

Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board

Meeting Summary – February 9, 2022

MS Teams

Members in Attendance

Michael Hughes	Terry Sapp	Tim Van Hofwegen	Michael Trafton
Kraig Knutzen	Murray Benjamin	Steve Omdal	Steve Wright

Proxy Designations

Michael Hughes for Nels Lagerlund

Members Absent

Justin Hayton	Rachael Ward Sparwasser
John Morrison	

Others in Attendance

Hal Hart, Director, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)
Don McMoran, WSU Extension
Craig Macku, Community Member

Call to Order, Introductions

Michael Hughes called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm.

Approval of Meeting Summary

Kraig Knutzen moved to accept the January 12, 2022 Meeting Minutes; Steve Omdal seconded. Motion carried.

Guest Speaker

Hal Hart, Director, Planning & Development Services

- Hal presented his Director's Update
 - The Board will hold a hearing on the recommended Shoreline Master Plan March 1, 2022
 - We are intending to have a new draft available next week which incorporates the Commissioners acceptance of both Staff and Planning Commission recommendations. I will have Peter send a link to that draft.
 - The Planning Commission will continue their work on the docket on February 22nd
 - This means continuing discussion of ADUs – crafting that for Skagit County
- Top Objectives-Next two weeks
 - Working to improve permit process – working on parallel reviews now to speed our process forward.
 - Several staff down due to illness this week.
 - Peter continues to work with our consultant on Agricultural Tourism – we want to have a draft out soon but our priority this week and next week is the draft Shoreline Master Program and Completing the PC review of the docket.

- Bills in the Legislature
 - Transportation Budget
 - Senate Bill 5885 Shoreline Habitat
 - Senate Bill 5964 Permit Streamlining Bill
- ADU on Agricultural Lands update from the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission moved through docket relatively quickly but put this issue on hold until the next meeting (set for February 9, 2022). The had a number of questions about this. The members mentioned they had been contacted by Planning Commissioner with regards to questions on impacts of ADUs on agricultural properties/lands.

New Business

Kraig Moved and Terry Seconded the motion to write a clarifying memo to the Planning Commission regarding ADUs in agricultural areas.

Terry Sapp spoke to the issue of ADU's on Agricultural Lands – housing – automatically twice as many houses – I am worried by this. Air B and B issues do not have family member obligations. Hal Hart suggested that the original Agricultural Advisory recommendation be attached to any additional communication.

Unanimous approval motion carried Michael will work on a comment through to the end of next week and send it for staff. If it cannot be considered by the PC at this time it would at least be part of the overall comments received in the record to the Board of County Commissioners.

Question about consulting were raised. Why does the county have a consultant and why are we hiring at the same time? Hart responded that we are have a consultant advising on overall process. It was the same consultant we brought in twenty years before. We are again looking at parallel reviews for things like building permits and critical areas to speed our review times. We have other consultants to assist a peak periods. We found that we were really paying a lot of money for consultant plans examiners. It may be better and less expensive to promote staff internally. We have also lost a lot of staff through retirements and we are rehiring for them in that way.

Steve Omdal – The Port of Skagit has a buyer on the property at Conway. We have an interested party who wants to buy the 33 acres of land in that area. This would create an important Trans loading facility for agricultural products. New Commissioner from Sedro Woolley has joined the Port this year. We have other properties at the Swift Center in Sedro Woolley and up at the Airport as well that we are looking at, but this provides mainline rail connection. Steve said, “I continue to stress the need to have a place to put product on rail.”

Kraig Knutzen noted: “This is the only access the Port has to rail. We appreciate your heart on this thing and looking far ahead for the Port – main line spurs are going to be harder and harder to find.”

Steve Omdal noted that the Port and the buyer may be able to subtract some property in the process.

Committee Reports

Economic Development- Don McMoran

None at this time

Critical Areas – Nels Lagerlund

Michael Hughes: We have lost Kerra for VSP however we have CJ Jones. CJ is presenting at the Agricultural Summit.

Our recommendation to staff is that we need we need to get that CJ Jones on the agenda and introduced to the AG. Board as soon as possible as well as the rest of the producers in the County. After looking at the state review of Skagit County.

Terry Sapp spoke to CJ Jones today because of his concerns about VSP. Per Terry Sap: Kara's five-year report was submitted with respect to meeting VSP goals. The goals were largely accepted by the Conservation Commission, but the technical members disagreed with the County's report about obtaining VSP goals. I did not determine what the outcomes/results were of that. But it was troubling to me with regards to the buffer bill Loraine Loomis Bill i.e., the mandating of buffers.

The Department of Agriculture disagreed with our County's VSP report. Some interests in the state may want VSP to be replaced by a vehicle within the Lorain Loomis Bill i.e., mandatory requirements)– the report was submitted in January of 2021 and responded in July 2021.

Buffer Bill Discussion (also known as the Loraine Loomis Bill) – fits with critical areas so let's discuss this per Michael Hughes

HB 1838 and companion Senate Buffer Bill these did not make it out of committee this year. They may still come back to life in a budget proviso etc., etc., both of these came out of the Governors' office and the Governor was upset that he did not get a bill out.

Representative Lekanoff had pushed a net ecological gain bill that was voted out of committee HB 1117. This one bill is alive and well and will impact counties.

The Governor is looking for ways to support Salmon. we are supporting VSP (Voluntary Stewardship Program) so we are hoping it will go well.

Lekanoff' s intent was to create a new vehicle for her bill. HB 1117 could get content out of the buffer bill and be added into Net Ecological Gain. Commercial Fisherman wanted this as well as others who testified. It was determined that Skagit County would lose 10,000 acres of farmland under this proposal. This was far more than any other county in the state and represented some 40% of the state total agricultural losses.

According to Kraig Knutson communications to the legislature has been challenging online. He noted that Skagit County Farmers are putting perspective clips out to make sure we are getting our points across to the legislators.

The Governor was upset that he did not get a Salmon Bill through even though agricultural community was supportive of the Voluntary Stewardship Program.

Michael asked: Does HB 1117 have a companion bill at this time in the Senate?

Kraig responded he does not know for sure, but he will remain vigilant on this and the mandatory bill as well as the Net Ecological Gain bill were tied to the Growth Management Act. Net ecological gain means in essence that you as a landowner will have to leave things better than you have found them.

Terry Sapp noted that the loss of 11,000 acres is a huge impact on area farmers and the farm economy in Western Washington. That represented some 40 percent of the total in the state. The Capital Press reported this (per Terry) that the loss in Skagit County was over 11,000 acres.

There was an element in the buffer bill that meant the buffer height of over 200 feet (fir trees). Lewis County had a loss of some 2,000 acres.

Also noted by several members that Commissioner Wesen gave a nice presentation on this issue and was strongly opposed to mandated buffers vs VSP (voluntary stewardship approaches). There was a lot of comment from Western Washington Agriculture on these issues again this year. The Companion Bill did not get a hearing on the Senate side.

Land Use – Terry Sapp (Chair), Kraig Knutzen, Murray Benjamin, Michael Trafton, Steve Omdal

Would like Peter Gill to share the Policy paper with the committee here first before we send to the Board. We want to add our comments to the work as it goes forward.

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

Kraig addressed the flood gate improvements – after putting the new ones in fish can bypass these. Headwaters designations for drainages into the drainage system would then mean the drainage systems would be fish bearing and then if that is the case your back into buffers/cleaning etc. If we lose our drainage systems, we lose our productive agricultural lands. We should reach out to Jenna on these issues.

Old Business

Agri-tourism we are waiting will get a copy of the report to Michael ASAP. Seattle City Light relicensing – they will research the Gorge Bypass and Fish bypass, but they are going to increase funding to the downstream habitat improvements. This would be an end around on previous agreements. Steve Wright – I thought Jenna lit into them pretty good on this issue. County is pushing hard on fish bypass on the dams.

Kraig – Jenna is working with mitigation efforts. These are trying to be pushed on AG NRL grounds. It's easy to take out 500 acres of farmland and create a wetland assembly there – we are saying don't drop your mitigation efforts on our most viable agricultural lands. For next month the Agricultural Advisory would like to see the following

- Agricultural Tourism Proposal discussion.
- CJ from our VSP team
- Our new Public Works Director would be invited to make a few remarks as well.

Reminder from Kraig Knutzen to the entire Board: Please stay tuned to the Ensley/Murray Lower Snake River Dam Removal process. The three lower Snake River dams. Pay attention of statewide impacts. The proposal is underway.

Don McMoran reported: WSU Workshop Season will continue after this Friday's Agricultural Summit

Adjourn

Murray Benjamin moved to adjourn; Kraig Knutzen seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:31 pm.

Next meeting is March 9, 2022 at 6 pm.