

# Pembina County Soils Committee

October 21, 2021- 10:00 AM

Farmer's Room~ Pembina County Courthouse

## SOILS COMMITTEE UNOFFICIAL MINUTES:

A regular meeting of the Pembina County Soils Committee was held on Thursday, October 21, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. in the Farmer's Room of the Pembina County Courthouse. **Members Present:** Camburn Shephard, Bill Gunderson, Robert Vivatson, Brad Schuster, Roy Paton, Alternate, and Nick Heuchert (via tele-conference). **Others Present:** Tax Equalization Director, Mikka Willits, Deputy Tax Director/GIS Specialist, Lisa Wieler, Auditor, Linda Schlittenhard, Commissioners, Hugh Ralston, Manny Doyle, Nick Rutherford.

Member's Absent: Reid Christenson (alternate)

Guest Speaker: Lance Duey, Assistant State Soil Scientist – ND USDA/NRCS

Meeting was called to order by Tax Equalization Director, Mikka Willits at 10:18 a.m.

Ms. Willits gave an overview of the Soils Committee Policy. She explained the main purpose of the policy is to provide guidance to Soils Committee members for the observation, review, and recommendation of parcel adjustments to the local assessors, township boards, city councils and County Commissioners. Mr. Shephard had expressed concerns of the NRCS PI indexes used to determine the soil type valuations as final and feels local knowledge should be taken into consideration. Ms. Willits reminded everyone that in 2012 the State Tax Department adopted the NRCS Websoil Survey for taxation purposes and that this is the baseline to begin the process of review. There is an understanding that experience is great knowledge, but that doesn't make an individual a Certified Soil Scientist. Mr. Duey discussed the general use polygons within NRCS mapping units and mapping concepts. The objective of the Soils Committee is to recommend **Land Use** modifiers for areas of concern. Both Mr. Duey and Ms. Willits reminded the committee that the Soils Committee members are to be unbiased and not influenced by outside sources. Mr. Rutherford motioned to approve the policy for the fiscal year beginning January 1, 2022. Mr. Ralston seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Willits went over the proper procedure of the formation of the Soils Committee per the Soils Committee Policy by the County Board of Commission. Mr. Shephard had informed Ms. Willits and Ms. Schlittenhard of a meeting on Oct 7, 2021, which did not follow proper procedure. Today's meeting is the first official meeting of the Soils Committee. Ms. Willits will ensure all proper documentation for the committee members is complete to follow the policy.

Mr. Schuster made a motion to nominate Camburn Shephard as Chairperson for Soils Committee for a 4-year term ending December 31, 2024. Mr. Vivatson seconded the motion. All in favor, motion carried. The term is determined by the term of the individual appointed.

Mr. Shephard made a motion to nominate Robert Vivatson as Vice Chairperson for a 2-year term ending December 31, 2022. Mr. Paton seconded the motion. All in favor, motion carried. The term is determined by the term of the individual appointed.

The Tax Equalization Office will remain as Secretary per the Soils Committee policy by the Board of County Commission. All committee members agreed.

Ms. Willits distributed applications to those members who had not yet filled one out. Applications were completed, signed and returned. Nick Heuchert stated he would be in the following day to fill out/sign his application, oath of office, and receive a copy of the policy. Ms. Willits reviewed which member would represent which district with the following being named:  
District 1- Pembina, Carlisle North/South, Joliette North/South- Bill Gunderson  
District 2- Akra, Beaulieu, Advance, La Moure, St. Joseph, Walhalla- Roy Paton  
District 3- Elora, Crystal, Gardar, Lodema, Park, Thingvalla- Camburn Shephard  
District 4- Hamilton, Bathgate, Cavalier North/South, Neche, Felson- Robert Vivatson  
District 5- Drayton, Lincoln, Midland North/South, St. Thomas North/South- Brad Schuster  
Ms. Schlittenhard, Auditor (acting as Notary) distributed Oaths of Office to each member in attendance and all Oath's were signed, dated and returned.

Each soils member collected their Soils Assessment Workbooks for their Districts and a discussion was held on modifiers defined by state law. Ms. Willits reviewed the listing of modifiers that were approved by the County Board of Commission and applied throughout Pembina County. Ms. Willits handed out 2 examples of Soils Cards showing the land types, modifiers that were used, along with a map showing the parcel location and demonstrated the process on how these modifiers were applied to the soils cards. Ms. Willits also gave a presentation on how to use the Pembina County GIS Parcel Viewer and the NRCS WebSoil Survey online that Mr. Duey will go into detail later. Mr. Vivatson mentioned Surety as a good tool to use and Ms. Willits noted she has also used Google Earth Pro. Ms. Willits stressed the importance of being consistent and equitable with the application of modifiers and to make sure to document everything on the property record card including: who you spoke with, the date reviewed and be sure to sign. Ms. Willits also stressed the importance of when using different tools other than the county tools, to be sure the correct parcel is reviewed.

Mr. Duey, Assistant State Soil Scientist reviewed and discussed the Productivity Index (PIs) and the "phases" that include major and minor components that were used when implementing the modifiers to determine the overall PI. For example: slopes, flooding, ponding, etc. A discussion was held on a modifier being applied in Red River Valley along the river bank. He also reviewed in great detail the Web Soil Survey and Soil Interpretations. Interpretations CANNOT be challenged. In order to make an adjustment a major change needs to occur and be documented. He also discussed how the dynamic and specs of the PH are affected by management and emphasized the importance of not trying to change what was adopted by the state for taxation purposes, as it could open the door for possible litigation, etc.

Ms. Willits explained, per the Soils Committee policy, that the Tax Equalization Office is the Secretary and that all official meetings are held at the courthouse during normal working hours. All correspondence is to go through the Tax Equalization Office as they set up the meetings, etc. A group PC Soils Committee email will be created for all future correspondence.

It was recommended by Camburn Shephard to have another meeting on Friday, October 29, 2021. Ms. Willits will check on the availability of the Farmer's Room and get back to everyone.

Motion was made by Mr. Paton to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Vivatson seconded the motion. All in favor, motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 1:07 pm.

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Secretary for Tax Equalization Office

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Soils Committee Chairman