

**Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)**  
**Minutes – August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2004**

Members in attendance:

Dave Boon  
Oscar Lagerlund  
Mike Hulbert  
Annie Lohman  
Bob Hughes  
Murray Benjamin  
Randy Good  
Larry Jensen

Members not in attendance:

Rose Merritt  
Roger Knutzen  
Kim Mower  
Lyle Wesen

Others in attendance

Gary Christensen  
Carolyn Kelly  
Curtis Johnson  
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Dave Boon called the meeting to order at 7.10pm, and welcomed board members and guests from the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee. Oscar Lagerlund, Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order shortly after 7pm and welcomed members and guests from Skagit County Public Works and Planning & Permit Center, as well as Steve Sakuma and Bob Rose, from the Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland.

2. Minutes:

After some discussion, quorum was suspended in order to review and approve the minutes for the July meeting. Larry Jensen moved, and Mike Hulbert seconded, the approval of the minutes as presented. Motion carried.

3. Discussion Items:

a. Office/Budget/Staff – Mike Hulbert, Randy Good

Staff presented the proposed 2005 budget for the Agricultural Advisory Board, which Farmland Legacy is recommending be raised to \$50,000. Staff explained the changes in budget numbers, the bulk of which reflected a request for a program staff person to be split between the AAB and the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee.

Board members Randy Good and Mike Hulbert, who also serve on the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee (CFAC), reported that the Farmland Legacy Program has been assigned to a cubicle in the newly remodeled Public Works Building at 1800 Continental Place in Mount Vernon. The CFAC feels a cubicle is not appropriate given the nature of the work done by the Program, which includes real estate transactions with local farmers. Staff reported that concerns expressed by the CFAC and members of the ag community prompted the County to find office space for the program. After some discussion, Gary Christensen, of the Planning & Permit Center, encouraged AAB members to contact the Commissioners' office to voice their support for the Legacy Program and reiterate the importance of the Program having its own office space.

b. Highway 20/Indian Slough – Mike Shelby, Curtis Johnson

Mike Shelby, from the Western Washington Agricultural Association, reported that a meeting has been scheduled with the Army Corps of Engineers for the Diking & Drainage Commissioners, following the incident at Indian Slough during a routine maintenance, when the Army Corps had to take enforcement action as a result of a complaint. The Army Corps has not had a presence previously, nor have permits been issued by the Corps for previous maintenance on the drainage system, but the Corps is now involved, citing its jurisdiction under the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899.

Curtis Johnson, President of the Western Washington Agricultural Association, said this latest development came on the heels of the ag community striking a deal with the WA Department of Fish & Wildlife to have an agreement between ag and WDFW rather than a permitting process. The Army Corps has its own permitting process and will be attending the meeting with the Commissioners to explain the permitting process, but the position of the agricultural community and the Western Washington Ag Association has been that permits are not necessary for routine maintenance of the drainage infrastructure. After some discussion, Dave Boon requested that Mike Shelby attend the next meeting to provide an update on the situation.

c. Transfer of Development Rights

The AAB discussed Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) in order to begin developing an opinion about the potential benefits and drawbacks to the community. TDR was discussed in the context of the existing Purchase of Development Rights Program, which purchases and retires residential development rights on agricultural lands. A TDR program would transfer those rights to another location, and in theory, be entirely bought and sold in the private market.

The CFAC has already expressed some concern about the impact on the Farmland Legacy Program – TDR, as proposed by some, could bankrupt the existing program. Additionally, the Western Washington Ag Association has concerns about the impact of such a program on the land market in the County; an appraiser for the Farmland Legacy Program projects a potential jump of \$2,000-3,000 in the per acre market value of agricultural land. Concerns have also been raised about the need for potentially complex and burdensome administrative oversight by the County, which could have significant cost implications.

Gary Christensen reported that the Planning & Permit Center has gotten approval from the Board of County Commissioners, by resolution, to pursue a feasibility study and the possible development of a Transfer of Development Rights Program, in large part due to positive public comment at a lot certification hearing in March. Gary handed out a copy of the resolution and work plan, and said he thought there would be an opportunity for the ag community to work with Planning on this issue. After further discussion, the AAB agreed to revisit Transfer of Development Rights at a later meeting.

**Adjourn regular session.**