated to agriculture.
- iv. **Farmland Development Rights Agreements:** Known as P.A. 116, these are temporary land restrictions between the State and a landowner.
- v. **Local and Designated Open Space Easements:** These temporary restrictions involve local governments and landowners agreeing to preserve land as open space in return for tax benefits and exemption from special assessments.

The program includes an annual grant funding cycle, allocating about \$2 million per year to assist local conservation programs. Local programs must qualify through the State by adopting specific ordinances and incorporating agricultural preservation into their land use plans.

As of the presentation's date, the State of Michigan holds 174 permanent conservation easements covering approximately 29,970 acres, and 43 grants have been issued to support local easement programs.

**b. 2024 Lachman Property Conservation Easement Monitoring Report**

Pioch presented the 2024 Conservation Easement Annual Monitoring Report for the Lachman Property provided a review of conservation efforts on a specific property managed by CHS Capitol LLC. Key findings from the report include:

**Property Details:** The property is located in Paw Paw Township, Van Buren County, and covers 81 acres designated for conservation.

**Land Use:** The land has been continuously used for agriculture, with corn being the primary crop planted in Fall 2023.

**Site Monitoring:** The site visit was conducted by Colleen Forestieri from the Van Buren Conservation District on April 16, 2024. The monitoring included a clockwise route around the property's perimeter, starting from the west side.

**Compliance:** The report confirms that all terms of the conservation easement are being upheld, with no violations such as encroachment or unauthorized uses detected.

**Landowner Engagement:** The current landowner, CHS Capitol LLC, was not present during the monitoring but was involved in the discussions regarding the monitoring results.

**Environmental Impact:** No evidence of hazardous substances or environmental hazards was observed on the property.

The report ensures that the property is being maintained according to the conservation easement's terms, contributing to the broader goals of preserving natural resources and supporting sustainable agricultural practices in the area.

Concern was expressed by several members that the grain bins could represent a commercial interest. The original baseline report on the property plus the original easement need to be reviewed to determine if there are any violations.

Ransler will forward the compliance report to the State (John Krohn) as required.

**4. Old Business:**

- a. Van Buren LBP Scoring System – follow-up discussion
- b. Determine next meeting date

**5. Member Reports and Announcements**

**Land Preservation Board By-Laws:** Pioch explained the proposed changes to the By-Laws. Druskovich, supported by Rickli, made a motion to adopt the By-Laws with the discussed changes. Motion approved by acclamation.

**Land Preservation Board Scoring System:** Pioch reviewed the scoring system requirements that need to be updated and approved before July 2024. The largest concern is to ensure that the most at-risk properties are preserved, with the scoring system supporting LPB's purchase of those properties.

After review and discussion of the document, Items to confirm include what is being done regarding certified endangered species and any other development points that should be included. The group felt the discretionary points were a good addition. Pioch will update the Scoring System and it will be reviewed at the May meeting.

Next Meeting date and location: July 12, 2024 at the Human Services West Building at 57418 CR 681, Hartford MI 49057.

6. **Adjourn:** The meeting was adjourned at 7:43 PM.