

Meeting Notes
Envision Skagit Citizen Committee
March 10, 2011
8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Skagit County Administration Bldg

Attendees:

John Cheney
Kerri Cook
Cory Ertel
Peggy Flynn
Jim Meyer

Kim Mower
Grace Popoff
Gustavo Ramos, Jr.
Doris Robbins
Nate Youngquist

Staff:

Kirk Johnson, Skagit Co. PM
Lisa Dally Wilson, Facilitator
Josh Greenberg, Skagit GIS

Meeting Handouts:

1. Meeting Notes, Feb 10 CC Meeting (e-mailed)
2. Excel file of all public comments collected at Community Outreach Meetings
3. Public comments collected from email, written forms and the ES Website
4. Citizen Committee revised 2010-2011 Meeting Schedule
5. Daniel M. Warner paper from The Urban Lawyer, Vol 42, No. 2, Spring 2010: *Growth Management Acts "Land-Supply Mandate" Or, Why the Growth Monster Eats the Leftover Meatloaf in the Refrigerator*
6. The Vision: Common Themes (guiding principles) and Draft Comments
7. Transfer of Development Rights: A Brief Discussion Paper for the Envision Skagit 2060 Citizen Committee
8. Flyer, Transition Skagit meeting, March 10
9. Flyer, The Last Best Place performance, March 27
10. Flyer, Transit-Oriented Communities: A Blueprint for Washington State
11. Website excerpts, Regional governance, land use, revenue sharing. By Myron Orfield (Note: Kirk will send full 30 page article out electronically)
12. Temporary Visitor Parking Permit, Skagit Valley College, March 21, 2011. This is for the next CC Meeting

Committee Business

The meeting notes for February 10 were approved.

Kirk gave a brief overview of the outreach meetings and provided draft meeting summaries and the written comments received on the website and from the meetings. He also distributed Rebecca Bradley's comments and encouraged the CC to read this material to better understand local development patterns and markets.

The CC engaged in a brief discussion regarding the potential, public perception that the County is "guiding" the Envision Skagit process. Kirk reiterated that his instructions from the County Administrator is that there are clear rules, and that no county electeds or staff or city electeds or staff exert influence or pressure on the Citizen Committee as they make their recommendations. One member stated that she feels the county has been "responsive to our requests and needs, and that the

process has not been guided by the county, only facilitated by the county". Another stated that the Committee needs to be careful about perceptions.

Final Calendar. The final calendar was again distributed to the CC. We will add topic areas, by meeting, to the calendar.

GMA 101 – Plan B. The CC decided against scheduling any formal committee briefing on the GMA in general. Instead, Kirk, Mark Personius, city staff or other resources available to the project will respond to CC questions as they arise relating to potential CC recommendations.

Topics to be championed by CC members. As the CC moves toward its recommendations, there will be issues that could benefit from contributions by individual CC members. These could potentially be incorporated in the final report from the CC. Examples so far include the role of local food (Jim Meyer), revenue sharing, regional cooperation and industrial land bank (Cory, Tim, Peggy), trails and open space (Kerri Cook), Environmental markets (Kim, Kerri). Kirk asked that CC members who would like to play this role submit their thoughts in bullet point form for staff to follow up.

Groundrules. The CC discussed the role of e-mail in helping conduct committee business in-between meetings. CC members are welcome to e-mail each other with questions or thoughts, but messages from individual members to the full CC should be rare. All CC-related messages should be written with the expectation that they could become public. Individual opinions should always be expressed as such. CC members generally do not want email to be the working style of the group, but want flexibility to talk about substance outside of meetings. It has been requested that email communications of substance be reiterated at the CC meetings. Ryan Walters will check on how CC e-mail relates to open meeting rules.

CC Etiquette. Just a reminder that committee members should always make sure they preface comments about this process with the fact that they are speaking for themselves and not for the committee as a whole.

"The Vision" – Common Themes and Draft Concepts

"Vision" comments from all committee members were compiled in the handout document, which was organized into eight themes and one placeholder ("Water"). Lisa provided an overview of the document and then took the committee through the handout, asking CC members to identify key things that might be missing or where they did not agree with what was stated or needed clarification.

CC discussion included the following points:

- The importance of local food was a common topic at public meetings
- Farmers are concerned about drainage problems caused by runoff from upland development.
- The meeting with farmers also raised the possibility of some formal designation by the state or higher body of Skagit agriculture as a reserve or heritage site
- The suggestion of "no net loss of forests" was meant to apply to both working forests and natural forests
- In addition to stormwater, management of wastewater is crucial for preserving shellfish habitat and freshwater habitats

- The extension of trails into farmland raises very significant issues of liability as well as the potential loss of functional farmland
- It will be important to define what the CC means if/when it refers to “rural villages” or “contained communities.” How would services to these communities be paid for? What population would they serve?
- While some CC members may wish to limit growth based on carrying capacity, others believe the CC needs to take into account realistic projections of coming growth, and consider the consequences of planning for a smaller amount. It was also noted that only three of the 12 CC members were born and raised in Skagit County.
- Draft principles that CC members submitted that relate to water fall under a number of different themes. Since some principles already show up under more than one theme, the principles relating to water can be kept where they are and also added to a new theme of “Water.”
- In general, the themes relate to basic human needs of food, water, and shelter.

In future work sessions the committee will address up to two themes at each of their upcoming meetings, with results from all of the discussions brought to the CC retreat May 13/14.

Metro Vancouver Planning

Lee-Ann Garnett of Metro Vancouver presented on the currently proposed regional plan, which is just concluding its ratification process. Metropolitan Vancouver currently has 2.3 million residents and 1.2 million jobs, and is planning for 3.4 million residents and 1.8 million jobs by 2041. The Agricultural Land Reserve was part of a province-wide designation in 1973. It has since shaped the urban footprint of the region, along with a “Green Zone” established by Metro Vancouver that includes park and conservation lands. The regional plan has five goals: 1. Maintain a compact urban area; 2. Support a sustainable economy; 3. Protect the environment; 4. Create complete and health communities; and 5. Support sustainable transportation choices.

In discussion with the CC, Ms. Garnett said that Metro Vancouver had achieved a 99/1 ratio of urban vs. rural growth through top-down removal of development rights in the agricultural and other reserve areas, which Canadian law allows without requiring compensation. They are still dealing with “monster houses” on farmland. Highways and golf courses have also taken agricultural lands. The regional plan must be approved by all local governments in the Metro area. Local governments cannot simply oppose it; they must identify specific points of disagreement, which then go to a dispute resolution process, if necessary. She said single-family residential neighborhoods have gotten denser through use of “secondary suites” and “coach houses” (“Accessory Dwelling Units” in Washington), which are now found on about 25% of single-family parcels.

Preliminary Envision Results

Josh Greenberg presented maps and charts with the most recent Envision modeling of the initial four scenarios: Plan Trend; Agriculture/Forestry; Development; and Ecosystem. He created a preliminary calculation of 13,778 potential development rights in unincorporated Skagit County (although some plans and policies might reduce this number). A little over half (7,384) are in Rural Reserve zones, with most of these (6,368) in areas allowing CARD density bonuses. Prohibiting development in the channel migration zone would eliminate approximately 1,740 development rights. There are 291 development rights in the floodway and 1343 in the floodway and floodplain. There are approximately 700 development rights in the Ag-NRL zone and approximately 400 zoned Industrial Forest.

Within the 50-year time horizon used in the model, the Plan Trend shows a need to expand the Mount Vernon urban growth area toward Big Lake, with a smaller expansion of the Bayview UGA and a very small expansion of the Sedro Woolley UGA (for commercial uses). The Plan Trend would lead to 418 new dwelling units in the Ag-NRL zone; vs. 319 for the Development scenario, 259 for the Agriculture/Forestry scenario, and 12 for the Ecosystem scenario (because it prohibits new development in the channel migration zone). It should be noted that these results are preliminary and that the Envision model is currently undergoing review.

Discussion: Natural Resource “Theme”

Lisa Dally Wilson facilitated a CC discussion to flesh out details for the theme “Protect natural resource lands and industries.” John Lombard summarized key points about the Transfer of Development Rights. TDR is driven by developer demand for greater density than would otherwise be allowed by existing zoning. As a voluntary program, development rights that get transferred through TDR tend to be from property that is difficult to develop or unlikely to develop soon, since these rights are less expensive for developers to buy. TDR would not replace the existing farmland preservation program, but could potentially complement it.

A question was raised about vesting. Kirk has agreed to provide information about the number of pre-GMA vested sites. He mentioned that the committee can request that the vesting process become more strict and better defined as part of their recommendations. There was also discussion about the card density bonus program, the policy and implementation. Again, Kirk reminded the CC that they are free to suggest changes to these policies

There was also discussion about policies addressing development in the floodplain. The CC was informed that a year from now, as a result of the Biological Opinion, and subsequent FEMA litigation, there may be greater restrictions on building in the floodplain. Policies may not affect areas behind the levees as much as greatly as other floodplain areas in the County. Currently agricultural activities will be exempt, but agricultural buildings will not be exempt.

Additional Natural Resource considerations for CC Vision

The following are results from CC discussion regarding preservation of Ag-NRL lands

- Look at existing zoning and ensure it is appropriate outside current UGA boundaries. If so, no expansion of UGA into Ag-NRL
- Do not expand UGA into Ag-NRL
- Enforce Ag-NRL zoning, Can code be tightened to ensure enforcement?
- Purchase of Development rights on Ag-NRL. Farmland Legacy Program is doing this now. Should be voluntary, compensated. Ultimate goal is to purchase or transfer development rights off of Ag-NRL. Support current program. Encourage avenues to find funding to grow the current program.
- Transfer of development rights (from Ag to Urban – eg. Mt Vernon program). Voluntary, compensated.
- Strengthen or augment existing TDR and purchase of DR programs
- Consider state designation of Ag land of significance.

- Strive to achieve goal of “no –net-loss”, but also need to consider productivity of acreage. That may change over time. CC would like to define “no net loss” at a higher level
- “Farms are not a higher priority than fish”
- Don’t expand rural roads that provide farm infrastructure
- WSU – figure out how to grow food east of Sedro Woolley and encourage county residents to do so.
- Most appropriate use of floodplain, use to incentivize Ag
- Consider upland impacts on Ag. Let growth mitigate growth
- Discourage private conversion of Ag-NRL to things like ponds, wetlands, gun clubs, etc.
- **Implement** county policy on Ag land.
- Kirk and Kim will work to identify and champion Markets and incentives for Ag (eg., American Farmland Trust, etc).
- Voluntary conversion to habitat – support TFI and other efforts, Farms AND Fish, Voluntarily provide services to benefit habitat
- Consider environmental services that occur on a rotation basis and don’t take Ag land out of permanent production
- Local Food! Marketing, Local, Branding, Transportation, Need for multi-use processing facility. Jim Meyer to provide additional detail for recommendation
- Support an Ag Industrial Park (consider when an ag building becomes a commercial development – this will be important with new flood planning rules)
- Skagit County existing regulations to support Ag are some of the strongest in the nation. Continue to set precedent with this policy and implement it!
- Young farmers need certainty – would help to have a state or county designated area that recognizes Ag, Succession Plans, Farmlink, etc.
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Announcements

Kirk noted the events with flyers that were handed out—a Transition Skagit meeting, a performance of The Last Best Place (drawn from interviews with a wide range of Skagit residents), and the workshop on Transit Oriented Development in Burlington.

4:30 Adjourn