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**East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District  
Board of Directors *APPROVED* Meeting Minutes**

Monday, August 1, 2022

**5:15pm- Call to Order**

**Guebert** called to order the regular meeting of the EMSWCD Board of Directors meeting at 5:15pm on Monday, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, at EMSWCD's Mainstem Farm Property.

**5:15pm- Introductions, Review Agenda, Introductions, Icebreaker**

**Guebert conducted introductions for the record. The following persons were present:**

**Board of Directors:** Mike Guebert (Zone 3 Director, Chair), Laura Masterson (Zone 2 Director, Secretary), Joe Rossi (Zone 1 Director), Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky (At-Large 2 Director, Vice-Chair), Jim Carlson (At-Large 1 Director, Treasurer)

**Staff:** Nancy Hamilton (Executive Director), Dan Mitten (CFO- virtual, 6:30pm), Julie DiLeone (Rural Lands Coordinator), Kathy Shearin (Urban Lands Coordinator), Matt Shipkey (Land Legacy Program Manager), Rowan Steele (Headwaters Farm Program Manager), Heather Nelson Kent (Grants Program Manager), Monica McAllister (Community Connections Liaison), Whitney Bailey (Senior Urban Conservationist), Asianna Fernandez (Executive Assistant)

**Headwaters Farmers:** Emily Cooper (Mainstem Farmer), Serena Milne, Gonzalo Garcia Reyes, Laura Kennedy, Mary Colombo, Nicki Passarella, Catherine Nguyen, Duane Lane (also Farm Access Equity Advisory Group member)

**Public:** Sara Curiel Paez (Consultant for FAEAG), Surabhi Mahajan (Zenger Farms), Preet Gujral (Metro)

**Changes to the agenda:** N/A

**Shipkey** conducted an icebreaker for the group asking for their names, their affiliation to the District, and how they first found their excitement for agriculture.

**5:26pm Mainstem Farm Access Project**

**Shipkey and Cooper** gave an overview of Mainstem Farm and how Cooper (a beginning farmer) began farming it and was provided with an opportunity for access. EMSWCD bought the property 4 years ago from a retiring farmer who had no family members interested in continuing the farming operation; the purchase unlocked opportunities to advance the District mission and to prevent the negative impacts (on Headwaters and other nearby farms) associated with the property no longer being utilized as a farm. EMSWCD prioritized making the farm available for a HIP graduate given the challenge that cohort faces in accessing land – Emily Cooper of Full Cellar Farm was selected via an application / review process, with EMSWCD entering into a 3-year lease with Full Cellar. This June, a pathway to longer-term access has been provided to Full Cellar Farm via a 20-year lease with a purchase option – this was a new and unique approach for the District which has come together well. Cooper is partnering with the District in ensuring the land remains sustainably managed, actively worked and is affordable and accessible to future generations of farmers via an agriculture management plan and a working farmland easement. Significant improvements to soil, water and habitat resources have already been realized, as evidenced by the organic and salmon-safe certification awarded to the operation. And we've safeguarded our investments in Headwaters for the future.



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**Cooper** This space has meant access to farmland for 4 other farmers as well as herself. Without the support of EMSWCD via the Headwaters Incubator Farm Program and its farm access work, Cooper would have never considered a site like Mainstem as feasible for her to lease or own. She is farming in community with other farmers in a way that mutually benefits all the operators. Her core values in her farming business include creating that sense of community, sharing equipment, and hosting farmers who have historically struggled to access farmland – providing those folks with the access opportunities she benefited from.

- Having the option to build a house and live on site means having a farm business that is much more efficient (for example she's able to easier recognize microclimates and doesn't have to spend time and money commuting). She is also able to build financial equity. Without the home site, she probably couldn't have made this farm access opportunity work for her.
- Cooper views her farming enterprise as supporting and advancing the District's mission of working towards the right balance of conservation and farming. There is little farmland left in East Multnomah and finding people to farm it sustainably and take care of it long term is one of the best ways the District can help protect soil and water health.

**Zimmer-Stucky** Do you/will you offer different subleases as well? **Cooper** Yes! Gentle Rain Farm has farmed here for 2 years. Rachel, who she hired when she first started at HIP, has transitioned to successfully farming on Mainstem. And she's excited to make available ½ acre for 5 years to farmers from communities that have struggled to access farmland due to racial discrimination and/or dispossession.

**Zimmer-Stucky** What is the future of farming in East Multnomah? **Cooper** The future is collaborative. Conversations with other farmers is a great way to help and lift each other up.

**Masterson** What can the District work on to help provide for successful farm access strategies? **Cooper** District and partners need to be thinking as long term as possible for the farm, including easements and what will future farmers want/need, and how not to close doors now that future farmers may need later.

**5:43pm** (Paez arrives and gives introduction)

**5:45pm: Transition to Headwaters Farm Equipment shed for the rest of the meeting.**

**6:11pm: Context, Process for Soliciting Feedback on Gordon Creek Farm Access Opportunity**

**Shipkey** shared why addressing farmland access inequities helps advance the mission and relevancy of EMSWCD. Helping people access farmland means we can also help them care for soil and water health on that farmland. By broadening whom we work with, we'll likely be able to grow the scope of our work and its impact, and we may learn new ways to do our work, which we would otherwise miss out on by working with the same folks we have always worked with. This is consistent with Masterson and Carlson's past statement on how new and different ideas can bring needed energy to the business of farming. In doing this work, we are being responsive to our constituents who feel that there are barriers to accessing farmland and that we can and should play a role in breaking down those barriers; that responsiveness helps ensure the continued relevance of EMSWCD. And, as a Board member said recently, if there aren't opportunities for everyone to participate in farming, there may not be a future for agriculture.

**Shipkey** reminded folks of specific milestones of Board support for advancing farmland access equity to date. Specifically, adopting it as a goal for the Land Legacy Program, making Gordon Creek Farm available as a specific access opportunity and hearing and OKAYING a plan to co-create with the community an access strategy for Gordon Creek Farm.



**Shipkey** briefly overviewed what that community co-creation looked like. Over the course of 9 months, the 7 members of the Farm Access Equity Advisory Group (FAEAG) met 8 times to learn about each other, share their passion for agriculture and increasing access to agriculture, and be the voice for the communities that we as an organization haven't historically interacted with; their final recommendations are found in the report in the Board meeting packet.

**Paez** This was a great opportunity for broad feedback from the community. We have members from different areas of the county including people who work for non-profits, but overall, everyone shared the knowledge and passion of agriculture which means there were a lot of similarities between everyone in the group but there were also many different perspectives that were taken into consideration, creating very rich conversations. The group's recommendation is one that everyone agrees on and feels aligned to, but also understands that there are different ways they can achieve one goal. She shared her appreciation for Shipkey and Steele in their work with the FAEAG and their genuine interest in learning about and listening to the group members.

#### **6:22pm- Gordon Creek Farm Access North Star Values & Recommendations**

##### **North Star Values:**

**Shipkey** The copy of the recommendation that was provided in the meeting packet is just a first step that needs to be fleshed out going forward. What the recommendations do is speak to the foundational question of what sort of framework for access the Board wants to provide at Gordon Creek? Once there is clarity around that, Staff can work with the community on fleshing out answers and adjusting the framework as appropriate – we expect to we would discover this through additional consultation and an RFP process (latter as suggested by Rossi).

[Shared the 7 North Star Values] The FAEAG's North Star Values underline and drive the recommendations that the group made and can be used to guide the board in decision making moving forward. The FAEAG recommends working to achieve as many of the values as possible but appreciates that all may not be achieved and/or may not always be appropriate. **Shipkey** noted how most of these North Star Values are in line with the District's values already.

**The Board** discussed a few questions they had about the values and expressed where they agree or align with certain values that we presented.

**Masterson** Focusing on 3 of the values, (alternatives to individualistic model of farming, centering the original, indigenous stewards of the land and focus on supporting communities rather than centering financial outcomes for EMSWCD) how can the board see a different approach to creating initiatives to assist farmers?

**Paez** FAEAG expressed desire to move away from the individualistic models of leadership in order to support communities in the crisis that we're facing. How do we co-create and join forces?

**Lane** We spoke a lot about collaboration and partnerships (financial and labor) within the community and trying to figure out how 1 individual would be successful farming alone on the Gordon Creek property. FAEAG sees that a collaborative community on the property is a successful route to go as it comes with cost sharing, equipment sharing, etc. which enhances the success of a small farmer and could end with stronger and longer-term results.

**Steele** The spirit of what the group wanted to capture was a mixture of a co-op and what is happening at Headwaters: proximity of likeminded growers with similar values, scales, and ideas as a rich opportunity for innovation. This isn't an ask for the District to head a co-op operation, but we want the Board to keep



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in mind that there are a lot of different ways that something like this can come together, and it is an ask for us to be receptive of the ideas that are brought up from organizations who want to be a part of this.

**Paetz** Out of all the recommendations we considered, this final option was the most difficult to put together as we made sure to look for as many different perspectives as possible first, and to incorporate our values and aspect of our histories as well. We looked at it as a chance for abundance and opportunity even if it meant the group themselves wouldn't get to directly "profit" from it.

Gordon Creek Recommendations:

**Shipkey** The FAEAG thought the Gordon Creek Farm has great potential as a farm access site - not too big but has great infrastructure, residence, site has been well maintained, location is great in proximity to the metro area, and it has a developed water right as well.

The Recommendation: The District to convey the Gordon Creek Farm property to an organization(s) who has the best capacity, capability, experience, and skills in making the site available to farmers from communities who have traditionally faced barriers to accessing farmland, and to make it available at no cost to that organization. Asked for the staff and Board to be flexible and be open to feedback from applicants. So, for example, if an organization isn't immediately ready to own, then considering a long-term lease with an acquisition option. This approach would be similar in many respects to the model EMSWCD employed at Oxbow and Mainstem Farm. As in those cases, EMSWCD would transfer ownership, but will hold a working farmland easement that ensures the site stays in farm use, is accessible and affordable to future generations of farmers and that the soil, water, and habitat resources would be protected and enhanced via a dynamic agricultural management plan. Other benefits the District would unlock via this approach include new opportunities to expand the scope of our work, possible learning opportunities about new approaches to natural resource protection, pathways for more and different approaches to agriculture (which are likely to make it more resilient), demonstrating responsiveness to our constituents and proving our ongoing relevance and possibly developing a model that can be replicated elsewhere.

**6:38pm- Questions, Discussion, Next Steps, Gratitude**

**Zimmer-Stucky** led the Board in a discussion about the recommendations that were made to them from the FAEAG on the Gordon Creek Farm Property. Started the discussion with an informal temperature check.

**Zimmer-Stucky** Initial thoughts on the proposal: sticker shock but remembered, and is holding onto, the idea that most great things probably started out by giving people the same kind of sticker shock. Reminded the Board that moving in the recommended direction is not a sharp turn or backtracking in our process, but a continuation on the route that the District is already on. Feels comfortable with taking the idea forward and developing it. At the end of the day, what matters to her is that there is still farming in East Multnomah County.

**Carlson** The thought of someone else managing the property appeals to him. Doing the conveyance for no cost is something he wants to chew on.

**Rossi** Looks at projects in a way that considers what else can you do with the money invested to work towards the mission? Breaking it up into small pieces will help teach farming but with the mission being soil and water health raises the question of is this the best option for the size of our investment? What other soil and water outcomes could a different \$1 million investment realize? Drawn to idea of selling with an easement to plow those funds into additional projects. Is the farm size viable?



**Guebert** Thinks a farm this size could be viable, especially if doesn't have burden of a mortgage. We should focus on what we are getting back for that investment, and what is the community getting back? A place like this could spur successful ideas for smaller scale farming, similar to how HWF has done so through shared equipment and shared community. Did have a similar initial shock about releasing the asset at no cost and thought about looking at it in terms of having a long-term lease and if mutually agreed upon goals were met in an agreed-on timeframe, then we could convey the property.

**Masterson** is excited by the report. Agrees with the broad goals for the outcomes. It's exciting to think in new ways. Regarding the idea of conveying for no consideration, drew parallel with our investment in natural areas where the District has invested in natural area acquisitions without taking a property interest / looking for a financial return. She thought of this parallel in looking at the example section of the FAEAG report, where most of the examples are about conveying natural resource focused project. Across the country, where else are people thinking about accessing farmland in this way? It is important that this is agricultural centered, which the North Star Values prove that this is. Excited to dig into the details, feels like this is a great starting point.

**Zimmer-Stucky** likes the way Masterson compared this to how the District has approached natural resources investments in the past because the board and staff just knew they had value worth preserving independent of any financial return (e.g., recent grant for the Shaull natural area transaction). Realized she was originally looking at the property as a buy, protect, sell model instead. Reminded the Board that value/return on investment takes on different forms; affordable fresh food, small businesses flourishing, etc. There is a generous Land Conservation Fund balance, so wouldn't be limiting other land protection work we could do.

**Carlson** Aligned with Joe's feedback. Initial concern would be telling the District's voters that we spent \$1 million on this property and then gave it away. Would suggest finding some way to get some value out of it like leasing it out to a farmer. Would like to hear about alternatives.

**Rossi** What we would get back from operating in this way, is that the best option for soil and water health? There are plenty of nonprofit organizations who teach farming that we could lease the property to and use that money for getting staff out into the community to find those farmers. What could other alternatives be? What kind of staff capacity would we need to add for this? Expressed concern about underutilization of EMSWCD farms.

**Guebert** Sharing equipment and property could be a huge opportunity and advantage over one person owning or leasing the whole property and having to handle costs themselves. Either way, this project does need to be done with an eye for success and would like to know what success for this project looks like to the Board and the District.

**Masterson** hears a lack of clarity and agreement around our definition of success. Profitability? Protecting resources? Supporting communities facing barriers to farm access? Reminder that we aren't talking about replicating the Headwaters model.

**Guebert** Noted that we have long had a mindset that the acquisition of agricultural property means a resale with an easement retained by the District, but there are other models. Regarding concern around return on investment (monetary), we must remember that as a government entity, that isn't always the main goal. We (the Board) must consider other kinds of value that we achieve, like we do when we invest in natural resource lands.

**Rossi** clarified that when he uses the term "return on investment," he means for soil and water health, not a monetary amount.

**Zimmer-Stucky** noted that doing something different is very much the Oregon way. She invited the Board Members to send any further questions to Shipkey & Steele. Thanked the Farm Access Equity Advisory Group, Shipkey, and Steele.

**DISTRICT BUSINESS****7:22pm- Approval of minutes**

**MOTION: Carlson moved to approve July 6, 2022, Board Meeting Minutes and June 29, 2022 Special Board Meeting Minutes, Masterson 2<sup>nd</sup>. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).**

**7:23pm- Review/Approve June & July 2022 Meeting Minutes and May LLC Meeting Minutes**

Guebert presented **previous Action Items**:

- Fernandez to uninvite the Board Members to the July Strategic Planning [DONE]
- Fernandez to send invite updates for Board, PC, and LLC meetings. [DONE]
- DiLeone to send the second amendment once she receives it. [DONE]
- Guebert to sign the Vegetation Management Crew resolution. [DONE]
- Guebert to sign the PGE Easement resolution. [DONE]
- Board Members to reply to Mitten or Schwenk's emails for their stipends by July 15<sup>th</sup> to be included in this last fiscal year budget. [DONE]

**7:24pm- Time reserved for Public Comment**

**Gujral** (Metro's Farmland Stewardship Program Manager) Agencies do these sorts of conveyances to other agencies all the time where there's an agreement for a conveyance of land or management responsibilities. They function the way they do because of trust, either in each other from previous partnerships or in the protocols put in place to ensure success. There can be a lot of fear in entering into this process with a new partner but thinking back to the conversation of envisioning a future for agriculture 50-100+ years from now, would love to see the land going to a conservation partner, where stewardship for soil and water health is a key part of the partner's mission. Suggested partnering with a nonprofit organization who has a secure funding source, so we can be certain of capacity.

**Passarella** (HWF) Found it valuable to hear what the board was thinking and how they want to go forward in defining success. It's important to consider what success looks like to us (small acreage farmers, diverse production farmers, animal farmers, next generation of farmers, etc.) as well as what success looks like for the District. In the concept of collective farming, if the collective owns their own infrastructure, machinery, and tools, they are more likely to feel a sense of pride in that ownership which could lead to happier and better farming practices and more care for the land – may not be the case if you aren't in ownership.

**Colombo** (2019 HWF graduate) Since moving from HWF to their own property have realized how big of a barrier it is to not have infrastructure and collective farm community. Stepping up operation from 3 to 10 acres is a huge challenge. Finding access to any land is a huge challenge!

**Reyes** (HWF) Struggles with the idea of the property being conveyed to a non-profit organization because as a brown farmer who has participated in such non-profits who say they support black and brown farmers, he's found that they're rarely successful in doing so and it feeds into the idea that black and brown people need non-profits to save us instead of us being able to build something ourselves.

**Milne** (HWF) It's important to hear the perspectives of farmers like us (at HWF) who are already participating in this kind of community, especially when it comes to land access as a barrier to farmers moving on to their own property. To fully understand the values presented for a project like this, it is important to remember that this land was previously owned by Indigenous people which was then stolen



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from them and is now in the ownership the District. Agrees with Reyes in not being confident in a non-profit being the right approach to providing access to the land.

**Lane** (HWF) Hearing the dollar values thrown out by the Board is a sign that racialized capitalism still exists in this community. Encouraged the Board to look at a system change through doing something that's radical or shifting the status quo. While he agrees that a \$1 million asset is huge, he reminded the Board to think about the 1846-1855 era, when the government did not hesitate to use government funds to forcefully remove his Indigenous ancestors from this land to give to farmers or lumberjacks who wanted to move West, especially if that era was when the Board's ancestors acquired land to begin farming in the Pacific Northwest. We (Headwaters Farmers) can and have proven that we can make a livable wage on 3.5-5 acres of land in the Portland Metro area, so distribution of this property could lead to the success that the Board is seeking. As for the District's mission, the soil, water, and animals that you're trying to protect can be done via easements, as mentioned at the beginning of this meeting with the Mainstem example. Going in front of taxpayers to tell them why the District gave this property to an entity, whatever it may be, is achievable if they explain that they are trying to eliminate or reduce racialized capitalism that is currently in place.

**Masterson & Guebert** appreciates hearing perspectives on this project and farming in general from the Headwaters Farmers.

**Carlson** is interested in ensuring his 60 acres supports future generations of farmers and not homes, so he appreciates hearing perspectives on this topic.

#### **7:45pm- Executive Director Update**

- Met with Carol Wilkinson from Intertwine Alliance, discussed common priorities and what she and her partners are working on.
- Board's Strategic Planning meeting on August 3<sup>rd</sup> at 4pm at Rossi Farms.
- September Board of Directors Meeting cancelled.
- Looking for time with the Board for ED performance evaluation.

#### **7:47pm- CLIP Grant #23-001 Approval**

**Bailey** presented the project proposal for the Fischer and Ihrig 1.5-acre property on Johnson Creek. There is a heavy focus on manual removal as much as possible, which is why this project is more expensive than others.

**MOTION: Zimmer-Stucky moved to approve CLIP Grant #23-001, Masterson 2<sup>nd</sup>. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).**

#### **7:50pm- Monthly Financial Reports: May 2022**

**Mitten** The balance sheet is stable and is better by about 4% from last year at this time. The Profit and Loss budget performance statement is healthy for the month and the entire fiscal year, there are a few variances in line items, but they are not problematic and have been mentioned throughout the year. Overall, each category is under 100% spend. Mitten explained the naming of two expense lines, 8810 (Volunteer Recognition, which is also for stipends for volunteers, advisory groups, staff recognition, and Board stipends) and expense line 8820 is for meeting meals. The Profit and Loss by Class doesn't show many variances or any areas of concern and is very healthy. The closing of the 21-22 fiscal year is in a couple of weeks, Mitten is wrapping up all remaining expenses. We received an engagement letter from the Auditor, which in addition to outline the audit engagement,



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also noted that his firm merged with another. We will still receive the same level of service and have the same team assigned to us; we may also have additional resources available during the audit because of the merge.

**7:54pm- Audit Engagement Letter for FY21-22**

**Mitten** The audit engagement letter for FY21-22 is attached for the Board's review, consideration, and approval.

**MOTION: Carlson moved to approve Audit Engagement Letter for FY21-22, Zimmer-Stucky 2<sup>nd</sup>. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).**

**7:56pm- Closing items: announcements, reminders, and action items**

**Steele** Reminder that The Oregon Agricultural Trust will be hosting an event at Headwaters Farm for donors and people they want to support. They've invited the Board and Headwaters Farmers.

**7:57pm- Adjournment: Guebert** adjourned the meeting at 7:57 pm.