

Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
January 10, 2018 6 pm
Skagit County Administration Building

Members in Attendance

Nels Lagerlund	Michael Hughes	Barbara Cleave	Murray Benjamin
Terry Sapp	Tim Van Hofwegen	John Morrison	

Proxy Designations

Michael Hughes for Kraig Knutzen
Tim Van Hofwegen for Sloan Johnson

Members Absent

Greg Lee	Kraig Knutzen	Scott Hanseth	Sloan Johnson	Steve Omdal
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Others in Attendance

Don McMoran, WSU
Andrew Miller, EDASC
Kathy Jewell, Skagit County Planning & Development Services
Ryan Walters, Assistant Director, Skagit County Planning & Development Services
Stacie Pratschner, Sr. Planner, Skagit County Planning & Development Services

Call to Order

Nels Lagerlund called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

Meeting Minutes

Murray moved to accept the December meeting minutes, Michael seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Local Issues

Andrew Miller, EDASC – Birds of Winter

EDASC is calling this “zero year” as this is the first year they are putting effort into how to control flow of people and spend money on advertising. Andrew stated that birding is the fastest growing outdoor activity, Birds and birders are here, trying to draw people here once every 90 days.

Andrew says the idea getting the most traction is EDASC compensating farmers for cover crops, what can be done to offset the birds in the fields. EDASC is holding a community meeting on January 19th to discuss this topic. Trying to figure out what farmers want to be involved in this project. Ecology was on board with this idea and willing to find funding for this study. Figuring out what can be paid with grant money, and what can we get sponsors for?

Michael asked about any effort about educating birders about right of property. He is already having trouble with people on his land.

Andrew explained that their goal is protecting birds, protecting birders and hope to get people to sponsor/donate money to get information where the birds are. Then EDASC will have record of who is a registered “birder” and suggested that farmers take pictures of the cars & license plates and send to him to reprimand or issue tickets for trespassing or illegal parking. They are working on an app that they must check they agree to be responsible birders before they can see the hotspot of where the birds are in real time. The website lists ways for ethical birding which includes being mindful of people and safety.

Nels asked how much revenue does the Eagle festival brings into the county. EDASC and the county has no figures. In the past no tracking occurred, so there is no baseline.

Nels asked about what was being planned for parking issues during the birding festival. Andrew replied that they are trying to establish organized tours at specific sites instead of everyone driving all over and stopping in the road to take pictures. They would park in town and catch a tour van/bus to the sites of the birds.

Nels wants to know their plan to communicate with farmers. What about critical infrastructure shortfalls, economics, (charging per person hayride around your property to take photos of birds), and stated the biggest problem of tulip festival for farmers is the mess and traffic.

Murray asked those present; how much extra ground actually available that could have a viable cover crop after potatoes? Don says crop cover in our area spiked in 2010 and decreased lately. Murray pointed out we cannot compare birds to tulips. Birding is a year round activity in Skagit valley. Before this event, Audubon says there are already 700+ events in Skagit Valley. He feels EDASC or the Bird Festival organizers will not be able to control people. Advised that if they do not have sponsorship between hotels and Chamber of Commerce then you will not know what's going on and how many people are visiting Skagit for birding. There is no data to show if birders stop and stay or just move through? Without this information, there's no way to predict the revenue stream for farmers.

Per Andrew, birders support farmers whose practices align with their values. Like Organic Valley.

John Morrison asked, how are you going to control the people in such a large stretch of land? How to keep people off your land? Know Where to Hunt has a group that monitors the land those owners have agreed to be shared to Know Where to Hunt members. They have guidelines such as a maximum of 2 cars in designated parking spot. In one case there were six, so they can call someone in charge and can look up the cars and see who was making infractions and punished/fined. Nels asked who runs this program. State is leasing land and setting up blinds. John suggested that EDASC have a similar model or have a way to scan their parking passes and see who or how many have been to their place so EDASC can pay the farmer. Murray also suggested that EDASC should pay for signs that say farm is not participating.

Tim suggested giving a parking area and pay to park, or charge for access to that farm land.

Terry does not like this idea as a practice. Asked how would notify people what farms are open for birding and which are not? He is already having trouble keeping people from illegal dumping and trespassing on his land. Agritourism is here and coming but how will it be managed? How are you going to pay one person for enforcement in such a large area? How much money can you get? Terry's opinion is that the money is not worth the time or the effort it would take to manage them. Terry suggested EDASC should find a way to manage the crowds of people and solve the parking issue before they market for people to come.

Andrew stated the common element of where the birds are is the farmers and how certain crops attract certain species of birds. Each community is doing a weekend; La Conner, Mt. Vernon, each community will have a different approach; pop-up sites, keynote speakers, demonstrations. Andrew feels this is an opportunity to inform people what agriculture is in this region.

Andrew Miller left at 6:43 pm

Terry Sapp – Preserving small parcels in ag-NRL zoning

From district 3 (up river) where he and other farmers are located. To pursue this subject he needs data and information. It's not easy to find this specific data. Initial work will be to get: where the farms are, parcels are and what size they are, and which have gone away as ag land in the recent period.

Ryan says we can request data from GIS on Terry's behalf once we know what data is being requested.

Ryan explained that in Imap – click on parcels you find info on each parcel. Widespread misunderstanding that parcels are same as lots, which it is not. Parcel is ownership for assessor's purposes of taxing. It does not mean that they are separate lots. For example, Guemes Island it looks like a lot of land divisions but it is not.

Nels asked how is this happening in ag land. Ryan says we need to look at each specific example; need parcel numbers or addresses in question. Stacie offered that we could ask GIS for a report of subdivisions and short subdivisions in east county since the 40 acre rule to show ag income. Issue is small ag land farms being turned into residential land.

Ryan says if we have examples, we can generate the questions. When Terry generates his questions Ryan will ask GIS to issue some data and reports. In the case of an illegal subdivision, the county will not issue a bldg. permit.

Nels says there is a presumption that if you do not farm for x number of years then you can change zoning to residential after x years. Ryan says this is not true; rezoning Ag-NRL land is discouraged by the Comprehensive Plan.

Nels says the county has 5, 10, 15 acres of ag land that has potentials for small farms (Viva farms). Nels gave an example of a small lot next to his that was given a permit for an accessory bldg., graveled over best 1 ½ acre of farm land and put a shop, then sold and now it's residential. Good example of land use changes.

Ryan stated that maybe the fact that you can do a Card or house is undesirable and not conducive to preservation of ag land. Murray asked when the county would help farmers against the Skagit Fish Enhancement groups

Committees

Economic Development: Steve Omdal (Chair), Don McMoran, Terry Sapp, Tim Van Hofwegen

Critical Area: Nels Lagerlund(Chair), Murray Benjamin

Land Use: Sloan Johnson (Chair), Michael Hughes, Scott Hanseth, Barbara Cleave

Flood & Drainage: Kraig Knutzen (Chair) Greg Lee, Scott Hanseth

Committee Report:

Economic Development – Don; IPZ is working with port and moving forward with the branding, hired by the port. Trying to establish what all SC farmers can stand behind. Hoping to have everything done by end of year.

Don McMoran, WSU County Director

Upcoming WSU Workshops at research center

1/12/18 — Seed workshop

2/16/18 – Ag Summit – need as many large scale production farmers there as possible

Need help getting farmers there this year. Don asked Nels to speak. An east coast production company coming to present at summit.

2/23/18 – Potato workshop -

3/23/18 - Berry workshop

Needs help spreading the word to everyone about all these workshops.

Old Business

SCL License renewal – Nels spoke to Allen Rozema about this. Don asked Nels to try to contact SCL – Don will forward email to Nels.

Stacie Pratschner - Thurston co – Agritourism overlay district and scenic byways. It was a 4 year process to adopt and had an agritourism advisory committee involved. She stated the program has been successful and developed some streamline permitting for agritourism. Huge undertaking, but was a huge economic need for the south part of the county. The Planner Stacie contacted at Thurston County stated that it had been a successful project.

Started in 2009/10 and adopted in 2014. Thurston County code 20.08. Kathy will email the link to Thurston County Code to the board.

New Business - None

Michael Hughes moved to adjourn, Nels seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:20 pm

Next meeting February 14, 2018 at 6 pm