

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

Members in attendance:

Oscar Lagerlund (Chair)
Dave Boon (Vice-Chair)
Randy Good
Bill McMoran
Lyle Wesen
Annie Lohman
John Vendeland
Murray Benjamin
Mike Hulbert
Kim Mower
Roger Knutzen
Bob Hughes

Members not in attendance:

Others in attendance

Mary Heinrich
Bob Rose
Don McMoran
Carly Ruacho
Allison Deets

1. Call to order & introductions:

Both the Chair and Vice-Chair were delayed; the meeting was called to order at 7.05pm by Randy Good, who welcomed members and guests Mary Heinrich (Ag Prospects) and Bob Rose (Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland) to the meeting. He passed the gavel to Chairman Oscar Lagerlund at 7.15pm.

2. Minutes:

Staff reported that minutes will be available at the next meeting.

3. Wetland Mitigation Bank Update – Bob Rose

Bob Rose, from Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, reported that the Board of County Commissioners was supposed to have an informational session with the Department of Ecology (DOE) and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on Monday, but it was cancelled due to a scheduling conflict. He also reported that members of the ag community met with DOE and the USACE last Wednesday (July 12th) to discuss the proposed bank. What he came away with is that DOE is still struggling with fact that we're trading known resource for speculative resource. The representative from the USACE was struck by fact that the proponents weren't telling the agencies the whole truth. DOE & the USACE didn't realize the two proposed banks (Clear Valley Environmental Farms/Skagit Environmental Bank and Salem Lutheran Church/Wildlands Inc/Nookachamps) are within one mile of each other in same watershed – and that two of the twelve “pilot” projects in the state were in Skagit County. Bob Rose also reported that on Thursday, John Mankowski, the Governor's Natural Resources Policy Advisor, was up for a tour and had an opportunity to learn about this issue. In the final analysis, DOE and the USACE will need strong lead from County, especially as it pertains to GMA ramifications.

AAB member John Vendeland noted that at the evening public meeting on Wednesday about wetland mitigation banking, the agencies were very vague about the program and the ramifications of mitigation banking; no substantive answers were offered.

Don McMoran noted that the bank at Salem Lutheran hasn't even been planted correctly and the plan for the bank hasn't been followed.

4. Transfer of Development Rights Feasibility Study – Mary Heinrich

Ag Prospects, a consulting group specializing in agricultural policy issues and headed by Mary Heinrich, has been hired by Skagit County to conduct a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Feasibility Study. Mary Heinrich provided some background on TDR, including its birth in New York City in the 1950s. TDRs got their start as a way to protect historic structures; the concept was developed as a way to save Grand Central Station from razing and replacement with modern buildings.

Mary Heinrich explained that through the research she and the other consultants have done, they have discovered that fewer than 10% of the more than 100 programs on the books are “functioning.” The program held up as the “most successful” in the country, in Montgomery County, Maryland, was established as an ag preservation program, but a 2002 study out of the University of Maryland found it to be an efficient open space program but not capable of protecting farms. In fact, the study found that the practice of leaving a residual development right actually aided in eroding the agricultural economy of Montgomery. The New Jersey Pinelands TDR program, touted as the second most successful program, tied up farms in sending areas for years but with no market for the transferable development right, the farmers were forced to simply sit on the land and wait for the market to develop.

Mary Heinrich went through a list of questions for the group, and identified areas Ag Prospects should study further, questions that need to be answered, and issues that must be addressed in order to make this program fit into the local land market. She explained that her next steps will include putting together focus groups in each sector of stakeholders in the land market, including realtors and developers. She will be coming back to the group for further input as the focus groups move forward, and another member of Ag Prospects will be interviewing program managers from around the country by phone prior to the municipal finance expert and the economist beginning their work.

5. Comprehensive Plan Update – Carly Ruacho

Carly Ruacho, from Planning & Development Services (PDS), reported that there wasn't much to report. She noted that the Planning Commission had met, and been very clear with PDS that the department better have a very good reason to recommend tabling anything that was GMA compliant. If the habitat special use permit is recommended to be a trailing issue, there will be a timeline attached and clear direction as to how the issue is handled.

PDS will have developed responses to all the comments by August 1, and deliver that information to the Planning Commission. August 15th will be the first meeting to deliberate issues, and ag will be the first issue on the agenda.

6. Miscellaneous

Oscar Lagerlund reported on the ag tour with John Mankowski, the Governor's Natural Resources Policy Advisor. He noted that Mr. Mankowski listened and understood the issues facing Skagit County agriculture by the end of the day, and seems sincere in looking at, and responding to, issues important to ag.

Randy Good reported on a meeting at the Port of Skagit of the Skagit Council of Governments. Sandy Mackie, a land use attorney, gave a presentation on UGA expansion methodology. While he portrayed the Lewis County experience as a "win" for Counties and Cities, it was not an entirely accurate portrayal of the situation. Part of the methodology he has suggested is that the needs of the cities, as internally defined, should serve to push the UGAs outward rather than defining overall County needs or outside analysis.

Roger Knutzen reported that a proposal has been made to "decouple" the Bayview Ridge Subarea Plan from the Bayview Stormwater Management Plan. Carly Ruacho noted that the implementation of increased density (per the Subarea Plan) can't happen until the drainage plan is done.

Annie Lohman noted that the State's new Right-to-Farm Law has been reduced to virtually nothing; the court has essentially struck down the right to farm in Yakima. She is looking for a group to work on this issue. The way the law was drafted, only the activity existing at the time of its enactment is protected, not the farm operation as a whole.

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called for adjournment of the meeting.

Adjourn regular session 9.15pm.