

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – September 17, 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
Roger Knutzen

Members not in attendance:

Others in attendance

Commissioner Ken Dahlstedt
Chal Martin
Gary Christensen
Bob Rose
Dyvon Havens
Tom Karsh
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Dave Boon, Chair, called the meeting to order shortly after 7pm and welcomed everyone to the monthly Agricultural Advisory Board meeting. Dave welcomed Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, Ken Dahlstedt, and Public Works Director Chal Martin.

2. Minutes:

The Board had a couple of amendments to make to the August 20 minutes: Roger Knutzen was not in attendance at that meeting, and the minutes failed to note the adjusted summer/fall hours, moving the meeting from 6-8pm to 7-9pm. It was moved by Randy Good and seconded by Rose Merritt to approve the August 20, 2003, minutes as revised. Motion unanimously approved.

3. Discussion Items:

a. Samish 2514 Process – presentation by Commissioner Dahlstedt and Public Works Director Chal Martin.

Chal Martin, Director of Public Works, offered information on Samish 2514, a water rights negotiation process, and provided the most current draft of the Samish River Watershed Action Plan for the County. All of the grant money flowing as a result of the 2514 bill was consolidated and will be spent in the Samish Basin instead of being split between the Samish and Skagit Basins.

The County's interest, according to Mr. Martin and Commissioner Dahlstedt, is to reserve and maintain agriculture in the Samish Valley by helping to fix the problem of what is currently unlawful water use. The goal of the Commissioners, as they work on this issue of water resource management, is to facilitate the process of making water available for agriculture. Skagit County is working with Whatcom and Snohomish Counties to achieve this because both counties have a stake as the money being used has been re-allocated from the Skagit to the Samish Basin. The Samish instream flow issues have not been resolved

Commissioner Dahlstedt and Chal Martin are going to return for the November meeting to provide further update on Samish 2514.

b. Cascade Trail – Randy Good

Randy Good provided additional information on the Cascade Trail and the issue of railroad takings. He also offered a summary and outlined the trail documenting his case.

Lyle Wesen drew on the specific situation Randy has brought to the table to talk more broadly about the concept of property rights and takings. He suggested that the AAB “strongly support property rights and oppose all takings.” Lyle also put forward a motion to draft a statement regarding the AAB’s position on property rights. He recommended writing a letter to the paper or the Board of County Commissioners to request their support and to ask them to stand up for the rights of property owners in Skagit County. Lyle noted that the AAB should cite instances where property rights have been supported by the County but request its continued support in this matter.

Tom Karsh suggested that the AAB’s role is to provide recommendations for changing the code and offer policy suggestions, noting, as Randy Good had, that the policy in the code regarding “redress” for affected property owners was too vague. Tom also recommended that the AAB draft a formal amendment to policy, suggesting to the Commissioners a way to effect permanent change, in lieu of posting letters to the editor of the paper.

Oscar Lagerlund moved that the AAB develop a formal policy recommendation on this issue and author a letter to the Board of County Commissioners. Larry Jensen seconded the motion. In further discussion, Beth Vander Veen recommended that the AAB continue developing its focus as a Board and work on the categorization of issues facing agriculture. Dave Boon called for a motion to table the previous motion until the AAB has developed a formal position on the issue. Roger Knutzen moved, and Lyle Wesen seconded. Passed unanimously.

c. Continued discussion of “Top 5” issues

The AAB continued its discussion of the top issues effecting agriculture in Skagit County, identifying Property Rights, Water Resource Issues, and Regulation as immediately significant issues with which to be dealt. The AAB identified some sub-categories to those three issues, with additions and amendments to be further explored:

Property rights

- Supply – water
- Land use
- Urban encroachment

Water Resource

- Irrigation
- Drainage

Regulation

- Control
- Environmental
- Permitting
- Zoning

Bob Finkbohner had looked over the copies of the resolutions related to the AAB and posited that the Board should use some of the areas outlined in the resolution as policy “tasks” to guide its work. The resolution covered three broad categories:

- Promotion/enhancement, under which the issue of viability, enhancing existing infrastructure, financing, and marketing would fall;
- Regulation, which would cover buffers, drainage, water, and property rights issues; and
- Land use, providing the AAB with the opportunity to help amend the code to better serve agriculture and offer suggestions regarding the comprehensive plan.

After further discussion, the two approaches to addressing categories for the top issues for agriculture in Skagit County presented at this meeting were merged to some degree into the following:

- Property rights/Right-to-Farm
- Regulation
- Promotion/Enhancement/Economic Viability
- Federal/State Issues
- Water Resource Issues
- Land Use Issues

It was recommended, and agreed to by the Board, that Commissioner Dahlstedt come back for the next meeting to provide more direction to the AAB in terms of how the Commissioners envision the AAB operating and contributing.

Adjourn regular session.