

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – July 20th, 2005

Members in attendance:

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

Members not in attendance:

Bob Hughes
Roger Knutzen
Kim Mower
Lyle Wesen

Others in attendance

Mike Shelby
Bob Rose
Oscar Graham
Ned Zaugg
Carly Ruacho
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Vice-Chair Dave Boon called the meeting to order at 7.05 pm, and welcomed board members and guests Bob Rose (Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland) and Oscar Graham (PDS) to the July meeting.

2. Minutes:

At 7.05 pm, quorum was not in attendance. At 7.25, Vice Chair Dave Boon turned the gavel over to Chair Oscar Lagerlund, who, seeing quorum, requested corrections or additions to the June minutes. Hearing none, Chair Lagerlund called for a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Lyle Wesen moved to accept the minutes as presented. Randy Good seconded the motion. Motion carried.

3. Marketing Position – Bob Rose

Bob Rose, Executive Director of Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, made a presentation on a marketing position that will be funded in part by a grant from the Washington Women’s Foundation. He provided some background on the project, which has been spearheaded by Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland (SPF).

The Washington Women’s Foundation awarded SPF \$80,000 over two years to help fund the marketing position. The Skagit County Farm Bureau and Skagit County Commissioners have pledged \$15,000 each over two years. USDA has committed an “RBEG” grant of \$21,000 for the project as well. The position will be housed in the Economic Development Association of Skagit County (EDASC), which has been working closely with SPF on this project. Bob Rose reported that a request for candidates has been released, and that SPF hopes to have someone in place by mid-October.

Board member Lyle Wesen asked if this position would be opposed to or compatible with the proposed incubator project. Bob Rose responded that this is compatible because Skagit County has to make a contribution to the incubator project if it goes forward; however, the county can have someone working for Skagit specifically.

Ned Zaugg, from Washington State University Extension, reported that he has also just been authorized to advertise for the position recently vacated by Dyvon Havens; this position will also have a marketing aspect.

4. Critical Mass Study

Allison Deets reported that a group of ag organizations is discussing the possibility of doing a “critical mass” study. The County, through the Farmland Legacy Program and Agricultural Advisory Board, has been asked to be the project leader on this study, which will look at the “critical mass” necessary to sustain the agricultural industry. Allison Deets is proposing to the group that the study be a proactive examination of the strengths and needs of agriculture; in essence, that the project be amended to look not at the “minimums” needed by agriculture in terms of land and infrastructure, but the realities of today’s farming, opportunities for the future, and the true needs of agriculture in order to remain successful. Her proposed “purpose” of a “Skagit County Agricultural Vitality Study,” as presented to the Ag Advisory Board, is “To quantify the agricultural circumstances necessary to maintain and expand the existing healthy agricultural industry, and provide strategies to enhance or protect its long-term sustainability.”

Several Ag Advisory Board members had suggestions for the study, including examining infrastructure needs, impacts of other counties’ agriculture on ag support businesses and farmers. The Ag Advisory Board pledged support for the project, and will help in its development and public outreach.

5. Shared Strategy – Mike Shelby

Mike Shelby of the Western Washington Agricultural Association reported that the stakeholders who developed the letter to the Skagit River Systems Cooperative (SRSC) regarding the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan have received a response. SRSC has agreed to have Mike Birely from the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife try to facilitate negotiations on the Plan with interested stakeholder communities, and in particular between SRSC and agriculture. The Swinomish Tribal Nation has also agreed to place a stay on current legal action until October 15th, 2005, and is willing to discuss and possibly find solutions to some of the differences between ag and the SRSC.

6. Critical Areas Update

Carly Ruacho, from the Planning & Development Services department of Skagit County, gave a report and update on the status of the current lawsuit related to Critical Areas. The County has been given a 30-day extension to come into compliance, and may request further extensions. The current position of the County is that it wants to continue on through the court of appeals process.

Board member Randy Good reported on a field tour of buffer projects by WSU. The project uses grass, red alder, and poplar buffers, or some combination thereof. Testing for nitrates is done at 25 foot intervals from the creek. At 100 feet, the soils sometimes test positive for nitrates; at 25 and 50 feet they do not. A cost has also been determined through this study: the average cost per acre over time of a buffer is approximately \$5,820. The USDA-funded Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) only pays \$2,500, or less than 50%. Randy Good reports that WSU’s project is leading to the conclusion that we can’t have a “one size fits all” buffer, because buffers have limited effectiveness, depending on location, vegetative planting, characteristics of the water body, etc.

7. Miscellaneous

Mike Shelby reported that there was a demo of a new underwater mowing bucket for ditch maintenance. Of note was the attendance of a Department of Ecology water quality technician. The technician pulled water samples immediately after mowing at the mowing site, as well as samples away from the mower. When asked about this, he said he didn't even need to run the samples through the lab – he could tell that the samples would pass Ecology's standards without even being tested.

Staff reminded the Ag Advisory Board that the Bayview Ridge Subarea Plan hearing will be held on Wednesday, July 27th, at 7pm in the Commissioners' Hearing Room. She requested that at least a couple members be on hand for the meeting, and that a member read the letter regarding the Plan into the record. Both Chair Oscar Lagerlund and Vice-Chair Dave Boon are unavailable, so staff will work with members to see who might be available to read the letter into the record.

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called for a motion to adjourn. Lyle Wesen moved, and Mike Hulbert seconded, that the July meeting of the Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board be adjourned. Carried.

Adjourn regular session, 9.15 pm.