

West Windsor Township Agricultural Advisory Committee

Minutes

July 27, 2026

Date: July 27, 2026
Location: Township Meeting Room B
Start Time: 3:05 PM

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 PM. The required public notice statement was read. Notice of the time, date, location, and agenda was prominently posted and filed with the Township Clerk on July 7, 2026.

2. Roll Call

Present: Rodger Jany

Charles Appelget

Doug Tindall

Mayor Hemant Marathe

Francis Guzik, Director of Community Development / Township Engineer

MINUTES: The April 27, 2026 meeting minutes were approved unanimously with no corrections.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS: No comments.

CORRESPONDENCE: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT: No members of the public were present. The public comment portion was closed.

3. Discussion Items

a. Sanders Property Follow-Up

- The Committee reviewed the prior action item directing Township staff to follow up with the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) and the Sanders family regarding updated appraisal procedures and potential funding options.
- No definitive status update was available. It was understood that the property owners remained dissatisfied with the appraisal or preservation value being offered.
- Members discussed concerns that farmland-preservation appraisals may not fully reflect the value of development rights when a municipality is actively seeking preservation.
- It was noted that the State has modified its appraisal process and that some farms have proceeded under the updated method.

Action Item: Township staff will contact the County and/or SADC to determine the current status of the Sanders property and obtain information regarding the revised appraisal process and available funding options.

b. Schenck Farm Property / Community Garden

- Soybeans were planted on the leased farm area primarily for weed control. Planting occurred late in the season, and it was too early to determine whether limited growth was caused by drought conditions or soil conditions.
- A possible community garden was discussed for approximately a 100-by-100-foot to 100-by-150-foot area near the farmhouse and schoolhouse, rather than within the main farm field.
- The existing community garden has a waiting list, and a garden on this side of the Township could serve additional residents.
- The proposed area may have limited sunlight due to mature trees and the development buffer. The Township landscape architect is reviewing declining trees in the buffer, and any removals may improve sunlight.
- Public water is available at the property. A nearby spigot could serve the garden if located near the bathroom building; another location may require a water-line extension.

Action Item: Township staff will continue evaluating the proposed community-garden location, including tree conditions, sunlight, water access, and coordination with interested gardeners.

c. 2027–2031 Farm Leases - Renewals and Rental Rates

- The Committee reviewed the parcels eligible for renewal and discussed proposed reductions for parcels affected by significant deer pressure, poor soils, small field size, or other productivity limitations.

The Committee also reviewed the rental-rate recommendations contained in Rodger Jany's March 13, 2026 memorandum, including proposed adjustments for Parcels E/F, G, M, Y, and L based on productivity, deer pressure, soil conditions, and prior excavation. These recommendations were considered as part of the Committee's broader discussion of lease renewals and rental rates.

- Comparable farmland rental rates from nearby municipalities, the County, and State-owned properties were discussed. Rates vary depending on field size, soil conditions, hunting rights, required in-kind services, and wildlife pressure.
- Members noted that smaller parcels with substantial wooded or brush edges are generally less productive because of increased deer damage and reduced efficient farming area.
- Parcel Y, located across from the firehouse, appeared on the parcel map but was not clearly included in the reviewed lease documents. The parcel has historically been farmed by Rustin Farms and should be addressed in the renewal documents.

Action Items:

- Township staff will confirm the complete list of renewal parcels and ensure Parcel Y is included in the appropriate lease agreement.
- The Mayor and Township staff will review proposed rental-rate reductions with Township Council and prepare the required justification for Township Council.

d. Parcels Requiring Competitive Bid

- The Committee reviewed the parcels that must be competitively bid and discussed grouping them into three bid packages rather than bidding every parcel individually.
- The proposed groupings generally included: (1) Parcels Z and J, including the South Lane area; (2) the Bear Creek parcel; and (3) the Cubberley/Line Road area together with the Clarksville Road parcel. Final parcel descriptions are subject to confirmation by Township staff.
- Suggested opening bid amounts were discussed as approximately \$50 per acre for the Z/J grouping and approximately \$70 per acre for the other two groupings. These figures were intended as starting points for further review, not final minimum bids.
- Members favored a live, in-person open-bid or auction-style process, subject to legal and administrative review. The Committee also discussed bidder qualifications, farming experience, references, financial ability, and the need to ensure that all awarded parcels are actively maintained and farmed.

The Committee also reviewed recommendations that Parcel U include minimum maintenance requirements if not actively farmed, that Parcel P be considered for removal from rent or converted to a maintenance-only obligation because of equipment access limitations, that the current farmer have the opportunity to match the highest bid, and that successful bidders be eligible to renew their leases at renegotiated terms and rental rates, subject to legal authority and Township approval.

- The Township will contact Monroe Township and other public entities that have conducted agricultural lease auctions to compare procedures, bidder requirements, and options when no bidder meets an opening price.

Motion: A motion was made to recommend proceeding generally in accordance with the parameters outlined in Rodger Jany's March 13, 2026 email, including grouping the bid parcels into three packages and targeting an open-bid process by mid-September 2026. The motion further provided that, if the bid process extends beyond October, the Township should renew the current leases as appropriate and restart the competitive process early in the following year.

Vote: All in favor. Motion carried.

Action Items:

- Township staff will contact Monroe Township and other entities regarding their public-auction procedures and legal documents.

- Township staff will confirm the three parcel groupings, opening bid structure, bidder-vetting requirements, and the legal process if no qualifying bid is received.
- The Committee will tentatively hold a follow-up meeting on August 17, 2026, if sufficient information is available for meaningful review.

e. Deer Management and Hunting Rights

- The Committee discussed significant deer damage on several Township farm parcels, particularly those adjoining Mercer County Park.
- Members emphasized the need for farmers to retain the ability to manage deer in accordance with State regulations and safety requirements.
- The prior year's depredation permit process was reviewed. New Jersey Fish and Wildlife inspected requested locations and, for the Grover farm, recommended an elevated position for safety. Bow-only hunting was used, and public concerns subsided after the safety measures and State authorization were explained.
- The Committee discussed whether hunting or depredation language should be expressly stated in the lease. No formal change was approved; current practice will continue subject to Township and State requirements.

Action Item: Township staff will consider appropriate deer-management language while reviewing the lease template and will follow up with the Park Commission regarding deer control and previously discussed fencing near affected parcels.

f. Lease Language and Requirements

- The Committee reviewed the proposed five-year lease template and discussed whether successful bidders should be eligible for renewal at the end of the lease term, subject to legal authority and Township approval.
- A proposed 2% annual rent escalator was discussed. Members noted that farm commodity prices do not consistently increase each year; however, the escalator also avoids a large rent increase after a long period without adjustment.
- The Committee reviewed Rodger Jany's March 13, 2026 recommendation to remove the 2% annual rent escalator from the lease. After discussion, the Committee determined to retain the existing 2% annual escalator in the lease.
- The Committee reviewed Rodger Jany's proposed revisions to Section 3I regarding the application of sludge and other agricultural materials, including language referencing Best Management Practices (BMPs) and consultation with Rutgers Cooperative Extension if questions arise. The Committee also discussed the use of chicken litter as an organic soil amendment and the importance of Township awareness because of possible odor or neighbor complaints.
- After discussion, the Committee elected to retain the existing Section 3I language, including the requirement for written Township consent. Email approval may be used as practical written authorization.
- The general lease template was otherwise acceptable, subject to final legal and administrative review.

Consensus: The prior motion/recommendation was amended or clarified to retain both the 2% annual escalator and the existing Section 3I language. The Committee agreed without objection.

4. Additional Discussion

- The Committee briefly discussed deteriorated portions of a Township farm building and the need for Township staff to inspect the condition.

5. Adjournment

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 4:05 PM.

Vote: All in favor. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 4:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kerielle Sollecito
Secretary