



SKAGIT COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD
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Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board (AAB) Meeting Minutes
November 13, 2013
Skagit County Administration Building

Members in Attendance

Nels Lagerlund (Chair)	Murray Benjamin	James Carstens
Ty Clark	Brian Duquaine	Michael Hughes
Mike Hulbert	Greg Lee	

Others in Attendance

Ken Dahlstedt, Skagit County Commissioner	Linda Christensen, Skagit County Planning
Steve Omdal	Randy Good

Call to Order

Nels Lagerlund called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Minutes

Ty Clark moved to accept the October 9, 2013 meeting minutes as presented and Michael Hughes seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Guest Speaker

Commissioner Ken Dahlstedt was introduced to the AAB and he appreciated the invitation to speak about the past, present, and future of Skagit County agriculture. In regards to the recent agriculture events, e.g., Pleasantville Valley Farms, water rights, and the Sakuma employee labor situation, the Board of County Commissioners wants to take a pulse of the farming community and be proactive on what the future holds for agriculture. Ken desires that the county and agriculture community work through this advisory board toward common goals.

Mike Hulbert asked about current events taking place with the Skagit County Council of Government (SCOG) regarding the Open Space Plan concept. Is the SCOG putting a special committee together for this plan? Mike asked that the AAB be kept informed and they would like a voice on such a committee, if it is formed.

Mike also asked about agriculture inventory of lands in regards to conversion of lost ag lands. Is there money for a survey or grant funding available? How do we get the latest information? Ty Clark asked if the county has an accurate count of ag land.

Skagit County Agricultural Advisory Board Members:
Nels Lagerlund (Chair), Kraig Knutzen (Vice Chair), Murray Benjamin, Jim Carstens, Dan Lefebber
Greg Lee, Bill McMoran, Mike Hulbert, Michael Hughes, Tyler Clark, Brian Duquaine

Ken spoke about economic viability of current Skagit County farming business. Ken is concerned on how to help the county's farms stay in business. Mike feels it is time for Skagit County to swing the pendulum attracting new farmers to produce new ag products or projects that will help stimulate the economy. There is concern that the county's permitting process is lengthy, perhaps too long for new startups in this county. Other counties have a shorter turn around.

Murray Benjamin spoke about the elk herd situation. The over population has become severe. Vast amount of crops have been destroyed. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has been ineffective so far to reduce the elk population. There is a concern that the Assessor's office is taxing this land differently. Wildlife makes it difficult to meet rental/income rates.

The AAB had a long discussion giving different ideas of how to make the county an economic viable producing farming community, whether it's a large commercial operation or individual operations. The ag community will steer the county in the future to better business farming.

The Port of Skagit County has been a great support for agriculture, whether on port land or anywhere in the county.

Nels Lagerlund commented that in general, farming is becoming a real challenge to keep within regulations e.g., the clean water act, among others. How do we plan for the future in this county for the "next new thing?" How do we promote farming? It's important to get work done, not just have vent sessions.

Committee reports

Nels reminded the AAB about the General Investigation Flood Control Alternatives letter written on October 9th to the Board of County Commissioners. He also distributed Public Works' 2012 Clean Water report and the clean water resolution for all to read.

The October 9 meeting minutes reflected a letter that would be sent to the Board of County Commissioners regarding the Clean Water Assessment fund expenditures. Today, it was agreed that the letter should not be sent until further information is considered. Mike Hulbert moved to table the motion that was made in the October 9 meeting minutes and Murray seconded. The motion carried with Ty Clark abstaining.

Mike Hulbert spoke again about ag land and how many acres have been converted to other uses. How do we get that information?

Adjourn and Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m. and the next meeting is scheduled for December 11 at 6 p.m.