

2016 Comprehensive Plan Update, Planning Commission Public Workshop – Rural Character Element, May 19, 2015

Small Group Flip-Chart Notes

Question key for all groups:

1. How do you define Skagit County's rural character?
2. What do you value or cherish about the rural community in which you live, work, or recreate?
3. What concerns do you have for the present and the future of Skagit County's rural areas?
4. Are current Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations effective at protecting the rural landscape, character and lifestyle by:*

 - a. Providing for a variety of rural residential densities and housing opportunities.
 - b. Maintaining the character and historic and cultural roles of existing rural communities.
 - c. Ensuring that land uses are compatible and in keeping with the protection of important rural landscape features, resources, and values.
 - d. Assuring economic prosperity for rural areas; and
 - e. Assuring that appropriate and adequate rural levels of service are provided.

Group Answers

Group One (Facilitator: Dale Pernula)

Question Two: What do you value or cherish about the rural community in which you live, work, or recreate?

- a. Diverse
- b. Bridge between urban and natural lands
- c. Resource origins
- d. Community
- e. Buffer between forestry and agriculture where people can live – elbow room
- f. Small scale agriculture – hobby farms
- g. Freedom
- h. Pockets within undeveloped lands – diversity of sizes

- i. Side by side with wildlife
- j. Quiet and peaceful
- k. Funkiness
- l. Responsibility

Question Three: What concerns do you have for the present and the future of Skagit County's rural areas?

- a. Sprawl – need larger lots to maintain
- b. Habitat connectivity – loss of open space
- c. Low impact recreational opportunity close to home
- d. Water
- e. Trespass
- f. Costs to rural residents of urban encroachment
- g. Urban bias in money, planning, and disconnect between urban and rural cultures
- h. Too many amenities
- i. Accommodating more without ruining rural character

Group Two (Facilitator: Kirk Johnson)

Question Two: What do you value or cherish about the rural community in which you live, work, or recreate?

- a. The quiet
- b. Has changed
- c. Access to recreation, forests, and water
- d. Not having to commute in heavy traffic
- e. Small businesses as I travel east
- f. Fresh air, clean water, bountiful farms
- g. Recreation opportunities
- h. Great rural friends
- i. Ability to have pockets of industry and business within confines of greater rural areas.
Need to balance those needs
- j. Geographic beauty
- k. Sense of community
- l. Walk from house to trails
- m. Can work on farm, then go hiking or run nearby
- n. Elbow room

Question Three: What concerns do you have for the present and the future of Skagit County's rural areas?

- a. How many acres are we talking about?
- b. How will we guide change?
- c. How to measure for "no net loss?"
- d. Loss of agricultural land
- e. Stop loss of and restore water rights
- f. Loss of rights regarding home rule
- g. External forces
- h. Commercial, industrial creep into rural areas
- i. Property rights, especially Corps of Engineers and Tribes: potential flooding, e.g. Barnaby Slough, Creekmore – lack of public input
- j. Urban sprawl

Question Four: Are current Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations effective at protecting the rural landscape, character and lifestyle?

- a. Pipeline through neighborhood – lost appeal due to lack of definitions between major and minor utility development
- b. Do our regulations support and implement comprehensive plan policies?
- c. Starting small business – Health Department regulation fees seem high and redundant – addressing challenges to small business startups.
- d. Farm worker housing

Group Three (Facilitator: Gary Christensen)

Question Three: What concerns do you have for the present and the future of Skagit County's rural areas?

- a. Coordinated Water System Plan is being ignored - "Water Systems"
- b. Rural housing – lack of discussion and information
- c. Ecological connectivity, people and animals
- d. Geo-hazards, landslides, drainage
- e. Rural agricultural – "non-NRL"
- f. Affordable infrastructure
- g. Rural densities and "character"
- h. Rural property rights
- i. Re-establish rural exempt wells, "water rights"
- j. Rural and senior affordable housing

- k. Medical support and facilities in rural areas (services and care)
- l. Fiber optic connection upriver
- m. “Better is better than bigger”
- n. Do our elected officials (Board of County Commissioners) represent us?

Group Three held a discussion on general topics following the conclusion of Question Three.

- a. Land use – “appropriate.” What goes into:
 - rural character
 - urban amenities
- b. Maintaining rural character while providing economic prosperity
- c. Embrace Envision Skagit 2060 (not universally supported)
- d. Need good and reliable data and maps
- e. CaRD (Conservation Easement) = perpetuity
- f. Plan for sea-level rise, one meter (some dissent)

Group Four (Facilitator: Ryan Walters)

Question Four: Are current Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations effective at protecting the rural landscape, character and lifestyle?

- a. **Providing for a variety of rural residential densities and housing opportunities.**
- b. **Maintaining the character and historic and cultural roles of existing rural communities.**
- c. **Ensuring that land uses are compatible and in keeping with the protection of important rural landscape features, resources, and values.**
- d. **Assuring economic prosperity for rural areas; and**
- e. **Assuring that appropriate and adequate rural levels of service are provided.**

Responses:

- a. Water Issue: change in plans regarding (cluster example)(Relates back to item c. in question above)
 - Approximately 80,000 acres should be able to provide for variety
- b. Personal property owners are doing that evident throughout county e.g. Christiansen’s Nursery and historic barns.
 - Concerned about rural village size, e.g. Big Lake community. No services, not public access, not walking paths, lack of public access to desirable waterfront areas (not keeping in character)
- c. Marijuana permitting and rural character: landscaping, fences, etc.
 - And as it relates to water supply
 - Potable water sources help to allow uses that might strain existing sources, rainwater catchment system (Guemes Island)

- Well rights being taken away by regulation, e.g. land not large enough to farm
 - Farmland Legacy Program vs Kent Valley
- d. Fairness (balance) in a struggle between regulation and personal property rights
- Arterials, e.g. Highway 20 for business as opposed to further encroachment in farmland and rural land
 - Tourism because of the unique nature but could run amok with sprawl (i.e. containment)
- e. Home based business needs internet service
- Fiber optic began, but...ran out of money in eastern Skagit County
 - Guemes Island Ferry, hours and size, balance of sustainability.
- (The note taker, Tammy Candler, further explained for clarification that the person who made that point was a resident of Guemes Island who said that sometimes a minority of the population wants the ferry to run at all hours and you need to strike a balance between what you would like to have versus a sustainable amount of service that you are willing to be taxed for.)*

Question Two: What do you value or cherish about the rural community in which you live, work, or recreate?

- a. Community – people pulling together, e.g. fire department fundraiser
- b. Oxygen

Natural green trees and land (agricultural scenic corridor registry), views of pastoral landscape with island

Group Five (Facilitator: Betsy Stevenson)

Question One: How do you define Skagit County's rural character?

- a. Places for wildlife and nature
- b. More hawks and falcons than cars commuting to work
- c. Open space (like Northern California): Starbird Road, Conway Hill, view coming into the Valley
- d. Agricultural and forestry define Skagit County rural character, wildlife but not elk and bears; Introduction of grizzly bears would be a detriment
- e. Low population density, people demonstrate a lot of self-sufficiency, don't look for government to provide
- f. Care about surroundings: what happens in their community, both land and people. Produce own food. Goats. Horses. Self-reliant. Proud/care about their surroundings (people and environment)

Question Two: What do you value or cherish about the rural community in which you live, work, or recreate?

- a. Independence, while caring and looking out for each other
- b. Volunteer fire department – neighbors helping neighbors. Recent house fire benefit pancake breakfast raised \$5,000 for family

- c. Ability to be a small farmer, sell and trade goods produced
- d. Can be true in cities, too. Audubon “hat”: outstanding natural historical resources, wintering birds that are dependent on agriculture but need rural open areas. People come from all over to see them. Moral obligation to protect areas, (birds) have nowhere else to go
- e. Diverse rural areas, agriculture, small farms, terrain, etc.
- f. Community of Samish Island – rural to them. Skagit County is unique, very rare for Puget Sound region. Can see the whole area to get the perspective.
- g. Seed crops (world supply)

Question Three: What concerns do you have for the present and the future of Skagit County’s rural areas?

- a. Encroachment of urban into rural farms, open spaces
- b. Sprawl: at what density do we consider it sprawl? (any loss of farmland to development or to conservation projects)
- c. Distinction between agriculture lands and rural areas, pressure between Seattle and Vancouver (here). Death by 10,000 cuts for agriculture, encroachments on farmland, five acres; incremental loss,
- d. Over complicate rural re-development density mechanisms like fully contained communities?
- e. So many options for rural. farming, but not necessarily. suitable for many uses. villages. hard to designate those areas. small farm; requires care and responsibility. need to take care of it. *(Note: this is an exact transcription of the flip chart notes.)*
- f. Most of what said about agriculture applies to forest lands too
- g. Biggest issue – private property owners having access to their own water

Question Four: Are current Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations effective at protecting the rural landscape, character and lifestyle?

- a. Not sure we’re doing enough to be sure uses are compatible, not sure how to fix it. Look closely for unexpected consequences and unintended consequences.
- b. Development regulations – have long lists of what’s allowed or permitted, may need to treat them as exceptions instead of permitted uses
- c. Mechanisms to increase rural densities (LAMIRD). CaRD – device to get back to five acre lots
- d. Get more people involved
- e. “Assuring” economic prosperity, “assuring” appropriate level of service in CP policies. We don’t have to assure anything along those lines.
- f. Unique communities – when do they get to grow? When do you provide services?
- g. Use “facilitate” instead of “assure”; government’s role not to provide or assure economic prosperity or services.

- h. Historic small communities are no longer there
- i. Rural character – don't over-regulate