

Monmouth County Agriculture Development Board
Division of Planning



Minutes for a Regular Meeting of the
MONMOUTH COUNTY AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
February 3, 2026, 7:00 PM

Hybrid Meeting at One East Main Street, Freehold, NJ or Audio and Video Conference via WebEx

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Bullock called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

Mr. Bullock read the “Open Public Meetings Act” Compliance Statement.

ATTENDANCE:

Present: Bullock, Clayton, DeFelice, Errickson (online), Giambrone (arrived at 7:15), Holmes, Incatasciato, Licitra, Mosley (arrived at 7:21), Pettyjohn, Van Mater
Staff: Beekman, Bezahler, Cortese, Emmerich, Honigfeld, Kiley, Palmieri, Schmetterer
Representatives: Chris Helmlinger, Sean Pizzio (online), Betty Velez-Gimbel
Public: John Aguiar, Angel Angelov Andrew Ball, Daniel Cacicio, Julia Callano, Amy Carter, Avery Carter, Daniel Carter, Patricia Conenna, Vito Conenna, Chris Dasti, Devon DiMaria, Adeline Ferley, Khrystyna Ferley, Bill Fox, Al G., Charles Gimbel, Alan Grippaldi, Sheila Hatami, Mike Heard, Joseph Henry, Ashley Horvath, Barry Johnstone, Dana Juenemann, Gretchen Kelly, Patrick Kelly, Anna Krisjansdottir, Carolyn Krug, Elaine McKane, Damian Majewski, Gina Miller, Melanie Morris, Tracey Narwid, Joann O’Neill, Marc Parisi, Daniel Picard, Linda Picard, Kevin Sullivan, Alex Sauickie, Harriet Stankiewicz, Magdalena Stankiewicz, Dale VanSant, Jean Verrier, Karin Verrier, John Vloyanetes, David Wallis, Evelyn Wallis, Lawrence White, Carol Van Mater, Thomas ___ (online)
1 unidentified caller online, 3 other sign-ins with illegible handwriting

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Mr. Pettyjohn motioned to adopt the January 2025 Regular Session minutes. Mr. Holmes seconded the motion which passed by voice vote. Mr. DeFelice and Commissioner Licitra abstained.

CORRESPONDENCE AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

None.

REGULAR REPORTS

- A. *Chairman*: No report.
- B. *State*: Sean Pizzio reported that the SADC is holding public auctions for two preserved farms: a 118-acre farm in Holland Twp scheduled for March 5, 2026 and a 30-acre farm in Hopewell Twp scheduled for April 17, 2026. Mr. Pizzio noted the passage of S699/A682 for the preservation of

privately owned woodlands through easement acquisition. The SADC will need a year or two to set up the program. Mr. Pizzio remarked that the SADC reviewed the 2025 Annual Monitoring Report and related statistics. He stated that the SFV is generating offers up 23% over the traditional appraisal approach and provided an update on the number of applications. A special SADC virtual meeting is set for February 12th, and the next regular meeting will be on February 26th.

- C. Staff: Ms. Honigfeld shared that the Sage farm closing is scheduled for the end of the week. Ms. Honigfeld also mentioned that planning is underway for the 2026 Farm Summit and that flyers are available.
- D. *Municipal Representatives*: No reports.
- E. *County Board of Agriculture*: Mr. DeFelice reported that the Board of Ag sent two delegates to the NJ Department of Agriculture's recent annual convention to participate in the development of 2026 policies to guide its position for the upcoming year. Mr. DeFelice noted the annual dinner will be on March 4th at the American Hotel. Mr. DeFelice added that there will be a silent auction to defray costs, and any residual monies will be deposited into the scholarship fund.
- F. *Rutgers Cooperative Extension*: Dr. Errickson reported that the search committee for the 4-H Director completed its work in December and is waiting for Rutgers to take the next step. Dr. Errickson noted that the Central Jersey Vegetable Growers meeting is scheduled for February 20th, and the Central Jersey Turf and Ornamental Institute will meet on February 27th.

OLD BUSINESS

Memorialization of Resolution 2026-1-1 (House Replacement, Block 20, Lot 5, Colts Neck)

Mr. Van Mater motioned to memorialize the resolution for the replacement of the single-family home on the former Cicaese farm, and Mr. Pettyjohn seconded. The vote passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Deed Interpretation Request (Block 46, Lot 21, Millstone Township)

Ms. Honigfeld advised that the subject operation is seeking approval to host farm-to-table events which will include dinners, breakfasts and cooking classes featuring the farm's mushrooms and produce. Mr. KC Sullivan, who represents Two River Mushrooms, explained the relationship between Mighty Dare Farm and Two River Mushrooms. Mr. Sullivan noted that Two River Mushrooms is a USDA organic mushroom farm which has been in business for about 10 years and is using a 4000 sq ft all-purpose pole barn on Mighty Dare Farm to grow about 1500 pounds of mushroom per week. Kurt Cavano is the owner of the farm, and Two River Gourmet Mushrooms leases a portion of the property.

Mr. Sullivan presented his plan to host small farm-to-table dinners and educational events that would showcase products primarily grown on site with more than half of the ingredients coming directly from the farm. The Board members asked questions regarding the composition of the mushroom's wood soy hull, the amount of substrate that was applied to the fields, and if there was any notable long-term accumulation. Mr. Sullivan gave an approximate calculation of the amount applied over an acre and a half. The Board asked if the farm is planning to host any weddings or larger events in the future. Mr. Sullivan advised that the farm is only planning small dinners and educational programs.

Ms. Honigfeld noted that Two River Mushrooms has an application before the Board of Health to obtain septic and water approvals and noted that Two River Mushrooms/Mighty Dare Farm might come back before the Board in the future to seek relief from some municipal requirements. The Board members concluded that it felt comfortable with proposed events meeting the definition of on-farm direct marketing activities.

Mr. DeFelice made a motion that the proposed activities meet the definition of on-farm direct marketing events and are in alignment with the deed of easement. Mr. Van Mater seconded the motion, and the matter passed unanimously.

RIGHT-TO-FARM AND STEWARDSHIP ISSUES

Status Reports

Mr. Beekman reported that there has been no change on *Basselini v. Crawford*; there will be an upcoming status conference call with the judge. Mr. Beekman advised the second portion of the Samrock Stables hearing is the next agenda item. Ms. Honigfeld advised that the Carm's Farm mediation was rescheduled. Ms. Honigfeld also reported that there is an upcoming subcommittee meeting to discuss stewardship issues, and she confirmed attendees for that meeting.

Activities Review for a Conflict Resolution Request (Block 154 Lot 6 Howell Twp)

Mr. Beekman read the second page of the agenda aloud and set some ground rules for the public hearing. Mr. Beekman opened the floor.

Mr. Christopher Dasti, of Dasti & Staiger, introduced himself as Howell's representative and advised that Mr. John Aguiar, the Township's Code Official, would be the town's primary witness. Mr. Aguiar testified that the township does not object to the agricultural operations on the property, including the raising of horses or other farming activities, and does not dispute protections that may apply under the Right to Farm Act. Mr. Aguiar stated that municipality's initial investigation arose from social media postings and the operation's website from around April 2024. The language in the postings alluded to the potential operation of a commercial school, homeschool program, and summer camp on the site. Mr. Aguiar explained that the township had concerns that the programs and classes were focused on traditional academic instruction (such as reading and math).

Mr. Aguiar highlighted the additional concerns of Howell Twp regarding ingress and egress, traffic, and the presence of children on the property for camps or classes. Mr. Aguiar testified that the township would not object to limited farm-related camps or activities, provided there is no traditional school operation or excess traffic or parking impacts.

Mr. Dasti noted that should the Board act favorably toward Samrock Stables, and the Board agrees that there is no traditional homeschooling or commercial school operation taking place on the property, then the MCADB should provide clarity and direction/guidance within the approval resolution on the scope of activities; the number of children present; the location of the activities on the site; and eventual site plan review for different aspects of the subject farm including applicable code and regulations for parking, ADA compliance, lighting, occupancy limits, zoning and building safety standards.

Upon cross-examination from Andrew Ball, counsel for the landowner, Mr. Aguiar elaborated on his prior points. Matthew Howard, a former township employee, had conducted the original investigation. A letter of violation was sent to Samrock Stables. The municipality did not receive a sufficient response. At the time the letter of violation was issued, the township considered the advertised activities to be inconsistent with the code for the ARE 2 zone, as the property lacked a farm designation.

A member of the public, Daniel Cacicio, cross-examined Mr. Aguiar. He raised questions regarding the objection to reading and math instruction and whether the township had confirmed if anyone had attended the programs advertised. Mr. Aguiar explained that the township concerns were centered on zoning compliance, noting that advertising a school would alone constitute a violation. The violation letter was a preliminary enforcement step.

Bill Fox, another member of the public, inquired about the procedural history of the matter. Mr. Aguiar responded that, as Samrock Stables did not have a farm designation, the township acted in the interest and safety of the people who visited that property.

Andrew Ball, from Davison Eastman Muñoz Paone, P.A., representing Samrock Stables, asked Ms. Julia F. Callano to speak on the activities taking place on the farm. Ms. Callano testified that she has never taught reading, math, and/or any other form of traditional schooling at the subject farm. She elaborated that the farm classes taught children how to care for animals and explored different feeds for the various animals on the farm. She did not use any books and/or other literature and indicated there was no classroom, but a hands-on experience where the children learned by interacting with the animals on the farm. Ms. Callano further testified that the products of the farm, such as wool, chicken/duck eggs, seeds for planting, produce, goat milk etc. were all used in the classes not just as a teaching tool, but also to market the farm products for sale. The horses were also used to teach the breeding and caring process and to showcase the horses to promote and encourage sales as a marketing tool. Ms. Callano testified that handwashing stations, hand sanitizers, and porta-Johns are available on site.

The following individuals spoke in support of the activities taking place on the farm and their tie to agriculture, showed examples of the crafts made by program participants, shared testimonials about the positive impacts of the farm and its programs on participants, and expressed frustration over the township's earlier handling of the case and investigation: Devon DiMaria, Magdalena Stankiewicz, Harriet Stankiewicz, Bill Fox, Amy Carter, Avery Carter, Assemblyman Alex Sauickie, Betty Velez-Gimbel, Khristina Ferley, Adeline Ferley, Jean Varrier, Dale VanSant, Anna Krisjansdottir, Elaine Taylor, Daniel Cacicio, and Lawrence White.

Mr. Beekman closed public comments and opened deliberations. The board deliberations focused on whether the activities fall within the permissible agricultural practices enumerated in N.J.S.A. 4:1C-9(a); whether the farm's educational and instructional activities related to equine operations are contemplated under N.J.S.A. 4:1C-3 and N.J.A.C. 2:76-2A.13; and whether the farm classes, camps and farm tours that are not equine related serve to increase the direct marketing and sales of agricultural products produced on the farm as per N.J.A.C. 2:76-2A.13.

Through its deliberations the Board made the following findings of fact:

1. Block 154, Lot 6 is situated in the Township of Howell and owned by Samrock Stables, LLC.
2. The general agricultural production activities that take place on the subject farm, such as keeping and raising of animals, equine breeding and training, production of chicken and duck eggs, and cultivation of seasonal fruits and vegetables (apples, pumpkins, pears and tomatoes) are permissible and acceptable activities under the Right to Farm Act.
3. The Right to Farm Act does not afford protection to the operation of a commercial school, and the MCADB would not have any jurisdiction over such an activity.
4. The Respondent plans to host the following activities as per Exhibit R-2: farm classes, farm camps, and farm tours.
5. Farm classes focus on teaching children all aspects of owning and operating a farm, specifically the care and raising of animals, and address topics such as feeding and nutrition, maintaining healthy environments and shelter for the animals, daily care of animals, and selective breeding of animals. Classes are offered from September - June, Monday - Friday from 10:00 AM - 3:30 PM with 10-15 guests and said guests are being dropped off prior to the start of each class.

6. Farm Camps entail the same components of farm classes but operate with alternating activities on a daily basis – with the emphasis on horses and riding three (3) days a week and general farming two (2) days per week. Classes are offered from July-August, Monday-Friday for one week from 10:00 AM - 3:30 PM with 10-12 guests and said guests being dropped off prior to the start of each class.
7. Farm Tours encompass a guided walking tour that includes the following: meeting the horses and their foal; visiting the poultry, sheep, and goats to learn how their eggs, wool and milk-based products contribute to the farm’s productivity; exploring the fields and gardens; and hands-on experiences such as collecting eggs, sampling fresh-picked tomatoes, etc.
8. The farm classes, farm camps, and farm tours that are not equine-related serve to increase the direct marketing and sales of agricultural products produced on the subject farm, as required under N.J.A.C. 2:76-2A.13.
9. The equine-related farm events and farm camps meet the definition of complimentary activity as per N.J.A.C. 2:76-2B.3, and the area occupied by equine-related infrastructure equals approximately 6%, where the Board has found that, in general, the equine-related infrastructure shall not exceed 25%.
10. The complementary equine-related activities have a direct link to the marketing of the horses that are raised, bred, kept, and boarded on the farm and satisfy the needed requirements under N.J.A.C. 2:76-2B.3, which remain subject to compliance with municipal standards.
11. A review of site plan elements is needed to evaluate parking as well as ingress/egress to the farm.
12. The Respondent would need additional approvals from other agencies should the pool located on the farm be used for commercial purposes in the future.

Mr. Pettyjohn made a motion to grant right to farm protection to various aspects of the Samrock Stables operation. Commissioner Licitra seconded the motion, and the vote passed unanimously. Details of the resolution follow: farm-based educational activities on the farm, including classes on livestock raising and horseback riding, are approved. Hours submitted in Exhibit R-2 are approved, as they comply with the AMP for On-farm Direct Marketing Facilities, Activities, and Events. The maximum number of guests to participate in the farm-based educational activities shall be 30 per event.

The activities are also eligible for protection as they meet the criteria for equine activity right to farm protections under N.J.A.C. 2:76-2B.3. Specifically, the Board finds the activities meet the criteria of subsections (b)1 and 2 as well as (c).

The approval is conditioned on receipt and review by the MCADB of the site plan elements. The MCADB will review the site plan elements, in conjunction with the Township of Howell, to ensure municipal standards are met, specifically related to parking and ingress/egress to the farm.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on **Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 7:30 PM.**

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion from Mr. Pettyjohn, seconded by Mr. Bullock, the meeting adjourned at 10:03 PM, which was approved by voice vote.