

Report from the Cabarrus County Agricultural Advisory Board regarding the proposed condemnation of agricultural land by the Town of Midland for a natural gas pipeline in the Cabarrus County Agricultural Districts – August 10, 2009

There is a period of 10 days for public review and comment on this report.

WHEREAS:

The Advisory Board is charged with determining that the criteria of *Cabarrus County Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinance - Article X – Public Hearings, section B. Procedure, #2. The Advisory Board shall meet to review: a. Whether the need for the project has been satisfactorily established by the agency or unit of government involved, including a review of any fiscal impact analysis conducted by the agency involved; and b. Whether there are alternatives to the proposed action that have less impact and are less disruptive to the agricultural activities of the district within which the proposed action is to take place.*

The need for the pipeline has not been established, as gas is readily available as stated by their attorney; needs of Midland are not immediate and gas is readily available currently to Town of Midland. We would also like to make it be known that there is absolutely no gain to Cabarrus County as per information that was provided to this board. Cabarrus County will only lose valuable farmland that lies in our Voluntary Agricultural District, which was adopted by the Cabarrus County Board of Commissioners in 2005.

Impact – Environmental: No fiscal impact was provided after numerous requests from the Soil & Water Conservation District. They are operating solely off the Federal and State assessments. Per e-mail correspondence of Monday, August 3, 2009 to Bob Ritchie from Dennis Testerman:

- Cabarrus SWCD is a sub-unit of local government governed by an elected board. This board is responsible for establishing local priorities for the conservation of natural resources and pursuing these priorities through a non-regulatory, proactive approach to conservation.
- Farmland preservation is one of four priorities in the Cabarrus SWCD strategic plan – along with community conservation easements/land use and education. Two of five Cabarrus SWCD board members, along with an associate board member, also serve on the Agriculture Advisory Committee appointed by the Board of Commissioners.
- Cabarrus Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) board formally went on record at their August 5, 2008 public meeting opposing the Monroe-Mooresville natural gas pipeline based on environmental and soil concerns. This vote took place several months after our staff met with Monroe Director of Energy Services head, Don Mitchell, and consultant Kelly Kinnett with Heath and Associates on May 23, 2008 to discuss the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed pipeline right-of-way. Because the proposed pipeline is a public, rather than private project, potential environmental impacts were reviewed at the state and federal – not local – levels. To date, there has not been an opportunity for a formal, local environmental review of this project.
- Cabarrus SWCD is in the process of reviewing erosion and sedimentation control plans and wetland permitting documents submitted to state and federal authorities in response to complaints from county erosion/sedimentation free/vegetation destruction stream/wetland impact and encroachment on farmland.

The negative impact on our farms in Cabarrus County is tremendous and the integrity of the family farms that are proposed for condemnation is in jeopardy. Some of the negative impacts include such issues as biosecurity to livestock, trespassers, security to farm and home, productivity of soil, invasive species, fire ants, limitation and constraints to construction of farm buildings, fencing. There will be a definite loss of property rights as indicated in the utilities easement that we were made aware after the public hearing on Tuesday August 4, 2009. There would also definitely be a loss of productivity of farming the land due to all of the items mentioned above.

The Barbee Farm, which is one of the farms that is in the condemnation process, is actually not only a production agriculture farm, but also is currently undertaking a gleaning project for the community. Gleaning is an ancient tradition where volunteers pick the corn that is not suitable for commercial or customer sale due to minor blemishes. The Barbee Farm was highlighted in The Charlotte Observer on Thursday, August 6, 2009. They are donating corn to local citizens in need. In 90 minutes, according to Charlotte Observer, volunteers had gleaned 4,450 pounds of corn from one field at the Barbee Farm in Concord. This family and its production agriculture are not only valuable to our economy but they are vital to our community in what they are giving back to those less fortunate. We cannot afford to lose farms or families like the Barbee family.

As to the subject of whether there are alternatives, their attorney stated that they did not feel that they needed an alternative. The Cabarrus County Voluntary Agricultural District is an advocate for farmland preservation and the preservation of the family farm. Since our adoption by the Cabarrus County Board of Commissioners in 2005, we have worked diligently to help farmers and the general community to understand the need for farmland in our county. To date we have over 10,000 acres signed up in voluntary agriculture districts and we value every acre of these districts. Therefore, this board feels that the gas line project has not explored other options, rather they have "taken the path of least resistance", that being the farm families in Cabarrus County.

The purpose of the Agricultural District is to preserve and save farmland in Cabarrus County. The future of Ag Districts is in dire jeopardy if this condemnation proceeds. We have several century farms in Cabarrus County and for the future of the family farm and our ability to continue to raise livestock and crops in our county; we need to focus on preserving our farms. Our focus on a local as well as a national level has been to look at sustainable agriculture. Citizens are realizing a tremendous health benefit from eating locally grown fruits and vegetables. We also need to be reminded that farmland generates revenue to our county yet asks very little in the way of county services.

THEREFORE:

As the Cabarrus County Voluntary Agricultural District Advisory Board looks at all of the facts at hand and understanding the negative impact that this project will have on our county and its Voluntary Agricultural Districts and its future. We also now have a clear understanding that Cabarrus County stands to gain nothing from the proposed gas line. Having heard all of the testimonies, we hereby are in absolute opposition of this project going through any farmland in the Cabarrus County Voluntary Agricultural District.