

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – August 20, 2003

Members in attendance:

Dave Boon
Randy Good
Lyle Wesen
Rose Merritt
Mike Hulbert
Murray Benjamin
Beth Vander Veen
Larry Jensen
Oscar Lagerlund
Bob Hughes
Bob Finkbohner

Members not in attendance:

Others in attendance

Bob Rose
Dyvon Havens
Tom Karsh
Gary Christiansen
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Dave Boon, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6pm and welcomed everyone to the monthly Agricultural Advisory Board meeting. Dave welcomed Bob Rose (Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland) to the meeting, then introduced Allison Deets, recent hire for the Farmland Legacy Program Director position, who will be staff to the AAB.

2. Minutes:

It was moved by Oscar Lagerlund and seconded by Lyle Wesen to approve the July 23, 2003, minutes as mailed. Motion unanimously approved.

3. Discussion Items:

a. Continued discussion of the takings issue, CART, and Pacific Legal Foundation's efforts regarding federal railroad banking.

Randy Good passed out an American Farm Bureau Federation article, a letter he has written to the AAB regarding easements and land takings, and provided an overview of the arguments as well as specific information on land takings in Skagit County. Tom Karsh provided a response from the County Commissioners to a letter from the Pacific Legal Foundation.

Beth Vander Veen asked what the AAB has been tasked with by the Commissioners as to its purpose. Dave Boon stated that the charge from the Commissioners is that the AAB will act as policy leaders. Rose Merritt reminded the Board that its primary role is to address regulation and policy issues, not specific situations, so the situation on the table for discussion needs to be placed clearly in the broader context of a land takings issue. Oscar Lagerlund said the current situation fits that broader context, specifically speaking to the protection of property rights – Do easements mean we have to open up private property to the public? – noting that a case like this might set a precedent.

After further discussion, Dave Boon noted that the current situation spoke to the broadness of the takings issue and suggested the discussion be continued in future meetings of the AAB. Lyle Wesen agreed, observing that members need the opportunity to read the information presented prior to the next meeting in order to better discuss the issue.

Tom Karsh expressed concern about the need to define a call to action, but Randy Good said no action was really required, perhaps just a letter from the AAB to let the County know it needs to stand up for property owners in cases such as this.

b. Drought Update

Dyvon Havens handed out information regarding the drought situation in Skagit County, noting that precipitation is more than 11” short in the past 12 months, and that we are 4” below average over the last 4 months alone. The county can make the case for drought relief, and Dyvon will be putting together further materials.

c. Seasonal Farmstand issue

Bob Rose, from Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, presented a column written by Steve Sakuma regarding a rezone to allow a “seasonal farmstand.” The column proposes that as a community we need to draw the line between farmstands and other non-farm commercial uses of our farmland. Rose Merritt suggested that we explore how other regions have handled similar issues, and Dyvon Havens recommended that perhaps the measure by which to judge cases such as this is whether or not the proponent of a project has demonstrated a commitment to Skagit County agriculture.

d. Engrossed House Bill 1418

Lyle Wesen reported that, pursuant to engrossed second substitute House Bill 1418, he was conveying a request for the Ag Advisory Board to nominate a representative for the Tidegate Task Force. Lyle provided some background information on HB1418 and the Tidegate Task Force, including noting the strong victory for agriculture represented by the passage of HB1418 unanimously in the House and by a vote of 44-4 in the Senate. Lyle nominated Curtis Johnson to represent agriculture on the Task Force, and Randy Good seconded that nomination.

Larry Jensen suggested that John Roozen be nominated for the state-level ag representative. Bob Hughes moved to cast a unanimous ballot for the nominations of John Roozen and Curtis Johnson, which was seconded by Larry Jensen and carried by the AAB.

e. “Top 5 Issues for Skagit County Agriculture”

The previous discussion regarding the Top 5 Issues for Agriculture was revisited, utilizing the list compiled by staff of members’ thoughts and a memo produced by Allison Deets that categorized the list into 5 subjects; Dyvon Havens had also given thought to the 5 subject areas into which the original list might be grouped. Members agreed to re-read the list and the memo, consider them, and provide further thoughts at the September meeting.

f. Ag Advisory Board Strategic Plan

Discussion turned to the strategic plan and mission statement. Beth VanderVeen recommended that the number one priority for the Ag Advisory Board be producing a clear mission statement. Bob Finkbohner agreed, noting that the AAB already has a mission statement based on the Commissioners’ resolutions but pointing out that the statement should be better defined by the AAB itself.

Regarding the strategic plan, it was suggested that the AAB acquire an outside facilitator for the strategic planning process. Allison Deets was tasked with surveying other Ag Advisory Boards both in and outside of the state to get a better idea of the issues being addressed and the structure and strategic plans of those boards.

g. Misc./Current Events

Rose Merritt had sent out a brochure on the Washington Family Farm Summit, taking place in October in Wenatchee. She noted that the timing was not good for farmers, but suggested that Allison Deets, as staff to the Ag Advisory Board, attend the Summit. The Board agreed.

Dave Boon tasked Allison with working with Mary Embleton to put together the Spring 2004 Washington Ag Summit. Lyle Wesen made an announcement about a legislative reception, August 26th, hosted by the Western Washington Agriculture Association at the WSU Research Center. The reception will be held to thank local legislators for their championing of HB1418.

Adjourn regular session.