

Meeting Notes
Envision Skagit Citizen Committee
April 1, 2011
8:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Skagit County Administration Building

Attendees:

John Cheney
Kerri Cook
Cory Ertel
Jim Meyer
Kim Mower
Grace Popoff

Gustavo Ramos, Jr.
Doris Robbins
Tim Rosenhan
Ryan Sakuma
Nate Youngquist

Staff:

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

Guests:

Kendra Anderson, One America
Jose Ortiz, One Skagit

Meeting Handouts:

1. Meeting Notes, March 21 CC Meeting (e-mailed)
2. Decision Points for April 1, 2011 CC Working Session
3. Public comments collected from e-mail, written forms and the ES Website
4. Notes from March 16 field trip, Honey I Shrunk the Lots
5. Ground Rules for Citizen Committee, revised 3-21-2011
6. Flyer for April 27 Envision Skagit public meeting, in English and Spanish
7. Draft Initial Citizen Committee Recommendations, Protect Natural Resource Lands and Industries (agriculture, forestry)
8. Proposed Language on Agricultural Land Use and Conservation and Restoration on Agricultural Lands

Committee Business

The meeting notes for March 21 were approved.

Guests. Kendra Anderson and Jose Ortiz introduced themselves to the CC. Kendra is based out of Seattle. Her organization, One America, focuses on immigrant and civil rights issues. Jose is a long-time resident of Mount Vernon, where he works with the Catholic Church and One Skagit, the local affiliate of One America. They are both working with Gustavo on the April 27 Envision Skagit public meeting, which is directed at the Hispanic community but open to all.

CC Schedule. Lisa said it was going to be difficult to complete the CC's recommendations in the number of meetings remaining. CC members suggested the possibility of an all-day meeting on April 29, instead of half-day. The possibility of a Saturday meeting was also discussed. Ryan and Nate asked that any additional meetings be scheduled sooner rather than later.

Relation to Comprehensive Plans. Kerri said she had been reviewing the existing County Comprehensive Plan, which she found already covered many of the issues the CC has been discussing. Kirk offered to "audit" the plan for where issues of interest to the CC were missing or existing policy was not necessarily being implemented consistent with CC recommendations. Gustavo asked about city plans. Kirk said the project does not have the resources to perform a similar audit of city plans, but we could potentially ask

city planners to provide summaries or to meet again with the CC to discuss their plans. Kirk noted that many issues that involve the cities, such as the 80/20 urban/rural split, are part of countywide planning policies, which are also addressed in the county plan.

Engaging City Officials. Cory and Gus said that city buy-in to the process was crucial. Kirk suggested that the CC's schedule could be changed, so initial CC recommendations were shared with city elected officials before being shared with the general public. There was a suggestion that such a meeting include city council members, not just the mayors and county commissioners on the Growth Management Act Steering Committee. Lisa said it would be important for the CC to be clear about the expectations of the meeting. Generally, Kirk feels that the county has been making an effort to engage the cities and towns, there has been city/town involvement in several of the community meetings, and he (and the CC) should continue to try to invite them to the table – to engage city councils and mayors and their planning staff. Further discussion of engaging the cities was put in the “parking lot” for development of a specific strategy to engage the cities.

Community Perceptions. Gus and Ryan noted their concern about perceptions, not just with the cities, that the CC was “the county’s puppet.” Kirk noted the efforts he has made to reach out to the cities and business groups. He asked that people consider the comments we have received from the public through the website and at public meetings, which tend to support the direction the project is taking. He asked that CC members from cities consider contacting their council members directly to discuss the process. Josh stressed that the CC should focus a 50-year plan on what the public wants. Doris suggested one-on-one discussions with City planners.

Decision Points – Working Session with Maps

Forestry

The CC reviewed handout #2. Jim clarified that his call for “no net loss” of forest was focused on land cover, and shouldn’t be interpreted to apply separately to managed and unmanaged forest lands. Josh showed a land cover map that was grouped into broad categories of developed, agriculture, forest, etc. He asked, if there is no loss of agriculture or forest, what’s left for the 100,000 new residents over the next 50 years? Cory said we may need to be strategic about where losses can be accepted.

The CC supports existing policies that prohibit UGA expansions into Industrial Forest land and that allow them into Secondary Forest and Rural Resource forest lands only if there is no alternative. The CC supports existing policy that precludes rezoning forest-NRL lands to higher rural density.

The CC discussed existing policies that allow density bonuses (CARDs) in Rural Resource forest zones if developments are clustered. Five CC members favored the current bonus system if clustering provisions are more strictly enforced. Four CC members favored no bonus plus additional land clearing restrictions, with an option to transfer CARD development rights to strategically located “villages.”

If/where allowed densities are reduced, the CC favors transfer or purchase of development rights, rather than uncompensated downzoning. The CC opposed further density bonuses to encourage clustering and protection of larger tracts of forest land. The CC will come back to these issues at its May retreat. The CC did not address 1.g on handout #2, concerning tools for achieving its land use goals.

Clarification of Agriculture Recommendations

The CC supported 2.a on handout #2, but asked to have maps available at the May retreat for more discussion of where lands could or should potentially be added to Ag-NRL. The CC discussed 2.b extensively. A number of members expressed discomfort with the existing language. Nate noted that agricultural land does provide wildlife habitat. Kerri stressed that if the large majority of future population would be located in urban areas, there would be a need for public access to open space. Grace noted that conservation lands are not always open to the public. She also noted that fish are food, while not all agriculture produces food. Kim stated that conservation lands are not always maintained, which can lead to drainage, noxious weed and other problems for neighboring agricultural land. There also is the issue of taking conservation lands off of the tax rolls. Lisa noted that there are two distinct issues included in 2.b—permanent conversion of agricultural land for conservation purposes and public vs. private ownership. Kirk proposed revised language for 2.b that the Committee supported verbally. Kirk typed up the new language over the break and provided to the CC for review and future approval. .

Environmental/Ecosystem

The CC decided to replace the third bullet in handout #2 under “Water” with a new statement, to be drafted, that refers to the need to be strategic about water resources.

The CC discussed 3.a. (Environmental Conservation and Restoration Goals) at some length, but decided to put off formulating any recommendations until the CC has seen results from the Envision model. It was clarified that the Ecosystem Scenario proposes tripling Plan Trend levels of restoration in the floodplain/Channel Migration Zone of the middle Skagit, not conservation purchases overall. A number of committee members noted their interest in consistency with whatever language is agreed upon in the natural resource lands section regarding purchases of private land and incentives for private landowners to achieve conservation goals. The language in #3a, bullet 3 will be modified by Kirk and John.

In discussing 4.a. (Urban Growth Expansions), the CC supported prohibiting UGA expansions into the floodplain, although Gustavo abstained and Cory noted his concern over repercussions with Mount Vernon. The CC will consider UGA expansions into the channel migration zone at its May retreat. Kirk will ask city planners to identify floodplain and CMZ areas where their cities might be interested to expand at some point, so potential areas of conflict are clear before deciding on that recommendation.

For 4.b., the CC decided against recommending a prohibition of UGA expansions into the elk conflict zone. Tim abstained, saying that he would rather focus attention on where the CC wants density, instead of a detailed review of where it doesn't. The CC needed more information about sensitive river basins prior to making a decision about whether UGA expansions should be prohibited from them (East Fork Nookachamps, Hanson and Swede Creeks).

The CC did not discuss 4.c, concerning low-impact development, but will come back to it at a later meeting.

For 4.d., the CC agreed that the questions of whether new development in rural or resource zones should be allowed in the floodplain or CMZ should not receive the same answer in all cases. Kirk agreed to ask Tim DeVries to draft a one-page summary of how the NOAA Biological Opinion on floodplain regulations might affect future development in these areas.

Next Steps/Next Meeting

CC members were asked to weigh in by e-mail on 4.e., 4.f., 4.g., and 4.h. CC members were also asked to start thinking about the final two questions on handout #2, concerning infill and redevelopment in the floodplain that is within existing cities or UGA boundaries. Kirk noted that CC recommendations could discuss riparian areas as important and deserving of special protections without deciding specific details about buffers, etc.

A two-page summary is being prepared for the CC that addresses how the GMA and existing regulations relate to rural villages, fully contained communities and similar concepts. The CC was asked to review handouts #7 and #8 as homework and provide any edits or comments to Lisa and Kirk by April 18th (the date of the next meeting). The CC will have the opportunity to continue to discuss the level of detail in the recommendations, as reflected in these handouts, as they are further developed.

1:05 Adjourn