

Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
February 14, 2018
Skagit County Administration Building

Members in Attendance

Nels Lagerlund	Michael Hughes	Barbara Cleave	Terry Sapp
Tim Van Hofwegen	Scott Hanseth	Greg Lee	Steve Omdal
Kraig Knutzen			

Proxy Designations

None

Members Absent

Murray Benjamin	Sloan Johnson	John Morrison
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Others in Attendance

Don McMoran, WSU Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Educator
Hal Hart, Skagit County Planning Director

Call to Order

Nels Lagerlund called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

Meeting Minutes

Tim Van Hofwegen moved to accept the January 10, 2018 minutes as written. Michael Hughes seconded. Motion carried.

Hal Hart was introduced as Skagit County's new Planning Director. He stated that he, or a representative, would try to join most if not all of the AAB meetings. He has experience as a planning director in Stevens county and Alaska. Hal invited a discussion to identify the AAB's activities, actions, and concerns.

Tim asked what Hal's role will be with the county. Hal explained that his role is basically three-part, with a few additional activities. He is responsible for an advisory role in 1) zoning code, 2) building of roads, and 3) fire marshal. He also has an advisory role in the recommendation of transportation routes such as access, road improvement.

Nels mentioned there are recent activities related to planning. As part of county business and tourism, EDASC is pushing and developing a plan for agri-tourism; this is not necessarily of any benefit to the farmer. The comprehensive amendment plan presented a proposal for further Avalon development and a proposal to place restaurants on farms.

Drainage is a huge concern to agricultural land in Skagit County. There are development pressures. Some of the farmland is below sea level. There is a question as to where the water will go as it comes off the hills. Current development has caused water to come off (the hills) faster now and the infrastructure to handle it is old. The Avalon development wasn't docketed because it wasn't right 'yet'. Noted is that the proposal stated that they would not have a problem with water drainage on the development

because they were elevated and water flows downhill. We need new storm water management requirements.

The comprehensive plan amendment also included restaurants on farms; this was docketed. AAB is concerned about enforcement. If something is allowed, how will the county prevent further development of it beyond the permitted use? An example was given regarding a property north of Burlington, between Burlington and Sedro Woolley. This was a facility that developed beyond its permit, and permitted use. It took 15 years for enforcement to occur for the facility; as part of the settlement they will be there for up to 7 more years to allow equipment liquidation and potential relocation.

Given this, how will the county enforce restaurants on farms? A lot of restaurant applications will pop up, as applications have been made in the past and have been refused due to ordinance/permitted use. Hal noted that enforcement would come from the health department.

Who will be moving into agricultural land and how do they perceive neighboring farmers? They are now a neighbor to a farmer. This could potentially put these restaurants right next to a farm.

Steve Omdal noted that there will be potentially one compliance officer and no revenue from the restaurants to the county. There is concern that the county will not be able to administer and monitor if there is no monetary funding; funding to do this should come from these restaurants. There may be no cooperation from these restaurants as there is no impact to them dollar-wise. There needs to be a source of revenue to support that (compliance) inspections occur.

State Level

As uses change in the Ag Zone, there is question of how we keep farming. An example of a spray drift bill introduced by Ranker was noted; it would mandate that a 4-day notice occur prior to agriculture chemical application. This bill was tabled and moved to committee so may reappear again.

A carbon tax may be upcoming. Off-road vehicles may be exempt, but heating and fuels used in agriculture accessory functions will be subject to the tax. What is the role of agriculture in the carbon tax debate? Hal will call down to the state agriculture committee and ask this question.

Washington is putting up more and more barriers to conduct business in the state, and this includes agriculture. A business such as Boeing can pull up and move to another state, but a farmer can't pull up his farmland and move.

The state has forced counties to work toward riparian comprehensive plans. AAB took interest as it impacts agricultural areas. A volunteer stewardship program was created by the county.

There is a newly created water resources billing for wells; Skagit County was separated out from the state bill. For water rights, there are some talking points that need to be visited; ideas include a map of areas where the county is coming up with solutions, identifying them, then working through the other areas without solutions. Not all Skagit County watersheds are affected and this could quickly be noted.

There are transportation concerns. How do you get people from I-5 to Sedro-Woolley? This is now the new growth hub of the county and there is one main road to get to there: Highway 20. Cook Road is being used as an artery, but it has also impacted agriculture. Use of Cook Road has become impractical

for agricultural equipment; agriculture practices take place in and around Cook Road daily. Hal stated that the Regional Transportation Planning Organization is supposed to address transportation concerns to provide transport to houses. Hal will bring forward information to the Skagit Area Transportation Committee of how agriculture is impacted by the management of growth areas.

AAB noted to Hal Hart that a lot of issues AAB has are water-related: drainage, water rights, water usage.

Committees

No reports

Preserving Small Parcels in Ag-NRL Zoning

Terry met with Ryan Walters concerning housing on rural acreage. The objective for Terry now is observation; why is this structure now here, or why is it being built here? Terry can't frame a question that will glean this information, so it has become strictly observation on a case-by-case basis. There is a distinction between a lot and a parcel and it becomes crucial in how permitting occurs. Some of these have provided 'residential opportunities' even after the 40-acre rule took effect, and the process has allowed the practice of converting Ag land to a lot with a house.

Don McMoran, WSU County Director

The Ag Summit is scheduled for Friday, February 16, 2018, with an 'Experience Ag' theme. There is no registration fee this year. The summit will cover the Future of Ag and continued viability, Commercial Ag, Food Processing, State Ag Tourism, Young and Beginning Farmers, Export, Research, and Visioning.

2/23/18 – Potato workshop

3/23/18 - Berry workshop

New Business - None

Michael Hughes moved to adjourn, Steve Omdal seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:10 pm

Next meeting March 14, 2018 at 6 pm