

# Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board Meeting Summary – January 27, 2020 Skagit County Administration Building

## Members in Attendance

Michael Hughes	Barbara Cleave	John Morrison	Don McMoran, WSU
Steve Omdal	Kraig Knutzen	Murray Benjamin	Steve Omdal
Steve Wright	Terry Sapp		

## Proxy Designations

## Members Absent

Nels Lagerlund      Tim Van Hofwegen      Justin Hayton

## Others in Attendance

Ron Wesen, Chair, Board of County Commissioners

Ken Dahlstedt, Board of County Commissioners

Lisa Janicki, Board of County Commissioners

Hal Hart, Director, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)

Michael Cerbone, Assistant Director, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)

Peter Gill, Long Range Planning Manager, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)

Kim Adams, Administrative Coordinator, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)

## Call to Order, Introductions

Ron Wesen called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

## Approval of Meeting Summary

Murray Benjamin moved to accept the December 11, 2019 summary with date correction, Jon Morrison seconded. Motion carried.

## Guest Speaker

The Board of County Commissioners, Ron Wesne, Ken Dahlstedt, and Lisa Janicki joined in the January Agricultural Advisory Board meeting to touch base between the Commissioners and the Agricultural Advisory Board to discuss Strategic Priorities for supporting local agriculture. To begin, Hal Hart presented the 2019 Agricultural Report and what is happening within the residential and commercial permits on Agricultural land in Skagit County:

- There are 97,000 Farm acres in Skagit
- 88,000 set aside for Ag Land
- There has been an increase in residential ADU's
- Decrease in commercial permits from 2018
- The 2019 Ag Report is available online
- Terry Sapp had a question if it is okay for a garage becoming a house, does that then mean it is an ADU? Hal would research this question and bring some information back to the Board
- Commissioner Janicki asked the Board what they could be doing to be more involved with the Ag Board so she can be more educated and be a better voice when attending the Ag Summit and when down in Olympia to be able to speak with confidence on the issues effecting Agriculture in Skagit County.

- Commissioner Dahlstedt said that communication is very important and things need to change with the dialog to make better decisions. No one has been attending Ag Board groups to help get funding to protect drainage. Agricultural Watershed Council responsible for funding for salmon protraction both Allan and Brandon stopped going to the meetings, they didn't feel their attendance in these gatherings was going to be beneficial to agriculture.
- A few issues happening in the Agriculture community now are:
  - Suicide is up 300% (in 10 years)
  - Immigration issues-who does the work? Need more labor, but can't break the law
  - Put forward some insensitive to help farming make money, America has the best profit availability
- Housing Shortage is a huge issue:
  - Skagit County is short 3500 units and getting a lot of pressure to do something about it
  - Can't say no to new homes, need more and the cities need to do more to utilize properties (look at going up, not out)
  - Lisa Janicki- using the fairgrounds could produce 500-600 units of housing, not really making a huge dent in the need, but everyone needs to be smarter and on the same page
  - Avalon would be a good idea to build a lot of homes, but they need to be kept affordable
  - Keep housing as close to work sites as possible, don't want to clog up I-5 any more
  - Arlington is getting tons of new jobs, need more housing
  - Starbird & 300<sup>th</sup> Street interchange is not Agriculture or Timber land, a lot of housing can fit closer to where the work is
- Terry Sapp suggested need to look for new ways for high efficiency Ag- large demand for small plots to have smaller farms (4-5 acres)
- Ken Dahlstedt said he wants to protect all Ag land, not take from it, they don't need to build on Ag Land, there are other options
- Kraig Knutzen is concerned that things can change with drainage & irrigation-when that happens it will be an issue for all. The Washington State Labor Rates, Family Leave Act, all are making it hard to do business
- Murray Benjamin questioned the Seattle City Light Renewal
  - Flood Control not going to be the same
  - Drainage & Irrigation is most important
  - Working on it now since the 2006 decision and the Department of Ecology bailed
  - Don't want to have issues with Tribes, just committed to making sure AG has water
  - Kara Symonds is heading the Relicensing program with Seattle City Light and will provide an update at the February meeting
  - Purchase of the water is in the works-trying to get a good plan no solution as of yet
  - Working closely with PSE, PUD, & the Tribes to keep the peace with Drainage & irrigation
  - Kraig Knutzen said the 100 ft. Buffers on all sides is taking out a lot of Agriculture land as now there is too much shade to grow anything after all the planting requirements
- Housing, Don McMoran, WSU asked where the numbers are coming from for housing
  - 67% of people are on Medicaid
  - Skagit has the worst housing in the state
  - There are 2-3 families living in houses
  - Affordable housing is major issue
- Terry Sapp said the cheapest land is Ag Land, how will it be preserved but also help with the housing issues

- Commissioner Dahlstedt-Rural Reserve land is better and cheaper for housing as the Ag land is going higher
- Hal Hart- 225 Housing Units going in in Hamilton (they are looking how to fund now)
- 72 Units approved near Hawthorn Grave Yard
- Private Sector in Burlington is looking at 72 Units
- Sedro Woolley is looking at 850 Units
- Need to work with Mount Vernon to get them to reinvest in the community-Push the city to work together
- Michael Cerbone asked how the Commissioners wanted to keep in communication with the AG Board:
  - Call, email, prepare letters, have work sessions
  - Have an Ag Board Member at the Tuesday Morning meeting on camera
  - Be more consistent
  - Don't assume the Board of County Commissioners know, ask questions, be the voice
  - Reach out to the larger Agriculture Community to get direction to make sure everyone is on the same page
  - Get people together let Lisa Janicki know what is important to the Agricultural Community, she goes to Olympia every other week and can speak knowledgeable about the issue
  - More people need to be in Olympia to speak out or else they don't know
  - Attend the Skagit Leaders Ag Breakfast the 1<sup>st</sup> Friday of the month at the Farmhouse restaurant
- Hal Hart gave a recap of the meeting, list of biggest issues:
  - Need to make Agriculture more viable-economics
  - How can we get more value added
  - Year round water for Agriculture most important
  - Preserving land for Agriculture
  - Getting important issues to the BOCC so they are knowledgeable about upcoming Bills in Olympia
  - Marginal farming is important
  - Drainage Dikes are important
  - Housing issues-RV compliance issues on rural lands & Ag properties
  - Future growth strategies
  - AG Spray is an issue-need to speak about this in Olympia
  - Send a list of Bills that are important to the Agricultural Advisory Group to Kayla Schott-Bresler- she can help with getting things together to go to Olympia and she can coordinate with the Commissioners so they know which Legislative Bills to speak about
- Peter Gill-gave a Census update
  - Census is just a population count
  - The Federal Government provides \$1,000 per person for school, transportation, etc. needs
  - Need to be able to reach out to the community and farm workers and get accurate counts
  - There has been low counts with young people and people with a lower social status
  - County is doing outreach: Postcards, Websites, Mail
  - Suggested using the Spanish Radio Station to send the word out to the Hispanic community

New Business

None at this time

## Committee Reports

### **Economic Development- Don McMoran**

- Funding- Skagit County folded in a Health grant and Pasture Management funding into the WSU Skagit County Extension Inner local. This effort saves the County money because they do not have to pay for F & A.
- On the University side of things we are moving from a negative budget (1.5% or greater cut the last 4 years) into the black. The intent is to be able to hire back some of the staff positions that were left vacant.
- Grants: WSU Water Irrigation Systems Efficiency (WISE) Cover Crops, Pasture Management, Agriculture Suicide Prevention and AgrAbility
- Publications: How to create an Agriculture Suicide Prevention Program (Journal of Extension), Various Irrigation articles being worked on as we finish up the WSU WISE grant.
- New Positions: Vicky McCracken is the new Associate Dean of Extension.
- WSU is hiring a new Provost and will be posting Chad Kruger's position at WSU NWREC.

### **Critical Areas – Nels Lagerlund**

None at this time

### **Land Use –Barbara Cleave (Chair), Michael Hughes, John Morrison, Steve Wright**

None at this time

### **Flood, Drainage & Irrigation – Kraig Knutzen (Chair), Nels Lagerlund, Steve Wright**

None at this time

## Old Business

None at this time

## Adjourn

Steve Omdal moved to adjourn, Murray Benjamin seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:10 pm

Next meeting is March 11, 2019 at 6 pm