

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – September 15th, 2004

Members in attendance:

Dave Boon
Oscar Lagerlund
Roger Knutzen
Randy Good
Annie Lohman
Kim Mower
Larry Jensen
Murray Benjamin
Lyle Wesen

Members not in attendance:

Rose Merritt
Bob Hughes
Mike Hulbert

Others in attendance

Kendra Smith
Dyvon Havens
Curtis Johnson
Kay Haaland
Bob Rose
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Dave Boon called the meeting to order at 7.10pm, and welcomed board members and guests Curtis Johnson, Bob Rose (Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland), Kay Haaland (WSU Extension), and Kendra Smith (Skagit County Planning). Kendra Smith offered some information about the reorganization Planning is currently undergoing, and said she may be Planning's representative to the AAB going forward.

2. Minutes:

Dave Boon requested corrections or additions to the minutes; Oscar Lagerlund stated that there appeared to be a remnant from a previous meeting in the opening paragraph of the minutes and suggested it be stricken from the minutes. Dave Boon called for a motion to accept the minutes from August 18th as corrected. Roger Knutzen moved, and Larry Jensen seconded, to accept the minutes as corrected. Motion carried.

3. Discussion Items:

a. Strategic Plan Review – Kay Haaland

Kay Haaland from WSU Extension led a discussion reviewing progress on the strategic plan for the AAB. Under the category of "Pro-Active Land Use Planning is Supportive of Agriculture," AAB members reported that the Board has had some informational meetings regarding the Transfer of Development Rights program proposal. Roger Knutzen reported that Mike Fohn would like to attend the October meeting to talk about Transfer of Development Rights and how he could see them working in Skagit County. Guest Bob Rose, Executive Director of the Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, reported that he is working with the City of Burlington to develop a Transfer of Development Rights Program, and that he will be happy to keep the AAB up-to-date on the city's progress. Allison Deets indicated that at the County-level, Planning will recommend the Farmland Legacy Program be made co-manager of the Transfer of Development Rights feasibility study and possible program development in order to assure that the interests of agriculture are met.

Under the category, “Drainage System Infrastructure Works Effectively,” Roger Knutzen said Districts 14 and 19, which are affected by development on Bayview Ridge, asked the County Commissioners to hold back on approving development plans until the Districts can approve it. Roger is not sure where that request is at present. Dave Brookings, Skagit County Public Works Administrator, has told Roger that he thinks other projects have priority over Districts 14 and 19. Members expressed concern that runoff from development will contaminate ditches, which are the Districts’ responsibility. It was determined by consensus that the drainage issue needs to be maintained as a standing issue on the AAB agenda. The decision to keep drainages on the agenda as a regular item was made because the Board needs to know what the Planning & Permit Center and Public Works Department are considering in a timely fashion.

Continuing the discussion on drainage infrastructure, questions were asked about the planned Skagit Highlands development (City of Mount Vernon) as it will impact the Nookachamps and perhaps other low lying areas in the county. Dave Boon said the AAB needs more information on this matter, and directed staff to find time in the agenda in the next few months for the AAB to talk directly with Mount Vernon about the Skagit Highlands project.

Regarding drainage issues generally, it was agreed by all that the Districts, rather than the County, should manage drainage, and that the AAB and Districts need to coordinate and communicate regularly with the County Public Works and Planning Departments on drainage issues. Kendra Smith, from the Planning & Permit Center, offered to notify Drainage District Commissioners and the AAB in a timely fashion when land use development sites are under review in her department. Public Works Administrator has made reports to the AAB and will be invited back on a regular basis to keep the Board updated on Public Works’ activities. Members also noted that it would also be helpful to know what kind of retention plans are required of large impervious sites, such as the Costco site, and how cities or private entities are compensating Districts or others for runoff management.

Kay Haaland asked the Board members if there are other questions that need to be answered when dealing with the drainage issue from a policy perspective. Lyle Wesen posed the question: how can AAB facilitate drainage improvement policies with the Commissioners? This question led to another question, Is drainage an appropriate issue for the Skagit Council of Governments to get involved in?

Under the category, “Commercial Agriculture is Thriving in Skagit County,” AAB members reported that County Assessor Mark Leander had attended a meeting to discuss tax incentives, and that based on that presentation, the understanding of the Board is that not much can be done locally on the issue of using taxing incentives to reduce costs of production.

Under the category, “There is Adequate Water Available to Irrigate Farm Crops in Skagit County,” guest Curtis Johnson, President of the Western Washington Agricultural Association, told the group about “water banking” being implemented in Whatcom County and the Sequim area under the guidance of consultant Bob Powell. Powell is beginning a study of water rights in Skagit County, which could lead to a similar plan (“Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plan”). Curtis suggested the AAB go on record as

supporting this effort with the Washington State Department of Agriculture. Dave Boon suggested that Curtis bring Bill Powell to a meeting of the AAB to make a presentation on the CIDMP process; Curtis will speak with Powell about attending the October meeting.

Under the category, “County Regulations and Land Use Zones Support and Protect Private Property Rights to Maintain a Thriving Agricultural Economy,” AAB members noted that Gary Christensen had said at a previous meeting he would work with members of AAB to review the agriculture-related items as his department works through the review and update of the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan, which is due to be completed in December of 2005. Kendra Smith said she would begin selecting portions of the plan and mailing them to AAB members for review.

b. Army Corps – Curtis Johnson

Curtis Johnson provided some history of the current issue with the Army Corps of Engineers regarding drainage infrastructure and the Corps’ jurisdiction over Skagit County’s drainage system. Curtis read a portion of US Code 33, Section 10, which is what the Army Corps is claiming jurisdiction under. Curtis is requesting that the Agricultural Advisory Board forward a recommendation that the Board of County Commissioners contact the second in command at the Army Corps in Washington, DC, with whom Commissioner Dahlstedt is acquainted, as well as the Washington Army Corps Director. After a brief discussion, Lyle Wesen moved that the AAB go on record urging the Board of County Commissioners to encourage the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to remove itself from the Skagit County drainage system. Roger Knutzen seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

c. Miscellaneous – Dave Boon

Dave Boon noted that the AAB has yet to meet with the County Commissioners to get a better idea of whether the Commissioners wish for the AAB to provide input and recommendations at any time, on any subject; or only when the Commissioners request direct advice; or some middle ground in between. Chair Dave Boon, Vice Chair Oscar Lagerlund, Member Lyle Wesen, and staff will attend a meeting in the next two weeks with BCC Chair Ted Anderson.

Adjourn regular session.