

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – April 21, 2004

Members in attendance:

Dave Boon
Murray Benjamin
Oscar Lagerlund
Randy Good
Roger Knutzen
Rose Merritt
Lyle Wesen
Mike Hulbert
Bob Hughes
Larry Jensen

Members not in attendance:

Bob Finkbohner

Others in attendance

Tom Karsh
Dyvon Havens
Gary Christensen
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Dave Boon, Chair, called the meeting to order shortly after 7pm and welcomed members and guests to the April meeting.

2. Minutes:

Dave Boon called for a motion to review and approve the minutes and agenda. Dyvon Havens found a typographical error on page 3 of the March minutes. Staff corrected. Mike Hulbert recommended the approval of minutes as amended. Roger Knutzen seconded the motion. Motion carried.

3. Discussion Items:

a. Ag Summit recap – Mike Hulbert

Mike Hulbert thanked the AAB for its participation in and support of the Ag Summit, noting that almost all AAB members attended the event on March 23rd. The Ag Summit Committee identified some areas for improvement at the next event, including having an evaluation survey for participants. The Committee would also like to expand the event to two days and offer a farm tour on the first day for elected officials and press. AAB members were pleased with the turnout at the event, which had well over 100 people in attendance throughout the day.

b. System for assessing AAB applicants – Mike Hulbert

Mike Hulbert felt that the AAB needed to have a discussion to clarify the process for evaluating a slate of contenders for the open seat on the Ag Advisory Board. The open seat on the AAB was vacated by a member from Commissioner Dahlstedt's district, and Mike Hulbert has asked Commissioner Dahlstedt if he wanted the appointment to come from his district. The Commissioner indicated that his primary concern is getting the best new member possible to represent the interests of agriculture. There is not, therefore, any geographic restriction on the filling of the vacant seat. Mike Hulbert also wondered if it was appropriate for the AAB to evaluate and identify the best candidates, and if so, should all or just a couple of candidates be forwarded to the Commissioners for the final selection. Staff reported that it was appropriate for the AAB to recommend a slate of candidates to the Commissioners for appointment. Murray Benjamin recommended a simple system, suggesting that the AAB receive the letters of interest and/or resumes of applicants to evaluate their potential. Lyle Wesen suggested that the AAB narrow the slate of candidates, offering two names to the Commissioners for consideration.

Dave Boon directed staff to send out the letters and resumes with the next meeting packet, although the deadline for application is not until the 15th of May. Any applications that come in after the packet has gone out will be distributed at the meeting on May 19th, when all applicants will be considered.

c. CAO enforcement issues

Tom Karsh provided the AAB with an update on the Critical Areas Ordinance. He reported that the County will be conducting two separate monitoring programs, testing water quality at 40 sites, and taking a physical inventory at 60 sites the first year and every five years subsequent. The water quality monitoring program will be looking at trends, over time, in functions and values in watercourse habitat, rather than using the program to target landowners for enforcement.

The Public Works Department is working with the state Department of Ecology and the Environmental Protection Agency, to develop the monitoring project, because those agencies have expertise in modeling habitat trends. However, nothing is told in the trend analysis about cause and effect. Rather, the two monitoring programs are not designed to target specific land uses; they are to look at general watershed trends and identify whether overall trends are improving or degrading over time. The Public Works Department is talking about having a review period where every three years the water quality and habitat data will be made available for public comment, at which time the County would like the Ag Advisory Board to be involved in the process.

Randy Good commented that the Public Works department has done an excellent job of collecting data, and that a combination of Public Works and Skagit County Cattlemen's data informed the current Critical Areas Ordinance. He notes, however, that now we need an analysis and formatting of the data to make it usable. Tom Karsh reported that WA Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) has a grant proposal in to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) for a full-time scientist and a statistician to develop the monitoring program. He also noted that the water-quality monitoring data will be publicly available, and so will be available to the ag community for review.

d. Direct Marketing Conference/Tour – Rose Merritt

Rose Merritt reported on a direct marketing conference and tour she attended in Chelan County. The tour visited eighteen agribusinesses and farms over two days, sampling a variety of ag products and gathering new ideas for ag tourism and direct marketing enterprises. Of specific interest to the Ag Advisory Board may be the Cascade Foothills Farmland association, which has worked hard with the Chelan Chamber of Commerce, local elected officials, Port of Chelan, WA Director of Tourism, and the BC Agritourism Director to develop an agritourism industry and related marketing strategy. Chelan is using agritourism to diversify and expand current ag operations, not replace the community's current ag sector. As a result of its efforts, the Cascade Foothills Farmland Association helped draw in \$10 million new dollars to the County in the first year of the agritourism strategy implementation. To help the process along, Chelan County also rewrote its regulations to accommodate agritourism businesses, and the state is using Chelan as a model for state agritourism development guidelines.

e. Miscellaneous

A sub-committee was established to explore the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) proposal for Skagit County. The joint committee will include a representative from the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee (CFAC), which oversees the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program. Committee members will be Murray Benjamin, Rose Merritt, David Hedlin (CFAC), Lyle Wesen, Larry Jensen, Roger Knutzen, and Bob Finkbohner, who will serve as Chair. The TDR Research Committee is tasked with exploring TDR programs and how one would affect agriculture in Skagit County. Randy Good moved, and Rose Merritt seconded, the establishment of the Committee and approval of Committee members. Motion carried.

A sub-committee was established also to work on the Ag-NRL aspect of the Comprehensive Plan update, set to be completed in December 2005. The joint committee will include a representative from the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee, as well as two AAB members who are also CFAC members. Committee members will be Mike Hulbert (AAB & CFAC), Randy Good (AAB & CFAC), Curtis Johnson (CFAC), Bob Hughes, Dave Boon, and Oscar Lagerlund, who will serve as Chair. The Comp Plan Update Committee and its membership were established by motion of Lyle Wesen, seconded by Rose Merritt. Motion carried.

Adjourn regular session.