

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – April 19th, 2006

Members in attendance:

Oscar Lagerlund (Chair)
Dave Boon (Vice-Chair)
Randy Good
Bill McMoran
Lyle Wesen
Kim Mower
Annie Lohman
John Vendeland
Murray Benjamin

Members not in attendance:

Mike Hulbert
Bob Hughes
Roger Knutzen

Others in attendance

Holly Freishtat
Don McMoran
Carly Ruacho
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called the meeting to order at 7.00 pm. He welcomed members and guests Holly Freishtat (SPF/EDASC Ag Marketing Program) and Don McMoran (new hire at WSU Extension) to the meeting. He also welcomed new Board member John Vendeland and asked him to introduce himself and talk about his interest in agriculture and participating in this Board. John Vendeland said he has been an agricultural consultant for the past 19 years, and has been here in the Skagit Valley since 1997, when he came to the area to work on a tea project with Sakuma Brothers' Farm. He works mostly in crop protection and biotech seed industries.

2. Minutes:

Oscar Lagerlund called for any additions or corrections to the March minutes. Board member Lyle Wesen identified a minor typographical error. Dave Boon made a motion to accept the March minutes as corrected. Bill McMoran seconded that motion. Motion carried.

3. Update on Agricultural Marketing Program – Holly Freishtat

Holly Freishtat, Agricultural Marketing Program Coordinator, reported that she has a better feel for what's happening in the agricultural industry here in Skagit County, but is looking for some feedback on the Agricultural Marketing Program scope of work, which she provided to the Board for review.

She reported that there are three main focus areas as outlined by the scope of work and the grant under which she is working: Agricultural Business Planning & Referrals; Ag Promotion & Marketing Assistance; Opportunities to Access New Markets. Holly Freishtat reported the following in her scope of work white paper:

The Agricultural Business Planning & Referrals element will serve existing and new growers. EDASC currently offers this technical service to small businesses and the Agricultural Marketing Program (AMP) is providing the opportunity to expand this service to agriculture. The AMP Director's office is located within EDASC as an intentional effort to strongly link the AMP with EDASC's services. The AMP Director works directly with growers and is the link between the farming community and EDASC.

The Agricultural Promotion & Marketing Assistance element is funding dependent. However, if funding is available, growers can apply for technical assistance from either web or printed materials. Web technical assistance includes revising or developing the grower's

website and printed materials and includes a farm brochure, price catalogs, storyboards, etc. The AMP will hire the consultants to provide the services and each grower will receive up to \$500 in services, and if services are greater, the grower will pay additional costs. Since this is a new service, AMP will start small by providing 8-12 growers with assistance. If the evaluation shows that this is a valuable and effective service, then SPF will write grants to fundraise or expand this program.

The Marketing Opportunities to Access New Markets element will include the completion of a feasibility analysis of distribution system options, already underway and due for completion by September 2006. This study will provide recommendations for transforming this distribution barrier into a marketing opportunity. The AMP Director will be primarily responsible for implementing the recommendations from the feasibility and distribution analysis and (when appropriate) hiring consultant(s) to perform services.

4. Comprehensive Plan Update – Carly Ruacho

Carly Ruacho, from Planning & Development Services (PDS), provided an update on the Comprehensive Plan process. The comment period closed April 18th, and PDS has brought someone in to collate all the comments, sort them, and identify the issue areas to which they apply. After that is complete, books of the comments will be distributed to staff for review and PDS will begin the process of developing response papers to the comment letters. PDS will meet with the Planning Commission in June to determine a timeline for the remainder of the process, and the Planning Commission will commence deliberations later this summer.

The proposed habitat special use permit is still very controversial, as reflected by the comment letters submitted. Carly Ruacho will be returning to the group with a request for further refinement of that portion of the proposed code revisions.

5. Skagit Environmental Bank (Wetland Mitigation Banking) Update

Allison Deets reported that the Board has submitted a letter to the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Ecology. Staff has been working with other agricultural organizations in the area, and local activist group Friends of Skagit County, has joined the ag community on this issue. The groups will be “pushing back” as a unit. Additionally, Senator Mary Margaret Haugen has taken an interest in the issue, as well as Congressman Rick Larsen.

6. Land Use Committee Update

Land Use Committee Chair Mike Hulbert reported that the Committee continues to work on the Comprehensive Plan, though it is turning its attention to the concept of “neighborhood councils,” something discussed recently in the Conservation Futures Advisory Committee’s (CFAC) meetings; the CFAC oversees the County’s farmland preservation program, and sees a greater need to reach out into the community, and suggested that that might be accomplished in conjunction with outreach efforts by the AAB. Staff also proposed consideration of connecting some of the activities of the Land Use Committee with the Economic Development Committee in the coming months as the AAB deals with issues that bridge areas of interest for the two committees.

7. Miscellaneous

Randy Good provided an update on the Hansen Creek Flood Control Zone. He and the farmers in the neighborhood have been working with Skagit County Public Works, trying very hard to get something resolved up in the Hansen Creek area. An HPA was issued by the state Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW), allowing for emergency dredging, but local WDFW staff called in federal agents (US Army Corps of Engineers), citing the Clean Water Act. Luckily, the dredging had been called off before the federal agents arrived to shut them down, because the fisheries agency was demanding \$60,000 in mitigation and a 120 foot buffer for Hansen Creek.

Oscar Lagerlund reported he had met with Steve Hinton (Skagit River Systems Cooperative) and Brian Williams (Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife), and that they now want mitigation for work conducted in drainage ditches.

Oscar Lagerlund played a tape from the state access channel, TVW, of the Fish & Wildlife Commission meeting. The Fish & Wildlife Commission heard a presentation from the Swan Society; the Swan Society reported that swans are 100% dependent on dairies for their continued ability to use the Western Washington flyway.

Annie Lohman said she thought the meeting attended by Commissioner Dahlstedt was quite informative, and helped to keep the AAB informed of countywide issues. She suggested having the Commissioners at least quarterly, and rotate them through, or possibly a Commissioner at every other meeting. After some discussion, Oscar Lagerlund and Dave Boon, as Chair and Vice-Chair, suggested bringing Commissioners in as needed, rather than on a regular basis.

Don McMoran talked about his new job at WSU Extension, where he will be replacing Dyvon Havens. He reported that he does not start work until May 1st, but he is happy to be at WSU and looks forward to working more closely with the AAB and the ag community.

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called for adjournment of the meeting.

Adjourn regular session 9.07pm.