

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – June 15th, 2005

Members in attendance:

Oscar Lagerlund (Chair)
Dave Boon (Vice-Chair)
Murray Benjamin
Randy Good
Mike Hulbert
Annie Lohman
Bill McMoran
Rose Merritt
Kim Mower
Lyle Wesen

Members not in attendance:

Bob Hughes
Roger Knutzen

Others in attendance

Mike Stansbury
Oscar Graham
Carly Ruacho
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Chairman Oscar Lagerlund called the meeting to order at 7.10 pm, and welcomed board members, new board member Bill McMoran, and guests Oscar Graham (PDS) and Mike Stansbury (PW) to the June meeting.

2. Minutes:

Oscar Lagerlund requested corrections or additions to the March minutes. Hearing none, Chair Lagerlund called for a motion to accept the minutes. Randy Good moved to accept the minutes as presented. Murray Benjamin seconded the motion. Motion carried.

3. Ag Incubator Feasibility Study – Diane Kamionka/Ned Zaugg

Diane Kamionka, the consultant hired to perform the Ag Incubator/Innovation Center Feasibility Study, refreshed the Board's memory on the history of the Ag Incubator project. Through a grant, Diane Kamionka was hired and established an advisory council of sixteen members, including three representatives from each of the five northwest counties (Skagit, Whatcom, Island, Snohomish, and San Juan). Skagit County's representatives in the feasibility study process are Ned Zaugg (WSU), Don Wick (EDASC), and Bob Rose (Skagitians to Preserve Farmland).

So far, Kamionka has met with growers and other ag-related people, listened to what some of the issues are, and developed suggestions regarding services with the help of the advisory council. The challenge, she reported, lies in narrowing the scope to achieve some impact on farmers' bottom lines. She is now seeking input from Ag Advisory Boards throughout the region, and hopes for some assistance in sorting out some of the challenging issues.

The working name she and the advisory council have come up with is a "Northwest Agriculture Economic Growth Center" that incorporates aspects of an incubator and an innovation center. Kamionka said that she considered tackling this project from the perspective of small versus large operations, taking industries one at a time, but wanted to get input from county advisory boards to make sure her project is headed the right direction. She presented a handout that outlines the proposed activities of the incubator.

The Board felt that agriculture needs to be defined, and that the incubator should not be an "instructional" model to teach people about agriculture, but rather focus on viable businesses. The handout specified that there would be no exclusions based on size, but there were some

objections to that; specifically, Lyle Wesen objects to the idea of classifying an entity with one dairy cow as a “dairy.” Rose Merritt followed up with the concern that energies would be focused on start-ups at the expense of working commercial farms seeking to expand their businesses. Diane Kamionka said that perhaps the incubator should focus the system on job creation as a threshold for participation rather than size. Murray Benjamin suggested that start-ups be directed to WSU Extension for assistance with learning about the ag business. Annie Lohman followed up, stating that the focus should be on existing viable businesses rather than on boutique farming, and Rose Merritt recommended a points system to help prioritize participants. The members of the Board concurred.

Kamionka then moved the discussion to the “long-term” versus “short-term” impact. The advisory council she’s put together recommends we should be “creating” a need, proactively – looking toward the “long-term” impact. However, in the “short-term,” we are in a reactive mode, filling a need. Several members said that there is a need to re-evaluate the “long-term” versus “short-term” idea; that we should stay ahead of the curve, but follow the market, because it is very difficult to “create” demand for a new product. Rose Merritt pointed out that farmers work and live for the short term, but keep their eyes on the long term – and that the incubator group should perhaps approach the feasibility study with the same thought.

After some further discussion, Chair Oscar Lagerlund thanked Diane Kamionka for her time, and asked if she would return again with another update, but in the meantime coordinate with the chair of the Economic Viability Committee, Lyle Wesen. Kamionka said she would, and requested additional comments if members had any, providing her contact information.

4. Candidates for Open AAB position

The Board discussed the four candidates for the open position, recently vacated by Larry Jensen, who did not wish to be re-appointed to another term. After some discussion, the Board reached a consensus, agreeing that the Board needed someone who represented agri-business and the ag support industry, having only active grower/producers currently. Consequently, Rose Merritt moved, and Murray Benjamin seconded, the selection of Bill McMoran for recommendation for appointment. Motion carried unanimously. The candidate will be forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners for approval and appointment.

5. Standing Issues:

Drainage:

Kraig Knutzen reported that the Planning Commission has passed the Bayview Ridge Subarea Plan, although drainage has not yet been addressed. The affected drainage districts, DD 12, 14, and 19, do not currently have the capacity to handle water from Bayview. The Chair directed staff to find out when the Board of County Commissioners will be hearing the Bayview Ridge Subarea Plan in session. After some discussion, member Lyle Wesen moved that the Ag Advisory Board recommend to the Commissioners that the Bayview Plan be put on hold until a drainage plan acceptable to the drainage districts is developed. Rose Merritt seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. Staff will draft a letter for the Chair’s signature, which the Board will review at the next meeting, and copy the Planning Commission, Planning & Development Services, and Public Works.

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called for a motion to adjourn. Dave Boon moved, and Rose Merritt seconded, that the April meeting of the Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board be adjourned. Carried.

Adjourn regular session, 8.55pm.