

**Notes from meeting of MET Easement and Stewardship Committee
Wednesday 4-22-2020
1:00 pm**

Attending: R. Powell, C. Wells, J. Jitkoff, S.Taylor Rogers, A. Jones
Staff: J. Chapman, A. G. Carlson, J. Turgeon
OAG: T. Kovacs

Next meeting: Wednesday, May 20, 2020 at 1 pm

EASEMENT PROGRAM

Agenda Item 1

- State recently instituted hiring freeze delays filling the Conservation Easement Program Manager position (vacant because J. Turgeon is now the Director).
- A.G. Carlson presented project pipeline

Agenda Item 2a – 20 acres in Washington County

A.G. Carlson presented the proposed conservation easement project. S.Taylor Rogers moved to recommend approval of the project for the Consent Calendar. C. Wells seconded the motion. **The committee unanimously recommended approval of this project to the Board of Trustees on the Consent Calendar.**

Agenda Item 2b – 34.89 acres in Garrett County

A.G. Carlson presented the proposed conservation easement project. J. Jitkoff moved to recommend approval of the project for the Consent Calendar with the condition recommended by staff. S.Taylor Rogers seconded the motion. **The committee unanimously recommended approval of this project to the Board of Trustees on the Consent Calendar.**

Agenda Item 2c – 162.525 acres in Queen Anne's County

A.G. Carlson presented the proposed conservation easement project. A. Jones moved to recommend approval of the project for the Consent Calendar. J. Jitkoff seconded the motion. **The committee unanimously recommended approval of this project to the Board of Trustees on the Consent Calendar.**

Agenda Item 2d – 291 +/- acres in Dorchester County with the US Navy

A.G. Carlson presented the proposed conservation easement project. J. Jitkoff moved to recommend approval of the project as presented by staff for the Consent Calendar. A. Jones Rogers seconded the motion. **The committee unanimously recommended approval of this project to the Board of Trustees on the Consent Calendar.**

Agenda Item 2e – 26.785 acres in Harford County with Harford Land Trust

A.G. Carlson presented the proposed conservation easement project. A. Jones moved to recommend approval of the project for the Consent Calendar. S.Taylor Rogers seconded the motion. **The committee unanimously recommended approval of this project to the Board of Trustees on the Consent Calendar.**

Agenda Item 2f – 56.67 acres in St. Mary's County with the US Navy and Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust

A.G. Carlson presented the proposed conservation easement project. J. Jitkoff moved to recommend approval of the project for the Consent Calendar. C. Wells seconded the motion.

The committee unanimously recommended approval of this project to the Board of Trustees on the Consent Calendar.

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Agenda Item 3a –

J. Chapman provided an update

- Little change in monitoring numbers due to stay at home order impacting MET staff, volunteers and Local Land Trusts alike
- Reiterating the imposition of hiring freeze that is impacting recruitment of Stewardship Planner and Long Term Contractual Stewardship Specialist
- Staff is looking into using the 2019 high resolution aerial photography when it is made available, to view properties not visited in FY19 (minimum 30 solely held and likely some LLT coholds, too).
- Also researching potential fee services to access 2020 hi-res satellite information for monitoring and reporting (informed estimate of \$50K for entire MET portfolio of 1294 easement interests on 136K acres).
- Reported that in response to current COVID crisis, the MALPF Board has suspended the requirement for 2020 monitoring of purchased agricultural easements by local governments and MALPF staff. MALPF cooperators are required to monitor 1/10 of their portfolio annually.
- LTA Standards and Practices call for 100% annual monitoring of purchased and donated easements, for which non-accredited land trusts (seeking accreditation) can use aerial imagery review 2 yr out 3, and 4 yr out of 5 for accredited land trusts. LTA's standard reflects IRS requirement for qualified land trusts to have a regular program of easement monitoring to be eligible to accept easement donations and for donors to receive tax benefits.
- MET's aspirational goal for monitoring is 100%, but we continue to be limited by staff and local land trust coholders' capacity for stewardship and monitoring. In light of impending fiscal deficits, future goals may need to be adjusted to reflect ongoing staffing limits at MET and LLTs.

Agenda Item 3b - Request to Approve Proposed Amendment on 155.6 acres in Talbot County
J. Chapman presented the request. The consensus of the Committee was that the reduction in the number of total dwelling units (3 down to 2) on the conservation easement land and proposed location of the new dwelling unit enhanced protection of the property. The requirement of common ownership and prohibition of any further division (eliminating the non-density division right) of the property constituted "an extraordinary circumstance". A. Jones requested that staff document in the file detailed explanation of how this request met the "extraordinary circumstance" exception. C. Wells moved to recommend approval of the project for the Consent Calendar with the conditions recommended by staff. S.Taylor Rogers seconded the motion. **The committee unanimously recommended approval of this project to the Board of Trustees.**

Agenda Item 3c - Request to Approve Residence Replacement on 180.86 ac in Washington County

J. Chapman presented the request. This item was tabled until next meeting. J. Chapman will consult with the OAG and with Washington County prior to the next meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

The Committee will not meet on March 25, 2020. The Committee will next meet at 1 pm on April 22, 2020.

2020 Committee meeting dates:

May 20

September 2

September 23

October 21

November 23 (this is a Monday; the Monday of Thanksgiving week)