

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB)
Minutes – December 20th, 2006

Members in attendance:

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

Members not in attendance:

Roger Knutzen
Mike Hulbert

Others in attendance

Mary Heinrich
Allen Rozema
Mike Rundlett
Don McMoran
Carly Ruacho
Allison Aurand

1. Call to order & introductions:

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called the meeting to order at 6.03pm. He welcomed members and guests Mary Heinrich (Ag Prospects), Allen Rozema (Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland), and Mike Rundlett (Western Washington Agricultural Association) to the meeting.

2. Minutes:

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called for review and correction of the October minutes. Lyle Wesen moved to approve the minutes as presented. Bob Huges seconded. Motion carried.

3. SPF New ED Welcome/Introduction – Allen Rozema

Chair Oscar Lagerlund welcomed “local boy” Allen Rozema, who has been hired as the new Executive Director by Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland. Allen Rozema previously worked for the City of Sedro Woolley for a year as Planning Director, and prior to that for several years at the Swinomish Tribal Community.

Allen Rozema said he’s excited to be working with agriculture and in the natural resource arena. Oscar Lagerlund asked if SPF would be following the current strategy and workplan or pursuing a different direction. Allen Rozema said that is up for debate after Bob Rose, outgoing Executive Director, retires at the end of the year; he noted that he is working with a strong Board of Directors, and that they have strong opinions and ideas about the direction the organization should take. He also noted that SPF will be getting back to some of its “core” work in 2007 and 2008, namely easement acquisitions.

Allen Rozema said he looks forward to working closely with the Farmland Legacy Program and the Agricultural Advisory Board on a variety of agricultural issues in the coming year.

4. Wetland Mitigation Banking Update – Mike Rundlett

Mike Rundlett, from the Western Washington Agricultural Association, provided an update on the wetland mitigation banking program. He has been offered a seat at the table on the “Mitigation Banking Advisory Group” to represent the agricultural perspective.

Mike Rundlett, along with Allison Aurand and Nova Gattman from Senator Haugen’s office, attended a forum on wetland mitigation banking on December 5th. Mike Shelby was a panelist at that forum, and represented agriculture, expressing the ongoing concerns agriculture has about the loss of agricultural lands to these banks. It appears the Department of Ecology is taking these concerns somewhat seriously, but mitigation banking proponents seem to be focused on pushing the state to ease its banking program requirements so the banks can move through the process and get certified faster. Mike Rundlett will continue to follow this issue and work on addressing the concerns through the “Mitigation Banking Advisory Group.”

5. Transfer of Development Rights Study – Mary Heinrich

Mary Heinrich, of Ag Prospects, provided information from the interim report on the feasibility of transfer of development rights in Skagit County. Mary Heinrich stated that following a thorough review of the literature on transfer of development rights, she felt it necessary to bring her findings back to the County Commissioners. The literature review revealed a distinct lack of success in existing transfer of development programs. “Successful” programs like that of Calvert County, MD, have required multiple downzonings in order to function – and while Calvert County is a “success” in achieving rural conservation goals, it has protected very few acres. The bottomline, based on the literature review and examination of individual programs, is that transfer of development rights can be a very effective tool for urban and rapidly urbanizing areas, but does not effectively address resource land conservation issues. Given that transfer of development rights was originally developed as a tool to protect historical structures and “air rights” in New York City, it is not illogical that it might not be a perfect fit in a rural setting.

Mary Heinrich said the primary reason she brought this interim report back to the Board of Commissioners was that she didn’t feel it was fair, given her initial findings, to carry on without consulting them – particularly as the initial findings indicate the program would not be an appropriate fit at this time. She recommended to the Commissioners a re-scoping of the project to explore and recommend the means by which existing programs could be enhanced through innovative funding mechanisms and how acquisition by the Farmland Legacy Program could be accelerated. The Commissioners have directed Planning & Development Services, as well as the rest of the TDR feasibility oversight team (which includes the Farmland Legacy Program), to work with Mary Heinrich to re-scope the project and the contract.

6. Miscellaneous

Mike Rundlett reported on a “post-933” meeting hosted by The Nature Conservancy today. The meeting was facilitated by Bob Rose and John Rose (TNC-WA board member). Mike Rundlett said the participation was weighted, which concerned him, and much of the discussion sounded as though the direction for a “933 fix” had already been determined and the meeting was informational only.

Oscar Lagerlund shared the recent Skagit Valley Herald editorial regarding the Bay View Ridge drainage issue. AAB members agreed that the editorial was very good and that it appears the County is listening to the concerns of agriculture and seeking alternatives that will help manage the water rather than dumping it straight onto the drainage districts.

Chair Oscar Lagerlund called for adjournment of the meeting.

Adjourn regular session 8.20pm.