

**Skagit County Planning Commission  
Public Hearing: Agritourism Code Changes  
July 25, 2023**

**Planning**

**Commissioners:**

**Kathy Mitchell  
Mark Knutzen  
Vince Henley  
Amy Hughes  
Tim Raschko, Chair  
Joe Woodmansee  
Tammy Candler Vice Chair (absent)  
Martha Rose  
Jen Hutchison**

**Staff:**

**Jack Moore, Planning Director  
Sarah Ruether, Long Range Planning Manager**

**Public Hearing**

**Commenters:**

**Randy Good, Friends of Skagit County  
Ellen Bynum, Friends of Skagit County  
Don McMoran, Ag Advisory Board  
Terry Sapp, Ag Advisory Board  
Michael Trafton, Ag Advisory Board  
Ken Dahlstedt  
Terry Gifford  
Brock Clements, Saltbox Farm and Save Skagit Farm Venues  
Katie Clements, Saltbox Farm and Save Skagit Farm Venues  
Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland  
John Christianson, Christianson's Nursery  
Tom Shields, Eagle Haven Winery  
Chris Dariotis  
Scott Postma  
Joey Van Pelt, Skagit Bridal, Hair and Makeup  
Mikala Staples Hughes  
Lacey Larsen, Evergreen Weddings  
Jessie Anderson, Maplehurst Farm  
Janie Kelley  
Jessica Winn/Nguyen-Davey  
Andy Mayer, President/CEO of Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce  
Jake Buganski, CEO of Skagit Tourism Bureau  
Amy Frye, Boldly Grown Farm  
Nick Cecotti, Lefeber Turf Farm and Vanderveen Wedding Venue  
Susanne Rohner  
Linnea McCord  
Val Mullen  
Judy Billings  
Miles Baron, Avenue Catering  
Rosemary Camp Kidane**

**Jacqueline Martin**  
**Larry Jensen**  
**Connie Funk**  
**Angelica Hayton, Hayton Farms Berries**  
**Rachael Ward-Sparwasser**  
**Ron Extract, Garden Path Fermentation**  
**Vivian Larson**  
**Kristi Sedlacek, Stepping Stones Garden**  
**Judy Pedersen, Stepping Stones Garden**  
**Jones Atterberry**  
**David Top**  
**Heather Top**  
**Mark Benson, Eagle Haven Winery**  
**Glen Johnson**  
**Adrienne Hopkins**  
**Hector de Leon, Tulip Valley Winery and Eagle Haven Winery**  
**Courtney Bourasaw, The Skagit Table**  
**Hayden Blackwood**  
**Peregrine \_\_\_\_\_**  
**Christine Wakoski**  
**Jill Shipman**  
**Tina Champeaux**

Chair Tim Raschko: (gavel) Good evening. Welcome to the July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023, meeting of the Skagit County Planning Commission. Before we start, I'd just like to point out that I believe there's closed circuit TV in the lobby. You can't hear?

(comments from audience about being unable to hear)

Chair Raschko: All right. I'm going to repeat – all right. Thank you. But there is room in the lobby. I believe there's closed circuit TV, and you'll be able to see and hear everything. And when it's your time to speak, you'll hear your name. And as another reminder, if you haven't done so already, just inside the door when you enter on the right there're sign-up sheets if you wish to speak. The only thing I ask you to do is please print your name clearly so that I am able to pronounce it in a respectable way. Thank you.

So we are missing Commissioner Candler, for the record, please, and I would ask for an approval of the minutes from our last meeting.

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Nobody wants to make a motion?

Commissioner Kathy Mitchell: I move that we approve the minutes from the last meeting.

Commissioner Joe Woodmansee: Second.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. It's been moved and seconded to approve the minutes. Is there any discussion of the minutes?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: If not, all those in favor, say “aye.”

All Commissioners: Aye.

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you. We now have time for Public Remarks and that’s for anybody that wishes to address the Planning Commission about any subject except agritourism, because you cannot speak of anything that happens to be on the agenda tonight. If there are other issues you wish to speak of, there will be three minutes per person, and due to the number of people we have tonight, we’re going to limit it to 15 minutes total time. So is there anybody who wishes to address the Planning Commission about anything but agritourism?

Unidentified Female Voice: One clarification. Who are the people on the Agricultural Advisory Board? Who are those individuals, and how many are there and are any of them owners or proprietors of the small venues?

Unidentified Male Voice: \_\_\_\_\_ agritourism.

Original Unidentified Female Voice: Oh, did you say *no* agritourism?

Unidentified Male Voice: Yes.

Original Unidentified Female Voice: Okay, I got it wrong. Sorry. I’ll come back to it. Remember that question.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. So nobody wishes to speak? So the Public Remarks will be closed and we will turn to tonight’s main topic, which is a Public Hearing on the Proposed Agritourism Code Changes. Before we begin, Mr. Moore, please make a statement.

Jack Moore: Yes. Thank you, Chair Raschko: Good evening, everyone. Thanks for coming. My name is Jack Moore. I’m the director of Skagit County Planning and Development Services. The Board of County Commissioners prepared a Statement of Commitment that they have asked that I share with you this evening.

“As identified in the Skagit County Strategic Plan, the Commissioners remain deeply committed to protecting farmland in the Skagit Valley where we have one of the most fertile valleys in the world. Supporting our agricultural and small business constituents is an important priority of the Commissioners. We have received significant correspondence with concerns about enforcement, impact on existing operators, and other important issues. Once the Planning Commission makes its recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners, we will work with staff to develop implementation strategies, including reasonable pathways for existing facilities to be brought into compliance. We are committed to a transparent public process and appreciate your participation.”

Chair Raschko: Thank you very much. Sarah, please?

Sarah Ruether: Good evening. I’m Sarah Ruether, long range planning manager, and welcome to a public hearing on the Agricultural Advisory Board’s proposed agritourism code changes. Just to let you know, there was a supplemental memo that came out on July 19<sup>th</sup>. It explained the proposed code changes and use allowances under current code and explained how proposed code revisions would change those allowances. That is –

Unidentified Female Voice: I’m sorry. I can’t hear you. Can you speak into the microphone?

Ms. Ruether: Okay. Sorry. Yeah. The supplemental memo is on the back wall here, or you can contact me later if you'd like to read it. The Agricultural Advisory Board's proposed code changes would not change use allowances for U-Pick, farmstands, farm-based business or home-based business uses. The proposed changes would reduce the number of events permitted under the use classified as "Temporary Events." The proposed changes add a new definition of "agritourism" and new criteria for agricultural accessory use.

The next steps in the process: We will have the public hearing tonight. We have tentatively scheduled a review of public comment for September 26<sup>th</sup> and Planning Commission deliberations on October 10<sup>th</sup>. And all the supporting documents for these code changes can be found at our website below, [skagitcounty.net/departments/planningandpermit/agritourism](http://skagitcounty.net/departments/planningandpermit/agritourism) – that HTML.

And, lastly, how to comment: The comment period is now open. It's scheduled to close on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at 4:30 p.m., unless the Planning Commission chair extends the public comment period and public hearing. He will make a judgement call on that. There are three options for commenting. You can mail your comments; you can email your comments; you can provide testimony. There's also a basket where some people have put letters for their comments. You can mail them to 1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon. You can email them to [pdscomments@co.skaqit.wa.us](mailto:pdscomments@co.skaqit.wa.us). And please provide your full name and address for any submitted comments.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Are there any questions for staff?

Unidentified Female Voice: When did public comments –

Chair Raschko: From the Planning Commission. I'm sorry!

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Nobody? Okay, thank you very much.

Okay, we'll now begin the public hearing. The purpose of this public hearing –

Same Unidentified Female Voice: A point of clarification, sir?

Chair Raschko: Yes –

Same Unidentified Female Voice: I would like to have the names of the Advisory Board –

Chair Raschko: I'm sorry, but this is our meeting and do not interrupt again. Thank you.

Same Unidentified Female Voice: \_\_\_\_ opened it.

Chair Raschko: You'll have an explanation in a moment.

The purpose of this public hearing is to receive testimony on the proposed agritourism code changes. Everybody will have an opportunity to speak. And if we aren't able to finish tonight – the building officially closes at 9:30 – we'll reconvene at a date after that.

Every speaker, though, will be limited to three minutes and I ask for your cooperation on that point. After three minutes you'll be asked to stop if you do not do so yourself. That way we can

get everybody through expeditiously. This is also a time for testimony, and not debate. Please address all your comments to the Planning Commission. I'd appreciate it if there would be no applause if you like what you're hearing, and be no negative reactions if you do not like what you're hearing. This is just a chance for people to address the Planning Commission with their concerns. I really appreciate your cooperation in that regard.

Written comments on this proposal are not limited in length and they will be accepted until the conclusion of tonight's meeting.

I think the way to move through this is we have the sign-up list. I will read the first person's name and I will read the second person's name. And if that first person would take the podium and the second person would stand beside it, when the first person is finished, the second person immediately can get up and begin to speak, and I'll call on the third person to come and wait. Okay?

So comments will be recorded in the meeting transcript, by the way. So thank you for taking the time to participate. The public hearing is now open. I will call the first speaker, who is Randy Good, followed by Ellen Bynum. So Mr. Good, please.

Randy Good: My name's Randy Good, 35482 State Route 20, Sedro-Woolley. Can everyone hear? Okay.

The Agricultural Advisory Board has worked diligently in putting forward and clarifying this proposed amendment proposal for over two years with agritourism surveys, public meetings, workshops, and newspaper articles. The Board and membership is made up of representation from all aspects of the Skagit County ag community with long-time wisdom passed down from generation to generation with the knowledge and expertise on Skagit agriculture. I was one of the founding members of the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program and member of the Ag Advisory that helped develop these existing County ag codes with the intent to preserve and protect agriculture and to fortify the 1991 Right-to-Farm ordinance without interference of any kind, as required under the Growth Management Act. If Skagit County was enforcing these existing codes, we would not be here today discussing these amendments. If the existing codes had been enforced, the public would have been well aware of what was permitted or not. Now all County citizens are dealing with misinformation to mislead the community to change County code to allow non-ag activities on farmland. Non-agricultural activities such as weddings, concerts, and meetings are going to interfere with the right to farm. If these venues are allowed, agriculture in Skagit County as we know it today will be gone forever. Are we going to preserve and protect the right to farm? The failure to uphold the right to farm has resulted in five crop farmers losing their right to farm in eastern Skagit County because of the imported, non-native elk contaminating fresh and organic produce and other damages, making it impossible to raise produce or even think about a seasonal roadside stand. We encourage the Planning Commission to support the Ag Advisory Board's recommendations and adopt the proposed minor changes to be in compliance with the right to farm in Skagit County. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you, Mr. Good. Ellen Bynum, and following Ellen will be Don McMoran. I hope I said that right. Thank you.

Ellen Bynum: Good evening, Commissioners. Ellen Bynum, Friends of Skagit County – I have to look up my address; I moved – 419 South Main Street, Number 207, Mount Vernon. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Friends of Skagit County supports the proposed code changes that strengthen and clarify this county's ability to conserve farmland for the future. Conversion of any Ag-NRL-zoned land to any other use except agriculture production and soil-dependent production is currently and has been illegal since 1990. As the now-deceased president of Friends of Skagit County, June Kite, liked to remind: Skagit County cannot permit an illegal activity. So I'm going to give you some background.

In 1990, Washington State passed the Growth Management Act and they started by having Counties inventory, designate, and conserve ag lands, forestlands, and mineral lands. RCW 36.70A.180 is the chapter Implementation. It's the Intent. The next one, .030, is the Definitions and it has long-term commercial significance for ag production as its priority. The Finding of Intent goes on to reiterate that and the Planning Goals state that as well. The Guidelines to Classify state that's a priority and the Designations and the Timeline for doing that state that. 36.70A.177, Ag Lands, Innovative Zoning Techniques, and Accessory Uses list things that Skagit County has already done. We did a 40-acre minimum, we identified soils using the soils map, and the other list of things are there for you to read. I want to point you to the last section, which is number (c), and it says "Counties and cities have the authority to limit or exclude accessory uses otherwise authorized in this (sub)section (3) in areas designated as ag(ricultural) lands of long-term commercial significance." This is where we start. Skagit County in its policies, codes, and Comprehensive Plan chose to limit or exclude non-agricultural accessory uses on Ag-NRLs and the said accessory uses must be soil-dependent activities. Whether other counties chose to save farmland or not is irrelevant to Skagit County's decision, because it was decided in 1990 and reaffirmed every year that the Comp Plan is updated. Skagitonians recognize that the largest economic driver in the county agriculture and they want to comply with the GMA. Friends of Skagit. SPF, Evergreen Islands, and individuals have prevailed on the – in many appeals which sided with the protection of farmland in perpetuity.

So –

(timer rings)

Ms. Bynum: – homebased businesses also have limitations –

Chair Raschko: I'm sorry, Ellen.

Ms. Bynum: That's okay.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Ms. Bynum: I've written all of the codes and the RCWs and you guys can read them. And you need to go back and read the code and read the plan.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Ms. Bynum: Yeah.

Chair Raschko: Don McMoran, and Terry Sapp would be next, please.

Don McMoran: Thank you, Commissioners. My name is Don McMoran and I reside at 14573 Beaver Marsh Road in Mount Vernon, Washington. I'm here tonight because I serve on the Skagit Ag Advisory Board as an *ex officio* member and I've done so since 2006. During my tenure on

the Board I've seen tremendous changes to our valley and our Ag Advisory Board has elected to live and let live. We mostly would have continued down this path is it was not for the leadership in Skagit County and other organizations encouraging us to define "agritourism." Through this 2½-year process the Skagit Ag Advisory Board listened intently and gave suggestions on how to guide the process. More recently the AAB Land Use Committee went deeper into the code to find out what was there and what the preferred outcome would be for the people that farm our highly productive Skagit soils. Unfortunately I only have three minutes of time so I'll focus my attention on the area where the committee has received the largest number of complaints: wedding venues.

In our research, we learned that wedding venues on agricultural land are not a permitted use. There are two exceptions of wedding venues on Ag-NRL land but those permits – it specifically states a wedding venue would self-certify, which they have not done so. So currently there are no legal wedding venues located on Ag-NRL lands. Weddings are not farming, and it really isn't agritourism either, at least not by our definition. This puts the AAB and now will put the Skagit County Planning Commission in a very difficult position. What does one do with an illegal activity that has been in operation for decades *and* is an industry that is currently *growing* in Skagit County? Currently there are 13 wedding venues and most are well beyond the 24 temporary use events that are currently allowed.

So the starting point – realizing that every wedding venue in Ag-NRL land is illegal, what is the AAB Land Use Committee to do? Close them down? No, it's impossible. For one, it's not very neighborly and it's not a Skagit County thing to do. So let's work to make them legal. Let's also limit on how many weddings can occur and what they would look like. Our starting point is 12 calendar days per year. Why? Because we think that's as many weddings as a person would want to take on if they were actively farming. That is another big push by the AAB Land Use Committee. We refer to it as "Big A, Agriculture, little t, tourism." The AAB wants our farms to be farmed.

In closing, my understanding is you'll be hearing some complaints tonight that are counter to the AAB Land Use Committee suggestion. My first comment is: Aren't we all so fortunate to live in a country where we can have public discourse and we can allow the legislative process to decide our futures?

My last comment if the AAB knows that tonight will not be the last night that we discuss agritourism in Skagit County, and I look forward to further discussion as this policy moves through the Skagit Planning Commission –

(timer rings)

Mr. McMoran: – as well as to the Skagit County Commissioners. And I will concede no more time \_\_\_\_ thank you.

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you. Terry Sapp, and after Mr. Sapp will be Michael Trafton.

Terry Sapp: It's a pleasure, Commissioners and staff and Jack Moore, to speak to you here again. This has been – my name is, as I said, Terry Sapp – and was said. I reside at 804 Ferry Street in Sedro-Woolley. I farm in that area as well, with my wife, who is an equal partner in all of what we do there.

I had some notes that I intended to share but some of them have already been said so I'll turn my direction slightly differently to say that as a member of the Agricultural Advisory Board and one

who has worked on this project for three years – actually I took interest in it in 2017 when I began working on that and have been because of that work in this room many times with the Agricultural Advisory Board. Also enjoying meetings with the Planning Commission with no attendees whatsoever, even though invited. It's a great surprise and of great interest to see so many people suddenly here and involved.

This has been a long process. The law is part of a long process. Nobody made this up last week or two months ago or when the announcements were made. This is well established law in a large body which includes not only the fine details like how barns are to be used. I know people are upset about some language involving that. But it goes all the way up through the full code for the Agricultural-Natural Resource Lands and exceeds even the County's ability to write code because overarching all of this is the Growth Management Act, which has, as Ellen had previously said, some very clear statements to offer about what is and isn't limited – is and isn't allowed in the agricultural zones throughout this state. So the County is restricted to act still within the umbrella controls of the Growth Management Act no matter what any of us might wish to do to change that.

Now I'd like to turn to one very pivotal issue that I think you'll hear a lot about. This wasn't part of my plan but because my speech has already been taken I'm going to suggest that you attend to one very significant, pivotal point you're sure to hear about often. It was taken into consideration by the Agricultural Advisory Board. That is the distinction between activities that support a farm and activities that are part of a farm. Those activities that support a farm – let's say, to make it simple, just generate money so that a farmer has more than what –

(timer rings)

Mr. Sapp: – might be generated from the farm are endless. Endless list of possibilities.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Michael Trafton, and following will be Ken Dahlstedt, please.

Michael Trafton: My name is Michael Trafton. I reside at 13999 Trafton Road in Anacortes. I am a member of the Agricultural Advisory Board as well. And a statement came out on Friday – the changes which were developed by the Agricultural Advisory Board. I think in order to be fair, some clarification is required here. The Agricultural Advisory Board was asked to evaluate the current code as it relates to agritourism. We spent more than two years of intense study, research, and debate. We came to a number of observations that we shared with the Planning Commission. The term "agritourism" needs a better definition as it relates to the agricultural natural resource lands. We offered a well thought out definition that ties agritourism to soil-based activities related to the specific farms. There were other areas of the code we felt needed stronger verbiage or articulation in order to strengthen and put teeth into the existing code. We do not propose to change the existing code. More importantly, we recognize that enforcement of the existing code as written needs to be diligently adhered to. Our society functions smoothly when rules and regulations are adhered to and followed. We may not like all those rules but we follow them. People know where they stand and they can plan accordingly if they follow the rules. The farmers and ranchers that reside in Skagit Valley today are required to follow certain guidelines in order to manage their farms and ranches within their specific zones. Is it not too much to ask that others abide by *their* zoning rules and regulations as well? Twenty years from now Skagit County and the Skagit County farming community will look a lot different than it does today. That's a given. We don't have to look too far to the south of us or to the north of us to see examples on what it would be or what could be. What Skagit County looks like is important. That's why we're all here tonight. Is it going to be something we'll all look back on and be proud of, or is it going to be something that we look back on and we may regret?



Chair Raschko: Thank you. Mr. Dahlstedt, and following will be – the writing's difficult. I believe it's Terry Gifford. Did I get that right? Okay. Thank you.

Ken Dahlstedt: I'm Ken Dahlstedt. I reside at 3718 Shoshone Drive in Mount Vernon, former County Commissioner for 20 years. And first of all I want to thank the Planning Commission. There's a lot of people here that are going to have a lot of differing positions and no matter what decision you make, some of the folks won't be happy.

I'm a fourth generation farmer. Been here for a long time, seen all these changes. I'm going to ask one question, if that's okay, for a show of hands. How many people here have attended one of the wedding venues or funeral or any activity? So it's something that's become really popular and certainly challenging. Skagit County currently has two code enforcement officers. *Two*. And if you've been reading the newspaper lately, they don't have enough money to hire more staff. They're actually looking at cutting those departments. So whatever decision you make or however much government overreach we might create, it is not going to solve the problem.

I want to give you one example also. I know one of the Planning Commission members, one of the Ag Advisory Board members, and a general manager of one of the largest farms out in the valley. I can tell you they're not on the same page because I talked to the general manager who says their operation runs a 40-acre parcel – that's 35 acres of farmable land and a wedding venue. They've worked cooperatively in the wedding venue and that farm operation. They respect one another. They find ways to make that work that's mutually beneficial. It's kind of called the good neighbor plan. I think that there have been some definite violations for people, whether it was a photographer or somebody that's gone onto these farms and created a problem, but I can guarantee you if you make this more restrictive and think the code enforcement officers are going to resolve it, they're not. That's why there're so many currently. If you drive down Cook Road, I see there's a farm that was kind of abandoned and now is a rock, bark, and a materials supply facility. And if you drive just a little further, there's an old dairy farmstead where the huge barn has all sorts of doors to park boats and motor homes. There's half-a dozen housing units that are there that were farmworker housing that are now rentals.

If the County's going to try to shut every single thing down, it's going to be a problem. Whether you have 24 events or you have 12, if you don't have a good neighbor *one* might be too many. So that's the challenge there. I think finding these – the County doesn't have a big enough tax base right now to support what it's trying to do. These venues create millions of dollars of revenue that comes into the county. And most of these old farm buildings, there's –

(timer rings)

Mr. Dahlstedt: – homeless shelters and a lot of rundown facilities out there that they're improving. Thanks.

Chair Raschko: Thank you, Ken. Terry Gifford, followed by Brock Clements.

Terry Gifford: I'm Terry Gifford. I'm with Willowbrook Manor English Tea House and Farm Stay at 27420 Minkler Road in Sedro-Woolley. I'm wearing the hat of a farmer today. I'm also on the Skagit Tourism Bureau Board. I'm the board president of the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival. So I'm very interested and concerned of the impact that we are all here for today.

But I want to share with you the feeling that I had when I was at Central Park in New York. I was so impressed at the foresight that planners had to create a green space in the center of what was

to become a true concrete jungle. And sitting there and feeling the peace of this green space, I was grateful. We have beautiful space and people long to come here and to feel well. Just today a guest came to my farm and said, "I feel rejuvenated." The people who come here need spaces to feel well. I personally would love for our county to provide avenues for small farms and large farms to be able to provide spaces for people to feel well, rejuvenated, hope, health. We live in a world where there's so many pressures and there is need for nature to speak in his quiet tones that when the wind kisses your cheek it gives answers to difficult questions. Please allow that to be part of the heritage of our valley. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Brock Clements, and then Katie Clements, please.

Brock Clements: Hi. We're Brock and Katie Clements, the Saltbox Farm on Fir Island and the Save Skagit Farm Venues group. I want to say I'm sorry for all the emails this week but these people wanted to talk.

My family's 56 acres of farmland on Fir Island, it's been in our family for 125-plus years. It's been passed down generation to generation. I was raised on this land and I want to be here for the rest of my life. Approximately 97% of our property is dedicated to food-producing crops with our lease partner. Potatoes, corn, barley, et cetera – 97% of the property. With the other 3% we host events in the retired farm buildings. The income from these events goes to four things. The first thing is it goes to maintaining the farm. It goes to improving the barns. Unlike so many of the farms and barns we see out there today, we are rejuvenating our barns. The second place it goes is to my mother, who has worked her whole life as a small farmer and this is a way to subsidize retirement. Third it goes to Katie and I. And then fourth, and to a much greater extent, it goes to hundreds of Skagit businesses that benefit from these events. These include every restaurant, every hotel, every motel, every florist, everybody in the beauty industry, caterers, photographers, bakers, breweries, DJs, gas stations, planners, art galleries. It's not just the venues here. Thousands of people would be affected by this in hundreds of Skagit County businesses.

We can do better than what's proposed today. We do need a path that protects farming activities and the farmers and the farmland. Yes. We do it at our venue but we understand it needs to be everywhere and all the time. It can be done. There are people on both sides – and I think we're going to hear them today – that think what's being proposed is not good enough and it goes too far. It kills a wanted and needed industry. Even your survey said 68% of the public wanted it in some form with some restrictions. Please do not close public comment on this issue. Allow time for a better solution, and for any solution make sure you have a plan to pay for it. Next, my beautiful wife, Katie.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Katie Clements, and then Allen Rozema.

Katie Clements: Hi, everyone. Thank you for having us and letting us have the opportunity to speak. We've heard the word "transparent" many times. If this were so transparent – this whole process – over the years, you would not have us here tonight. I would argue most of these people are here tonight because of the group we made, Save Skagit Farm Venues. We have over 3700 signatures on a petition. I've emailed you guys over 736 emails of support of keeping these farm venues in a way that works with farms. Like my husband said, we know it can be done because we do it. Our farmer friends tell us, You guys should be the model. You're doing it right. Many people in this room have gotten married at our venue, been there for many events. Even the people opposed to this, which is kind of funny.

I also want to talk about the illegal thing. We're second generation wedding venue proprietors. This has been going on since the '90s. There were venues operating. If we're illegal, prosecute us. You can't because there isn't anything in place. So where will the money come from to prosecute us, and is it really in the best interest to prosecute tourist activities? We're talking millions of millions of dollars these people bring to Skagit, and if you do this it's going to go elsewhere. I cannot fathom how anyone on a government board wants to see that money go away. You don't even have enough money to pay employees. You're talking about layoffs. So let's just end this industry. Excuse me. It's emotional because it's my livelihood. And again, we weren't told about this. We heard through rumors. We've had to deal with lies in the press about incidents that supposedly have happened at our facilities, our friends' facilities. Lies.

You're all missing an opportunity here to realize that if you want people to care about farmland you can't remove them from it. The Ag Board, it seems pretty clear they do not want the public on farmland. That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. I didn't grow up on farmland – never cared about it. I started caring about it when I was there working on it every day. And the venues can be that conduit, that connection, that liaison between the farmers and the public. We don't really understand how people coming up from Seattle to get married in front of a cornfield is not agritourism. If that's not agritourism, what is?

We don't think that the amount of events should be limited, and if it should it should be case by case. We own a 56-acre farm that borders our property completely. Why would we have to limit? We do hope we can find a common ground, though. I'm not – nobody's saying we want to have hundreds of events. We don't want to work that much! I mean....

Lastly, you're going to – like my husband said, all the other businesses that will suffer from this. I just want to add that they're mostly women-owned businesses and we all know women have had to fight pretty hard to make it in this place, and that'll go away too.

Yeah, oh –

(timer rings)

Ms. Clements: Oh, my last thing. Why wasn't the –

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Ms. Clements: Why wasn't the tourism board or EDASC involved in any of this? Agritourism?

Chair Raschko: Allen Rozema, please, followed by John Christianson.

Allen Rozema: Good evening. I'm Allen Rozema, director of Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland. Our office address is 414A Snoqualmie Street. Thank you, Commissioners, for allowing this opportunity. I first want to thank and acknowledge the tremendous – I mean, my God – the tremendous amount of work that has been done to get us here tonight. The Ag Advisory Board, all the others. The stakeholder meetings. It's been a tremendous amount of work. So thank you to everyone.

On behalf of our board, we want to acknowledge that we feel there – we have some concerns and while we have some concerns – what we think is some ambiguous language – we would like to encourage the Planning Commission to – as part of your process – to allow public comment and more public input to help us clarify and work through some of the ambiguity that we're seeing.

We'll get some of that addressed in our written comments. And another piece of the puzzle is what we're working towards to try to find that clarity – we've been working with several ag groups, Western Washington Agricultural Association and the Farm Bureau, and we've been reaching out to multiple stakeholders right now. And tomorrow we're hoping to start a dialog again with Ag Advisory Board members, with the farm community, with the venue community – the agritourism community – to try to find some common ground, if you will, on some of these definitions and ambiguity, and if you afford some more time for public input and comment we would like to deliver that work to you to help in *your* deliberations and to help with the deliberations of the Board of County Commissioners.

So thank you, and again I want to thank everyone involved to get to where we are tonight. And with a little more public input an opportunity for some who feel maybe they've been disenfranchised by the process a little bit more time. I think (it) will give your body and the Board of County Commissioners additional information to consider. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. John Christianson, please, and Tom shields next.

John Christianson: Hi, I'm John Christianson. I have Christianson's Nursery on Best Road near La Conner. My daughter's here and my wife. My grandkids are out in the lobby. My great-grandson's out there. So I win the award for packing the generational audience tonight!

The ag tourism survey did show an overwhelming support for ag tourism. I was so encouraged by that – I have not been involved at all. I'm not – I'm busy. I work every day and I don't really have time for this. But I was real encouraged. And it never occurred to me that things would turn around as they have, based on that survey. The discussions that must have happened – unbeknownst to me – didn't reflect the survey. And the survey had solutions that seemed reasonable, too, and I can't say that I've seen those either applied. So the survey was great. I just didn't see people listening to that survey, based on the super majority of support that ag tourism had. So what we've done as owners of Christianson's Nursery, we've grown over the years. We've had it now 34 years, since 1990, and we now include potato storage sheds; we have the food hub; food distribution; and 60 acres of blueberries.

We're longtime supporters of the Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland and I think most of us here are that. We host the Skagit Valley Farmers Market on Sundays and that runs June through October, Sunday, from 10 to 2.

(audience laughter)

Mr. Christianson: In the last 34 years we have witnessed the loss of so many old barns. Many of you are my age. Some of you are older. All of you have seen this. It is a sorrow that I – whenever I see a barn falling down I think gosh, can't somebody do something? Well, let's face it. Grain, hay, horses – it's done. Those barns don't have that use anymore. What can we do to preserve these barns? And they're being replaced by ugly metal buildings that look very industrial. There's no image of Skagit Valley farmland that shows ugly metal buildings. It's always beautiful old barns. And those barns are going to be gone in many of our lifetimes. They're simply going to be gone, unless something happens. We have this opportunity to use these old barns for something. Repurposing them and certainly wedding venues seems to be the path that allows one to make improvements that can't be done with modest income farm tours – are great – education's great. None of these things make any money, but it promotes your farm. Indirectly you profit. But honestly, the venue thing allows you to have the funds to reroof the dang barn! That's the

beginning. Then you've got to do that top loft where all the hay used to be, and then you work your way up.

So anyways, I really feel like, you know –

(timer rings)

Mr. Christianson: – our nursery has preserved many of these old buildings – and I want to thank you. Sorry.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Tom Shields, and after that Chris – I believe it is Dariotis? Got it? Okay, thank you.

Tom Shields: Tom Shields, 31683 Pipeline Road, Sedro-Woolley. Me and five other partners bought the Eagle Haven Winery a year-and-a-half ago. Spent a little over a million dollars. You drive up the beautiful Highway 20 and you see this beautiful sign that says "Tourism Activity Next Right – Eagle Haven Winery." And then now all of a sudden we're saying that we're breaking the law and we're not following the rules. Well, there was two owners previous to us that they seemed to get by just fine. We are also in an old dairy barn. That barn has been restored. It looks very nice. We actually had a memorial service there today for Pola Kelley, a pillar of this community, and I think that we should have the right to have that. It is very, very hard for us to make it on the apples and the grapes that we grow. We've added 1700 grape plants. We're working with 1100 different apple trees. I usually don't get home until 10 or 11 o'clock every night and my wife's not very happy with me. But it is a path that we chose and it is very surprising to know that the County had these rules. I guess I'm sorry that we didn't look into that. And why didn't somebody warn us not to spend your million dollars on a winery because they're not permitted in Skagit County? We don't have very many weddings. We do have events there. We have fund raisers for cancer patients. We earned a little over \$20,000 for the Boys and Girls Club last year. Hopefully we'll be allowed to earn them another \$30 or 40,000 this year. It's not all about us. We try to give back to the community. I love farming. I love the farmland. I think that we would all be willing to preserve that land into farmland. We don't want to see anything else happen to it. We want it to stay farmland. And we're trying very, very hard to farm it, but it does not make us enough income.

So who's to determine what activities would be considered related to farm-ag business? When we're on the Festival of Family Farms, we're growing over 200 pumpkins for the kids to come in and paint. There's no charge for the pumpkins, there's no charge for the painting. To try to get other people involved in farming – and I think we're doing a good job of trying to help educate people that way. We try to teach them what happens when apple tree from the seed through the pruning through the grafting. I just think that it's a shame that we have all these issues with this County when we don't want to hurt farmland. We want to support farmland. We're here to support farmland. And I honestly believe we are farmers. My fingers are dirty. I worked on the farm last night, the night before, the night before, the night before. I work there every day very, very hard. We're trying very, very hard to be good farmers and good stewards. We've heard no complaints from any of our neighbors. If there *are* some going to the County, we certainly haven't heard of any, and most of our neighbors come over and like to visit with us. We had two of them walk in today. They noticed we were having a memorial service. They just kind of said hello and they walked off. But, I mean, they actually love to come over and see us. Terry is actually a neighbor of ours. She has people that comes over –

(timer rings)

Mr. Shields: – from her place to ours and the other way. Thank you very much for your time.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Okay, Mr. Dariotis. After him would be –

Chris Dariotis: Thank you, and good pronunciation. My name is Chris Dariotis.

Chair Raschko: And then Scott Postuma.

Mr. Dariotis: I live at 17389 Hulbert Road, Mount Vernon. It's about a mile east of the roundabout in La Conner. I just have a small, 18-acre farm where we have a small farmstand that we sell our vegetables at. I'm not like a big producer of a venue or anything like that, but I support those people who do have venues because they need a way to generate an income for themselves.

And I've written these comments and sent them to you, but I'll just try to read them – a few paragraphs from them: It was great expectations of a more expansive future for tourism in the Magic Skagit. I attended several of the Planning Commission meetings and spoke at some of them, but never did I hear the Commissioners or those running those meetings discuss the possibility of these drastic changes to the code. These are all new things. I had these expectations of what it would be like to have agritourism in the Magic Skagit, because when I was a young man I travelled in Tuscany, Italy, and I was learned by the invitations to experience long-term stays. They had, like, farm stays of a week at a historic vineyard in Tuscany to participate in the harvest, to learn about cooking on the farm and from the crops from the farm, and just to enjoy the beauty of sitting in the Tuscan sun. When I purchased my 18 acres, I envisioned the one day we would see such experiences in the Skagit Valley. I spoke at those Planning meetings of the difficulty of producing an income from a small farming operation that I've continued to pursue in retirement and suffering from partial disability. But mostly I listened to the other speakers. I learned that there were many people who, like me, had visions for what this Skagit Valley could become. Not only industrial scale farms producing the major crops of seeds, potatoes, corn, and hay and barley – and I mention barley because that's the new hip crop that now is in disfavor because the malting facility has closed. So now all the people who have invested in the –

(timer rings)

Mr. Dariotis: – barley crops have to find something new.

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you. Scott Postma, and then Joey Van Pelt, please.

Scott Postma: My name is Scott Postma. And I'm actually speaking to you as an outsider of Skagit County. I do not live in the county. I live in Sioux County, Iowa. So every year our family will take a two-week vacation and every single year they all and always want to come to Skagit County. Now the primary reason for that is that we have family that lives here, but at the same time this is one of the most gorgeous counties in the country. And I've had a chance to travel throughout my life. You guys have something so incredibly special here. It's mind-blowing. A lot of people from our area in Iowa have been to Skagit County and it's not because they want to farm. It's because they want to visit and experience the county through tourist activities.

Now I have no doubt that farming is incredibly important and is a major income driver and a way of life for many of the Skagitonians. I grew up on a farm, my family in Skagit County, you know, works on the farm also. So I understand the importance of it. At the same time, what makes this county special also is just all the different tourist-type activities that are possible. So when you've got things like wedding venues where these wedding invitations go out – all across the country,

okay? – and these people end up attending the wedding venue in Skagit County with the Cascade Mountains in the backdrop with Mount Baker – right? They spend their money in the county and they leave with incredible memories. And some of those people eventually will come back year after year if that’s what they desire because they had such a good time. Some of my best memories growing up are the times we spent in Skagit County.

And I would just like to encourage the County Commission to creatively think of ways that agriculture and tourist activities can coexist. And part of the reason that that’s important is because while agricultural activities are key, there are going to be times that agricultural activities in the county are going to be stressed, because that’s the way cycles of economic activity work. And you want to have layers of activity for income from the County perspective that allow you to continue to maintain your budgets. And I would just want to charge you guys to think of a way and work hard – and it’s probably going to take more time, but figure out how you guys can work things out so that things like wedding venues and other activities are able to coexist with farms. Because if you can do that in a way that’s unique and in a way that works, it can become the model –

(timer rings)

Mr. Postma: – for how many other counties in the United States can do it.

Chair Raschko: Thank you very much. Joey Van Pelt, followed by Marsha Knutzen, please.

Joey Van Pelt: Hi everyone. My name’s Joey Van Pelt and I own Skagit Bridal Hair and Makeup. I wrote a little something here. I moved back from living in Seattle for over 10 years to start my onsite bridal hair and makeup company. At first local business for me was slow but soon business picked up and I was able to build a team of local female freelancers. Many of these freelancers are not only female but they are moms and the bridal industry for bridal makeup and hair works with their schedules being moms.

We work venues such as Saltbox, Christianson’s Nursery, Vanderveen Farm, Maplehurst, and Grand Willow. If the recommended restrictions are put into place, not only will you be cutting into venues’ much needed income, but you will also be displacing income of female business owners like myself and many others. Please let us go back to the drawing board and find a solution that works not only for farmers but also local female business owners. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Unidentified Male Voice: Marsha Knutzen doesn’t wish to speak.

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you. So Mikala Staples, followed by Lacey Larsen, please.

Mikala Staples Hughes: Good evening, Commissioners. My name’s Mikala Staples Hughes. I reside at 18065 Skagit City Road. I stand before you today with a heartfelt plea: To preserve not only our farmland but also the very essence of agricultural operations that sustain our way of life. As an executive in the agricultural industry and the wife of a fourth generation Fir Island farmer, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that threaten our agricultural legacy. Today farmers face real risks and it’s not just about preserving the land. It’s about safeguarding the very ability to perform essential agricultural activities. Lawsuits, negative public perception, and burdensome regulations threaten their livelihoods daily. Consider a farmer with 4,000 acres of land and an average field size of maybe 50 acres. That operator is managing at least 80 individual fields that are complete with their own set of challenges, landlords, and neighbors. Farmers lose operational

hours to individual requests by neighbors to not spray when they are home, or they choose to skip an area of a field when digging spuds because the dust could ruin the neighbor's barbecue. Or maybe they have to skip a pole with a big gun when they're irrigating because vendors are setting up chairs at the neighboring wedding venue. These challenges are paired with the already complicated nature of farming as we are at the mercy of wind, rain, and crop maturity.

As it pertains to wedding venues, let us be transparent in confronting the previously unspoken truth. All have been operating illegally within the Ag-NRL. We must recognize the County's past enforcement shortcomings and that now is the time to rectify these issues and establish stringent regulations that provide a legitimate pathway for the deserving and diligent venue operators. To achieve this, I would propose robust additions to the existing code governing administrative special use permits for temporary events in the Ag-NRL permitting 24 calendar events per year. These recommendations strike a decisive yet delicate balance supporting both our farmland preservation goals and thriving businesses within our region. Some suggested changes may include requiring annual reviews after permits are issued to ensure ongoing compliance; requiring permit holders' active presence during events; or including agricultural representation in the review of new venue permit applications to ensure consideration of the unique needs of our industry. To further bolster our farmland preservation efforts; and to mitigate challenges posed to the farming community, I would suggest the venues operating in the Ag-NRL be subject to a farmland preservation tax payable to Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program. This investment will strengthen our resolve to secure the future of our cherished farmland for generations to come. Together, these recommendations harmonize the needs that protect our farmers, their operations, and our County's 300-million-dollar annual agricultural economy. We have an unprecedented opportunity to leave a legacy for future generations.

(timer rings)

Ms. Staples Hughes: As we move forward, I implore you to make decisions –

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you. Thank you very much. Lacey Larsen, followed by Jessie Anderson.

Lacey Larsen: Hi there. My name's Lacey Larsen. I am previously known as Lacey Robertson. I'm 32 years old, born and raised a Conway girl so I have a lot of that Skagitonian pride that we all know and love here. I am a wedding planner. I own Evergreen Weddings. So I have a very unique perspective on this side of the argument. As a wedding planner, I see couples and their plans from start to finish. I see who they hire, the decision making process, and the money that they spend to make their day happen.

Now I have to point out there could be some humor here because I really can't imagine two more vastly different industries fighting for protection and space to operate – farmers and wedding planners, right? And wedding venues. So let's just laugh for a second. But from the event industry side of things, all we want truly is for the chance to be heard and seen for the growing powerhouse that this industry has become. I don't know how much you know about weddings but the industry within the United States is a multibillion-dollar industry. And I'm going to run through some numbers on what kind of money gets brought into Skagit. But first and foremost I just want to state that where a lot of our frustration lies on the event side of things is the immense lack of effort from the County, from the farmers to have a conversation through all of these years of studying. Like, I respect how much work has gone into these proposals, the studies, all of that, but there was a lack of effort to have a conversation for those that would be directly affected by this – namely the wedding venues.



So with that said, I just want it to be known I speak for all people within the event industry. Nobody is against protected farmland. If you're from here, you understand how important farmland is to our county. So let that be known. Nobody is against it. But what I want to talk through right now is just education and background on what the wedding industry brings to Skagit County.

So earlier it was said that there's 13 venues here. As far as I know, there's actually 21. If you want to count venues that are out in Anacortes. There's the Hope Beach Club out in La Conner. So it spans all from Anacortes and Bow and Conway. And so if we take these 21 venues – I talked with these owners and it's been determined that they host about 30 weddings a year, so that's 630 weddings. Follow my math here. On average, couples spend anywhere from \$30 to 50,000 on their wedding day, and so that gives us a range of 18.9 to 31.5 *million* dollars that's brought in for these small businesses that operate within the event industry. And that doesn't include money that's spent on guest lodging, where they're dining out, if they're shopping small for a gift for the couple. Like, this is a luxury industry. People want to spend money on it.

Secondly, on average a couple will hire roughly 10 businesses to make their wedding day happen. Brock Clements ran through a standard list – caterers, planners, bakers, the venue itself, florists; the list goes on.

(timer rings)

Ms. Larsen: Can I finish real quick?

Chair Raschko: No. I'm sorry. It's not fair to everybody else.

Ms. Larsen: That's okay!

Chair Raschko: Thank you, though. Jessie Anderson? And then Aletha Kelley, and then the name looks scratched out. Does that person wish to speak?

Unidentified Female Voice: She's gone.

Chair Raschko: Oh, she's gone. Well, then we'll have Janie Kelley next. Thank you. Please go ahead.

Jessie Anderson: All right. Good evening, everyone. My name is – thank you. My name is Jessie Anderson and I live at 18495 Dike Road in south Mount Vernon. I grew up at Hayton Farms on Fir Island and married my husband, Jeffrey Anderson, who is also a lifelong Skagit County resident from another generational farm family. In 2008 we bought his grandparents' homestead – Richard and Pat Smith – and it was a 5.75-acre portion of their family farm. Our farm, Maplehurst Farm, includes a historic home, a shop building that had previously been abandoned by the family farm because their farm outgrew it, a field, mature trees, gardens, and a spare lot where a neighbor's home once stood but the family farm had torn it down and it had been converted to a farm access route and parking for farm equipment. We also lease 10 acres from Jeffrey's mom and aunt for farming. This year we're farming orchard grass and planting berries. We've not taken any farmland out of farming and have nothing but respect for the farmers in the Skagit farming community, which we are a part of.

When our first daughter was born in 2010, we began hosting some events at our farm as a way to supplement our income. Our farm venue immediately filled a void within the community. We began hosting weddings, memorials, school auctions, charity fundraisers, youth group meetings,

high school proms, company meetings, and much more. Seeing the look on people's faces when they attend events at our property is extremely rewarding. For some of our guests it is the first time that they have spent time in our county, seen a working farm, or learned where their food is grown. This can be an emotional experience and I've seen many people moved to the point of tears when they are struck by the beauty that surrounds up and the opportunity to learn about the Skagit Valley and its rich history.

Skagit County's new proposed code seems to deem agritourism as incompatible with agriculture. Agritourism businesses like farm venues bring economic benefits like keeping local populations employed while promoting knowledge and an appreciation of the land and agriculture. Limiting the potential for creative revenue generation on small farms will only add to the trend of farmland being abandoned, developed, or taken over by larger farms or companies. Young farmers need access to land and multiple revenue streams to keep small farms operational. An oversight of the code proposal is that it doesn't give –

(timer rings)

Ms. Anderson: Thank you for your time. Thank you for listening.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Janie Kelley, and Jessica Nguyen-Davey.

Janie Kelley: I'm kind of emotional, probably because I'm really pregnant. But I'm feeling like a lot of things are happening in this room! I didn't plan any – I'm a DJ! I can talk loud – just so you guys know! No, I'm here because I've been in this event industry for about nine years. This has been a business that I've grown. Probably two-thirds or more come from Skagit. I do a lot of work at Maplehurst, Wisteria Gardens, Saltbox Barn, Vanderveen. I know a lot of different faces in here and I'm super, super supportive of continuing to somehow bridge the gap of preserving farms and continuing our livelihood as vendors.

One thing I wanted to say is on any given weekend day, we could see an average of 210 different businesses working these weddings. These businesses span from Whatcom County all the way down to King County, with the vast majority of them residing right here in Skagit. So, you know, I don't have a lot of – I'm not a math person, I'm not – you know, the codes; I have a hard time following a lot of different things. But from my own experience this has allowed me to continue to grow my family. I love serving in this community. I love Skagit County. I love all the people that that I've met. And if we could somehow just work on a plan that somehow appeases the farmland people and us in the event industry, like, that would be amazing because this is – you know, my future is in this business. And I would love to see everyone get what they want in the end. So thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Jessica Nguyen-Davey, and then, please, Andy Mayer.

Jessica Winn (Nguyen-Davey): Hi, My name is Jessica Winn. Address is 19526 East Hickox Road. And I just recently purchased a 50-acre farm with my husband and my brother. An awkward time to buy a farm. With this farm, what I want the Commissioners to consider is the barrier to entry with new farmers. When you have – today farmland is extremely expensive. It's hard to start. If you are not a generational farmer it's a first generational farm, like ground zero. These properties need significant restoration. My barn needs an overhaul, my greenhouses need an overhaul. And when you are trying to consider code changes it's not about necessarily today's needs but tomorrow's. And how do you create code that's sustainable for a generation for years to come? And how do you continue to support that? You *have* to have diversification of income. Fifty acres

sounds like a lot but 50 acres of potatoes won't support what this property needs for longevity for it to be a producing farm. That is our goal. We want to farm. Obviously there's other resources available on properties like this, and those are going to be needed. That's how you're going to support these micro-farms, farms like this. So I just ask that consideration be around to a new generation of farmers in Skagit County.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Andy Mayer and –

Andy Mayer: Hi, Andy Mayer, president and CEO –

Chair Raschko: One moment, please. After Andy we'd have a – I believe it's Michele Betts. Did I get that right?

Mr. Mayer: Andy Mayer, president/CEO of the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce. Trying to come up with a policy that everyone agrees on appears to be difficult. Well, as you're hearing, so is farming. Agriculture in Skagit County has continually been evolving over the past century thanks to changes in market demand, wars, weather, droughts, floods, and many other factors. Sometimes it has led to prosperity; sometimes not. Farmers have typically relied on off-farm income in order to survive. Some have also used agritourism to make the difference between barely getting by and being able to support families for generations to come.

In this process that we're discussing, some of the steps identified as important have been reflecting what the community wants, providing a path for those not in compliance to become so, and to have code that can be reasonably and equitably enforced going forward. I don't think these things have been addressed yet. Instead, what is proposed is all about prohibiting or severely limiting certain activities. The limitation of special events to 12 per year, as an example, is arbitrary, as some of *you* discussed in your previous deliberation.

And the stipulation that agritourism be incidental and subordinate opens up a big can of worms because it is nearly impossible to measure. Also the proposed policies could endanger long-standing *permitted* agritourism activities that contribute significantly to the economy of our area if the proposed codes are interpreted in certain ways.

The Chamber's suggestion is that you take a couple of steps back and consider proposals that are inclusive and allow appropriate and significant economic activity. They have been developed. And yes, they might depend on neighbors communicating with each other, but I think they can do it.

So such proposals need to be comprehensive, not piecemealed as is currently happening. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. We would have next, please, Jake Buganski, and after that, please, Amy Frye.

Jake Buganski: Good evening. My name's Jake Buganski. I'm the CEO of the Skagit Tourism Bureau. Our offices are located at 1932 East College Way.

I came here from the east coast. I've been in the tourism industry for my entire career. I've run a few other tourism bureaus in other locations. I was a former state tourism director in the state of New Jersey. And on the private side of the industry I've worked with destinations all over the country. I was enamored with this place the minute I arrived, and I was enamored with it because

of the things that we're talking about here today: because of the bucolic, agricultural landscapes that we as a tourism bureau are here to preserve. It does not benefit us in promoting this area to do anything that jeopardizes the character or integrity of this place as a destination, and everything that we do and are in support of reflects that sentiment.

The Tourism Board and I came up with some agritourism policy positions that we had discussed a few months back and, I think like a lot of the folks in the room here today, kind of have become confused along the way in the process in terms of where there were opportunities for us to articulate those positions. Our position was pretty comprehensive, but two of the main bullet points there were that any policy decisions that are made should absolutely do nothing to jeopardize the character or the integrity of this place as a destination. But the second most important on the list was that any policy decisions that are made should be made based on research and best practices from other agricultural communities. And I think that we've thought throughout the process with the proposed policy options that the process would include that type of thinking. I think that where we are now is at a point where we're just confused about how we got from the place where the policy options that were presented are reflected in what the proposed changes that we're seeing are. I think that what we're looking at is something probably closest to the current policy option and I think that that was one that did not have much support, based on the surveys from the public hearings. And so, like we've heard from a few of the other folks in the room tonight, a few of the other organizations in positions like ours, I think we'd be best served to take a couple steps back. We are here as a resource to be a part of this conversation that we've not been a large part of prior to this. We have resources available to be able to contribute to the conversation. And I would just welcome you to avail yourself of those resources and suggest that we take a couple steps back in the process and think about how we got to where we are.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Amy Frye, and then Nick Cecotti.

Unidentified Male Voice: Tim, I'd just like to clarify for people coming up to speak, if you stand on the feet marks and stay back from the mic it sounds good and if you lean into a mic it sounds terrible. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Amy Frye: Hi, my name is Amy Frye. I live and farm at 8855 Ershig Road in Bow, Washington. I own and operate Boldly Grown Farm. My husband and I run the farm. We have two little kids. This is our ninth year of farming in Skagit. We do wholesale certified organic vegetables, we're salmon-safe-certified. We were able to buy the property on Ershig two years ago and it was a long, hard road to get to that point but we're happy to be there. Many of you know the property. You've seen us basically take an old, derelict farm and try to turn it into something that's a community resource. We have a little farmstand onsite, and we're happy to be there.

And I didn't really have prepared comments. I'm going to sidestep the venue question for the most part. But I do think that, at least from what I see, the voices of farms like mine have not really been part of the discussion. It seems like it's mostly bifurcated into the events versus the old boys' club – no offense, it's a turn of phrase. But it is, you know, mostly boys. I do feel like there is room at the table for farms like mine, first generation farms who are excited about farming. We grow vegetables as our primary income but, man, it is hard to make a living as a first generation farm in Skagit. It was *not* cheap to buy the farm. We got it by the skin of our teeth. We only could buy it because it was a derelict farm that needed a lot of work. We're really happy to be stewards of that property now, but we really also need to be able to find creative revenue streams to be able to farm into the future. I don't exactly know what that looks like. I don't want to touch weddings

with a 10-foot pole personally, but I appreciate those of you who do because a lot of us get married. So life cycle events are a really important part so I do want to acknowledge that.

I do think – I guess if I start to ramble too much my long story short is I tend to agree with Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland that the comment period needs to be extended. There needs to be some more voices heard. I would like to see there be some more farms like mine at the table. And I don't think we need to recreate the wheel. I think there are examples elsewhere in the region, in the country where agritourism can be done in a way that doesn't degrade the surrounding farmland, so let's look at those. I think as someone who's been following this process the entire time, I do have questions about what happened to the work that BERK Consulting did. Was it thrown out? What happened there? It feels like a lot of that initial input just kind of went away. So these are just questions I have as someone who's kind of been watching the process happen.

Yeah, so I would in general like to extend the comment period. And I think one thing that hasn't come up tonight is, you know, for farms like mine who, again, try to make our living on vegetables, we want to do a few extra things that the part in the proposed change about limiting the public from farm buildings is concerning. So if I have my CSA members out to my farm for a dinner because they want to see where their food is grown and it starts to rain, I can't bring them into my hoop house to get under cover? So I just think there's a bit –

(timer rings)

Ms. Frye: – of concerning language there. So I look forward to hearing where the discussion goes.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Nick Cecotti and then Suzanne Rohner.

Nick Cecotti: Nick Cecotti. I have Lefeber Turf Farm and Vanderveen Wedding Venue. It's all been said 10 times. To me the hard part is I'm not sure you guys are very receptive. I'm sorry to say. I could see it in your faces in the beginning. And from my perspective, I tried to get a permit. I was met with opposition. It wasn't to help me get there. It was no, you can't do it. I don't like those kind of things so I bucked the system. To me, public service people are to help us get there. I look at the multi-generations. They've kind of got it made – not "made," but, I mean, they've got a good start, they got a good foothold. The first generations don't. That's me. I don't believe you're going to do anything with a 20 or 50-acre farm in straight ag that's going to create a good living for anybody anymore. So I believe in protecting the farmland first. I believe that if you have existing buildings and you can make something of them, you should be allowed to do that. If you can make a little more living. I looked up my last two years of taxes. My lowest piece of property went up 20%, the highest 50%. My wage didn't go up that much. I got to do a little something extra to make ends meet if I'm going to stay here. I would love to do that. I spent my whole life here. Fifty years I've been on this farm. But I'm a pimple on a gnat's ass. I need extra avenues to make an income on that. I don't have thousands of acres anymore. I just have, you know, 100, 150, 20 acres – whatever. You *need* other avenues. There's not enough that can be produced on 20 acres of dirt. I have personally not seen any problem interacting with any of these other farmers. I've not heard anybody personally complaining to me. We've had many, many events. People love the farm. I'm sure it can work. I would like to see you guys try and help us get there so we can all keep it. That's what we're after, is keeping our farms going. So for the little guy: Let them do something with their land. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Suzanne Rohner, then –

Suzanne Rohner: Suzanne Rohner, Anacortes, Washington. When in doubt –

Chair Raschko: – Linnea McCord next.

Ms. Rohner: – look at what’s already on the regulations.

Chair Raschko: Now who’s who?

Ms. Rohner: Suzanne Rohner, Anacortes, Washington. When in doubt, look at what’s already on the books. This is a WAC – sorry, it’s an RCW from 2007. And by necessity I have to talk really fast. And it’s outdated statistics in here but it’s still relevant.

The legislature finds that “maintaining the capacity to provide adequate food and fiber resources is essential to the long term sustainability of a state’s citizens and economy. The nation’s population has reached 300 million and will continue to increase for the foreseeable future. Further, the world population is now over six billion and is projected to reach nine billion by the year 2050. In Washington state the population’s growing by over one million people every decade with much of this growth occurring in western Washington. This growth is increasing the competition for land, not only for housing but also associated retail, commercial, industrial, and leisure industries. The legislature finds that many once productive agricultural areas in western Washington have been overtaken and irreversibly converted to non-agricultural uses. Other agricultural areas in the state have diminished to the point that they are dangerously close to losing the land mass necessary to be economically viable. Further, only a limited number of areas in western Washington still retain a sufficient agricultural land base and the necessary agricultural infrastructure to continue to be economically viable both in the short term and the long term. The legislature recognizes that because this significant decline has occurred in less than half a century it is imperative that mechanisms be established at the state level to focus attention, take the action needed to retain agricultural land, and ensure the opportunity for future generations to farm these lands. The legislature finds that history shows that previous advanced civilizations in the world were founded on highly productive agricultural lands and food production systems. But when the land or its productivity was lost, the civilizations declined. In contrast, other civilizations have existed for millennia because they maintain their agricultural land base, its productivity, and economic conditions sufficient to maintain stewardship of their land. The legislature finds that there is a finite quantity of high quality agricultural land and often this agricultural land is viewed as expendable resource. The legislature finds that the retention of agricultural land is desirable not only to produce food, livestock, and other agricultural products, but also to maintain our state of economy and preferable environmental conditions. For these reasons and because it is essential that agricultural production be sufficient to meet the needs of our growing population, commitment to the retention of agricultural land should be reflected at the state policy level by the creation of an Office of Farmland Preservation to support the retention...”

(timer rings)

Ms. Rohner: – “of farmland and the viability of farming for future generations.” Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Ms. McCord, and then Val Mullen.

Linnea McCord: Good evening. My name is Linnea McCord and I live in 6478 Bayview in Anacortes. And I want to introduce a subject that not's been discussed here and it's called food insecurity. Americans take their food for granted. They're not watching what's going on all around the world. They're not watching what's happening to the farms and they're not watching to the Ukraine, which is the breadbasket. I really love seeing everybody here. I'm a retired attorney and college professor in a business school, and I hope that we take this opportunity to start that conversation. But we have to know what the rules are and we have to know the vantage point. What you're saying is that you can't make a living. That's right. The very rich and the very poor has become a very wide gap in America over decades. You're right. There is something wrong.

The other thing I will tell you is I spent 31 years in California, 15 years in Texas, and in California I saw the deterioration. I saw it happen. And you're California North. You have to be very careful what you do, how you do. Take all that energy, but you need to understand this is not a conversation where you get to be considered as an equal person at the table unless you first understand you will be sued, they will be sued. Agritourism activity is defined (as) "any activity carried on at a farm or ranch whose primary business activity whose primary business activity is agriculture or ranching and that allows members of the general public for recreational or entertainment or educational purposes to view or enjoy rural activities including but not limited to farming, ranching, historic cultural and onsite educational programs. Recreational farming programs can include hospitality services, guided and self-guided tours, petting zoos, farm festivals, corn mazes, harvest \_\_ operations, hayrides, barn parties, horseback riding, fishing, and camping."

When the law gives you the examples, they're telling you the parameters. Wedding venues are not on that for a reason. Here's the other thing I'm going to tell you. I had students tell me they spent 40 or 50,000 dollars on a wedding, to which I responded: You're in a *business* school. How much did you borrow for your *education*? There's a *problem* mathematically in the country. We together have to figure this out because we're all sitting on the Titanic together. This is not something that you can change. This is not about them deciding to put you at the table. This is the statute. It's federal law. It's state law. It's to protect farmland. There is something wrong. Take a look at the New Green Deal. Take a look at the regulations. Take a look at what the price of oil is. Take a look what the price of groceries is. Take a look at what the taxes. Take a look at the big picture. What we have to do is talk to each other about what is actually going on in our communities. I love it here.

(timer rings)

Ms. McCord: It's gorgeous. I hope we do that.

Chair Raschko: Thank you very much. Judy Billings, followed by Miles Baron. Oh, excuse me – Val Mullen. Are you Val Mullen?

Val Mullen: Right, right. Yes. Right. Val Mullen from \_\_ Road in Sedro-Wooley. My concern is for small farms as we have a small fourth generation family farm near Lyman. I, like just about everybody in here, is in – I'm in favor of saving farming in Skagit County. I'm also in favor of keeping farmland for farming rather than just event centers. Farmland, in my opinion, should not be sold to anyone that is not farming. If a piece of land is zoned as farmland and no farming is occurring, that property should probably be rezoned appropriately.

I'm concerned about this proposed code change for small farms, though. This code change appears to target places where the codes have been abused with activities not related to agriculture. This zoning change is more regulations, rules, and it's not clear how this will affect the small farmer. In my opinion, more rules and regulations don't really save anything. The small farmer has to compete with big farmers, cheap products that are flooding the market from other states and countries, many rules and regulations we already have in this state and this county. It's not clear how this code change will help any of these issues for the small farmer. It's also unclear how it will be enforced. If I have a small farm and I'm trying to make a living as a farmer, cutting the number of agritourism days from 24 to 12 could hurt my chances of making a go of it. I find this code change is rushed. The definition of "agritourism" is still too ambiguous, and it may need more conversation. It adds more costs, regulations to the small farmer, and I'm not convinced that it will accomplish the goal of saving farming. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Judy Billings, and then Miles Baron.

Judy Billings: Judy Billings, 14455 Gibraltar Road in Anacortes. Throughout the world farm production is under assault. Our main concern is food. I like to eat. It's a big concern of mine! Our Skagit soil is fertile and needs to be used for growing food. Ag land is farmland, not event land. I understand the constraints of small business, having run a small business for 40 years myself. I understand the need of a small grower to supplement the farm income. This can be accomplished by means other than event centers. I discovered one ag event center that has had almost 350 wedding events in six years, and that includes two Covid years. So that's about 59 events a year. I could not find any special use permit for this event center. Wedding event centers are a business of their own. They have nothing to do with farm production. I feel the Agricultural Advisory Board is being extremely generous even allowing 12 wedding events on ag property. There should be none.

There are many ways to supplement income, especially for hobby farmers: petting zoos, riding lessons, farmstands, tasting shops, U-Pick it, et cetera. Functions that are connected to the soil, to agriculture. A farmer is receiving a tax discount on their acreage to produce food because it's important to society. The balance of the discounted tax amount does not just disappear. It's paid for by everyone else in that district, so the government gets their full amount. For a wedding venue to have a property tax discount makes no sense. They do not contribute to food production. Some farms are being turned into event centers period.

Developers all over the world are destroying farmland and paving it over. Preserving the 88,000 acres of rich soil in Skagit County should be the only concern of this body. That's all there is, and once it's gone it's gone forever. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Miles Baron, and then Rosemary Kidane, please.

Miles Baron: Hi. My name is Miles Baron, 1510 Windsor Drive, Mount Vernon, co-owner of Avenue Catering. And I came here with one question that I still don't understand the answer to completely because it *is* ambiguous. What is the current and/or proposed definition of "agritourism"? And does it include venues that just happen to be located on a farm or are they considered separate agritourism and outside the scope of the proposal? After hearing much of the comments tonight, I got an education, so I'll relay this real quickly.

I grew up in a small town and by that I mean I grew up in a village within a town that had 4,000 people on a farm. The two industries – three industries – were twine, farming, and summer resorts. There were 17 summer resorts, 20-something farms. Middlesex County, Connecticut was the



largest land area county in the state and most of it was farming, the rest twine or summer resorts. Zoning was strictly enforced. That town is unrecognizable today because the zoning was enforced that only farming happened here, and if you owned a farm you couldn't sell anything else. If you were working for the twine mill only the twine mill and, you know, if you had a summer resort you probably couldn't even have a vegetable garden.

I was very encouraged when we moved out here, I think, 17, 18 years ago to see venues – to see farms, rather, with venues to help support the farm. To say that a wedding venue has nothing to do with the farm that it's on, as a caterer in the background seeing what they're doing, you know, as we come in to set up, that can't be farther from the truth. That wedding obviously supports the farm and makes it so that farm can exist. And as an industry that supports the wedding industry and we support farming, of course. We buy our potatoes locally, we buy our vegetables locally whenever we can. Reducing the number of events at these places to the point where they won't be able to sustain their farm because they have a few weddings, that just doesn't seem correct. And then having worked for the County for a couple of years, going out with a proposal that basically cuts off your nose to spite your face by reducing your tax base and reducing the amount of income to other businesses like myself who pay taxes, just – there doesn't seem to be any logic. As someone mentioned, I think you have to go back to the beginning. A law that – I recognize –

(timer rings)

Mr. Baron: – law in 1991 is outdated.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Ms. Kidane, and then Jackie Martin.

Rosemary Camp Kidane: Hello, my name is Rosemary Camp Kidane. I'm a lifelong resident of Mount Vernon. My family were territorial settlers of Fir Island and they've continued farming there since before Washington was a state.

In your summary of your staff report it says that you are placing restrictions on private use of land basically. This is a *taking*. You are *taking something* from the people who own this land. Now Mr. Christianson rightfully pointed out that the agritourism really was encouraged in Skagit County, and a lot of you people went into business because agritourism was promoted in this county. And we've had advisory people come up here and tell us that we're not changing the law. We're just doing what we *should* have done. But because it wasn't done properly all of you are being punished for it now and you're going to pay taxes to buy these permits and you're going to be told because you haven't told us the uses that oh, that's not a use, and then they'll have to do another permit and another tax. It's not fair to people out here.

I've met or heard a few of the Advisory Board people. I still don't know who they all are or whether of them have a venue that sells something that's small. Because it appears to me this is big farmers versus small farmers. If you have a big mono crop you don't want any of these little guys getting in your way of your tractors on the road or your irrigation. But there's a lot more small farmers than there are big farmers in Skagit County.

Mr. Christianson pointed out that agritourism came up and that a report was given and that three policy options were outlined and another no-action alternative in March of 2022. I would like to know what the three other options were because when no action was taken this Advisory Board decided that they would work on it. Well, again, who's the Advisory Board? Have they any venues in our area?

You've also said that all events must be accessory to agriculture use and incidental or subordinate to the working farm. Every single person who has a venue out there that's working on a farm, everything goes to keeping that going. You all know that. And I would say we are not California. I'm sorry. I understand that you think the Growth Management Act covers all this but –

(timer rings)

Ms. Kidane: – when you change definitions you have changed the law. And I think we have the right –

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Ms. Martin, please. After Ms. Martin, Larry Jensen.

Jacqueline Martin: All right. My name is Jacqueline Martin, 746 West \_\_\_ Place, Burlington. We have heard a lot that there's not a definition of "agritourism," but – I don't know where Jake went – there's a great definition of "geotourism" on the website of Skagit County. Geotourism sustains or enhances the geographic character of a place, its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and well-being of its residents.

I'm not from here. I'm from New York. I got drafted out here because I have over a decade and a half of experience in planning, evaluation, and putting things into place like this. Though there was transparency in the development of these codes – because I was able to do quite a bit of internet research and find stuff – it seems it was done in a silo. There are a lot of other organizations that do absolutely support conserving the land of Skagit County. I stayed in Skagit County because it's by far the most beautiful place I've ever seen. I've seen most of the Lower 48, Alaska and Hawaii, as well as travelled internationally for work.

We have a – someone said it – a food insecurity issue was released today by the Skagit Population Health Trust that 57% of their survey respondents found that food was too expensive and inaccessible. We do need to support farmland. We need to support small farms in order for them to actually produce - \_\_\_ boldly – I love your CSA. It was great! – But in Skagit County, Robert Wood Johnson identifies that most people living in Skagit County do not make enough money to live in Skagit County. Everybody is just barely getting by. To limit ability to create and sustain themselves in Skagit County – you're going to see people leave. We have enough brain drain as it is. We have enough things closing as it is. I don't know why Skagit Malting magically closed its doors, but that was a big loss. We need to consider what is going to happen. Then something in 1990 is absolutely not even close to appropriate to use today. There are completely different generational issues as well as climate issues that we need to consider. Additionally, Washington state has the least available housing in the nation. We need to consider our housing availability. We need to be able to consider our benefit opportunities, our medical and behavioral health access as well, as we see those issues rise. These are not independent of each other and they need to be worked on in a collaborative manner. I highly suggest and recommend that the –

(timer rings)

Ms. Martin: – timeframe for public comment be extended because of that reason. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Larry Jensen, and then Connie Turner. Did I get that right?

Larry Jensen: Larry Jensen, 15356 Produce Lane, Mount Vernon, Washington. I'm here to talk a little bit about myself just to give you a little background from where I'm from and where my perspective is coming from.

I'm from a third generation farm. I don't think that's important that much because we all have the same passion here. If you'll listen to everyone that we've talked to – listeners talk – so far everyone has wanted to make sure that the farmland continues. There isn't anybody saying, Let's destroy farmland.

But I think we have to look at it from a perspective of how do we keep people farming, from a profitability standpoint. And for me, I've been both a national and an international marketer and I can tell you that the things have changed from the time I was in high school to today. When I was in high school in this county, basically everybody grew for a processor. It was National, it was Twin City, it was frozen peas, it was frozen corn, it was something else. That's changed. There are basically none of those people left. That market is not available to any size grower small or large. Which means *everybody* now in this transition has had to come at it from a different perspective. The large farmers have hired expert marketers, safe food safety people, compliance people, expert people in terms of application of chemicals and fertilizers and so on. And the small farmers have had to get creative on how they can hold their land, take care of their buildings, take care of their farm, and take care of their families and their relatives who probably willed them that or at least they bought it from.

So to me, we have to have a partnership that's going to accomplish that because without that we are going to see the farms – the small farms in particular – become estates for rich people who are coming out of Seattle who don't need to work. They will buy the farm and they will have an estate farm. They would maybe have a horse or two, and the rest of the farm will not be productive.

So I'm advocating that we use these small farmers to our advantage, and that advantage is this: They have a great way of communicating with the urban public that the large farmers do not do. We do not elect the people who control our futures. The people who control our future lives in Seattle and Tacoma and the large cities, and those are the bridges we need to build and the people who do that best are the small farmers who have the time, who have the events, who can explain to them we need a way to do our irrigation, we need groundwater to do that. We need a way to get rid of our wastewater in the winter. We need proper drainage. We need to have labor laws that help us compete nationally and internationally. And we need those sorts of things and, frankly, it's the small farmer that's going to build those –

(timer rings)

Mr. Jensen: – bridges for us. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. You're Connie?

Connie Funk: Hello. My name is Connie Funk. I live on Pleasant Ridge, 13973 Dodge Valley Road, Mount Vernon, rural Mount Vernon. And here we are in economic hard times for just about everyone and here we are with yet one more divisive issue. I just want to echo everything that has been said. Larry was beautiful because he has lived experience as a large farmer, as a long-term farmer, and understanding that being creative and collaborative and developing community partnerships with urban populations is the way to the future. So I'm very much in favor of extending time and having conversations without being divisive. I'm not for booing and hissing, but actually applause is freedom of expression. So I will thank all of the speakers tonight that are supporting farmland. My husband and I are surrounded by farmland. We're not farmers. We consider farmland safety. I'm looking at Richard Gilkey's painting. That *is* the Magic Skagit. And we consider farmers sacred. Without the people here, there are no farms. And for people that have venues on farm property, they consider it sacred too. So let's have conversations that are

including everyone's voice at the table and let's be neighborly to each other in this divisive time. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Byron Betts, and then –

Unidentified Male Voice: Byron had to take off.

Chair Raschko: He left? Thank you. All right then, I see Lee Roozen is scratched off and Val Mullen already spoke. So I think we have Angelica Hayton, followed by Rachael Ward-Spanwasser (sic).

Angelica Hayton: Hello. My name is Angelica Hayton. I own Hayton Farms Berries located on Fir Island here in Skagit Valley. My great-great-grandparents settled my dad's farm in 1876 and he farms right next to me. I grow different varieties of berries and raise grass-fed beef. My current farmstand is 200 square feet and I do not have enough room to adequately display my grass-fed beef and frozen berries in freezers. The new code would prevent me from using my ag support buildings to sell any of my farm-raised goods. I do not wholesale my farm products. I sell all of my produce and beef at farmers markets and my farmstand. When Covid-19 shut down farmers markets in Seattle, I opened my farmstand and it became a very important outlet for me to be able to sell my produce and beef directly to the public.

My dad and I both farm within several miles of two farm venues. It has been a very positive experience. They bring in people to our area who visit my farmstand on Fir Island, and while they are here they learn about our farms and often follow up with me at farmers markets where I sell my produce and beef.

The farm venues haven't interfered with our farming and I believe they provide a valuable service to our community. Please don't close public comment on this topic. Agritourism is a positive thing for our community and our economy. I'm worried that the new code will harm *my* farm and other local small businesses. This code needs to be more thought-out and be more inclusive to all businesses in Skagit Valley. How it is written now is not inclusive and it seems it'll be very harmful.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Rachael, followed by, I believe, Dickie Anderson.

Rachael Ward-Sparwasser: Hi there. My name is Rachael Ward-Sparwasser and I live at 19687 Trophy Lane in Mount Vernon – Conway, technically. I grew up at 1699 Beaver Marsh Road at the corner of Beaver Marsh and Calhoun. My great-grandparents and my grandparents moved here a long time ago. They lived on Bolson Road. My grandfather worked as a farmhand in dairy farms around the county, which there are few of now. My parents started a business here, Valley Electric, in the '80s. I grew up here. I graduated from Mount Vernon High School in 1994 with the idea that I was going to move away and never come back. I went to the University of Puget Sound and then the University of Washington for law school. I have a law practice in Edmonds, Washington. I subsequently moved to Denver, started a real estate investment firm, and then in 2019 I was invited back by a group of friends that I graduated from high school with – Class of 1994, Go Bulldogs! – and we started talking about some of the changes that were happening in the county. Again, I had never lived here, hadn't moved back here, but my eyes were opened to some of the challenges that the county was facing. And at that point I felt like there were some legacy projects here in Skagit County that could be captured for the benefit of not just the county, not just for other businesses, but also for farmland. And I think the mistake that people are making is that it's one or the other, and that somehow one type of farming is more important than a different type of farming, or that one type of farming is actual farming but the other type of farming

isn't farming. I grow tulips, for example. That's farming. I don't produce food. So some of the arguments that are getting made about all ag land should be produced by food doesn't fit for our valley, and the Tulip Festival brings in millions of dollars every year and tax revenue. There is nothing about the weddings that I've been to here. I actually bought a wedding venue. It was the \_\_\_ Gardens. At the time I bought it, five years previous a company from China had it that had *no* intention of investing *anything* here in the valley. But the price was so cheap they bought it. They let it sit, overgrow, everything. That is what is going to happen.

Change is inevitable, and I get that we don't like it but can we not come around a common value of this is what is important to – I moved my whole family back here in 2018. I could live anywhere in the world and do anything that I want to do, and I want to be here. I want to invest in what's important here and see it continue. And that's what I see when I look around this room. It's all people that have that same vision and that same desire. They just see different ways of doing it. And the two most common phrases I've heard since I moved back here is "Well, we've never done it that way,"

(timer rings)

Ms. Ward-Sparwasser: – or "We've always done it this way," and it's time to stop doing it! That's how –

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Nikki Anderson? I might have the first name wrong. Okay, then Ron Extract, please. And after Mr. Extract, Vivian Larson.

Ron Extract: Hi, I'm Ron Extract. I'm co-owner of Garden Path Fermentation. I reside at 231 South Anacortes Street in Burlington. My partner Amber and I came here in – we moved here in 2016 to start Garden Path Fermentation because we wanted to be close to our ingredients. And Skagit Valley's one of the very few places in the world where you could actually source everything you need, not only to make beer but wine, cider, meat, all sorts of really cool fermented beverages within about a 20-mile radius. And we may be the only producer in the entire world that makes all of these things using over 98% of ingredients grown within 20 miles of where we're located.

We came here with that vision, but also with the vision of being able to offer visitors a seed-to-glass experience. Wanting to grow our own – some of our own ingredients, not to the exclusion of other local farmers' with whom we currently enjoy a great partnership, but to be able to grow some things ourselves and to really be able to showcase the beauty and the bounty of this land. And when we spent our first two years here really looking for a property where we could do that, and we had a lot of false starts because we were looking in the Ag-NRL zone. We were told no, you can't do that there; there are a lot of limitations. You can have a winery or a brewery but you can't have a tasting room. You could offer samples, but not glasses. You can offer snacks, but not meals. None of this was in the code. There were no delineations anywhere as to how these things were defined. We were just told what we couldn't do. And our response was Okay, so where can we do it? Can we do it on Rural Reserve? We found a section in the Skagit County Code that specifically allowed for winery tasting rooms in Rural Reserve land, and we asked about that and we were told, Oh, no. We removed that years ago. Rural Reserve is now the same as Ag-NRL. You can't do it there either. And we said, Okay, what zone do we need to look for? Where in the county can we do this? Where can we build a seed-to-glass venue where we could grow our own ingredients, where we could be open to the public, where we could really showcase what it is that they're consuming, and the answer was "Nowhere." But we were assured that there was a process by which this was going to be addressed. We were assured that this was something that we weren't alone in wanting to pursue and that our business was the sort of thing that Skagit

County needed. And we participated actively in that process. We've been involved in that process for the last seven years since we came here. We bought property in Skagit County. We built a home here. We invested our life savings and our family's life savings in starting a business here and creating jobs here, and we were assured that there was a future for us. And then the end result of this is only saying what can't be done on Ag-NRL land. It's not saying, Oh, but here's what you can do on Rural Reserve. Here's some other pathways forward. Here's a place for agritourism. What it's effectively saying is, You're not wanted here. Go somewhere else. And, you know, I really wish if that's the message that Skagit County wanted to send us that they would have sent it seven years ago when we first got here. But that's the message that we're getting now. And –

(timer rings)

Mr. Extract: I'll end it there. Thank you.

(applause)

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

(audience applause)

Chair Raschko: Vivian Larson, and then Kristi Sedlacek.

Vivian Larson: Good evening. Thank you for allowing us this time to speak. My name is Vivian Larson. I live at 19003 County Line Road. It's a Stanwood address but it is Skagit County.

I am a farmer. I am a small farmer. The only food I raise is for my family. I am a flower farmer. Part of what I do supports the venues in this county. There are many small farmers like me in this valley who raise flowers, who typically – that's what we do, that's how we make our living. Anytime you go to someone and you say we're going to restrict your income by 50%, that has a trickle-down effect that we're going to see everywhere. We pay a lot of taxes in this county and that's – it's hard to be able to make that ends meet if we are not allowed to do business.

I would like to say please leave the comments for this proposal open for a longer period. I think that we need to talk this through. I believe that the farmland is sacred. We grow farmland all over Fir Island. I do small plots of land that are not totally accessible to large tractors and large farmers. There is a place for everyone. I believe that the venues that we are talking about – I think that they open people's eyes to coming here, to seeing how beautiful it is, and I think that we have a responsibility to keep it beautiful and to keep it farming. But there is a way to do it together successfully and not fuss about all the little things that are going to make people angry. I would like to say that the Saltbox Barn has been across from our family farm for a number of years and we have never had a problem with their venue operation. They are respectful to my mother-in-law who owns her place, and I would like to see it continue. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Kristi, and then Judy Petersen.

Kristi Sedlacek: Hi, my name's Kristi Sedlacek and I am with Stepping Stones Garden in Burlington, Washington. Our family bought the venue a couple years ago and it's been a wedding venue for many years. But our family background: We are a family-run business and we're also family with multi-generational farm experience. We've also had to tear down a barn back in the

1990s that was absolutely beautiful. You know, if we would have had the entrepreneurial idea back then, we might have been able to keep that barn.

We are a wedding and event center – not just weddings. The amount of land used, I also want to point out, is very small for an event. But also, the \_\_\_\_\_ but also has almost 100-year-old magnificent house that is also used to showcase the history of the Skagit Valley. We provide weddings but also event space for charity, such as the Boys and Girls Club, that raises over \$100,000 a night for the kids of Skagit Valley. We also host the graduation of your local doctors, and we hope to keep them in the valley and they want to host it at event centers like this because it showcases where these people just spent a large portion of their education in the Skagit Valley. Where these events take place do not impede on agricultural activities.

Also if we start to limit the number of events that we have we will have to make business choices because for the charity events, because we want to be part of our community we offer them a discount compared to a wedding. Weddings do bring in a lot of money but we also want to support our local charities. So if we have to make a business decision whether – you know, we will take the weddings. They're more expensive if we have to limit them. So that would limit the event spaces for other charity events that raise a lot of money for local charities.

What we are hoping is that we provide a beautiful venue that's also next to a large farmland owned – and the farmland next to us is owned by a large corporate farm that owns big warehouse farms, and we have beautiful gardens next to it and many people come, and they enjoy – they love the beautiful fields and they come enjoy our gardens, which adds to the serenity and beautiful culture of the Skagit Valley.

Now I am born and raised in Mount Vernon and went to Mount Vernon High School, but I moved away and lived in England for 14 years and in Germany. Both of those – and I lived in the country out there, and both of those areas had similar growing pains like here: large farm fields and now there in England there's pubs next to the farm fields. People sit in picnic benches and drink beer and the farmer's running –

(timer rings)

Ms. Sedlacek: – their tractor. So –

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Judy Pedersen, and then Jones Atterberry.

Judy Pedersen: That was my daughter. I'm Judy Pedersen. I'm the owner of Stepping Stones Garden, but I'm also the owner of about 200 acres of farmland. And my family goes back to the end of 1875. I have made it a purpose that I will save that farmland. So I own a goat-milking operation, I own cropland – but you know what? I have to rent it all out. So I think here's a chance to save Skagit County and save the beauty because it's important to our lives. And I wish you the best, but save the farmland. I went to farmers markets all over the place. I served grass-fed beef hamburgers to 25,000 people at a soccer tournament. When I had enough money, my husband said, Listen, you have spent too much time doing this, and I said, Okay, when I get enough money, I'm going under farm credit service and I'm going to pay those farms off, and that's what I did. It can be done, but you have to be creative.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Mr. Atterberry, and then David Top, please.

Jones Atterberry: Commissioners, thank you. Jones Atterberry, 4019 Peters Lane, Anacortes. People talk about history. I have history too. Lived in Woolley, lived in Burlington, grew up in Anacortes. The Atterberrys are up on DB Minkler Road up there. They had the 80 acres that included Minkler Lake. Now this is back in 1905. Doesn't matter.

But I did pick strawberries for Sakuma and on Stewart's little farm up there off of Whistle Lake Road. I did pick raspberries on Young Road. And I did run for Libby's – I was the combiner out there for Libby's cannery working for – out there off of Best Road. Thank God I'm not a farmer, nor do I want to be a farmer, but that doesn't mean I don't appreciate the farmers and all the stands and all the people and all the venues that I use and so dearly love to buy flowers and vegetables and watching the Nelson people with their potatoes. And them donating boxes of potatoes to the Burlington Lions Club so we can have our potato feeds. That is what Skagit County is all about. It's the community.

I've been around here a long time. I'm 73 years old. I've participated in a lot of functions and I want to thank especially the venue people for allowing people like me and other citizens to come in and still feel, smell, and be part of the farming community. And that's what keeps farming healthy – is by bringing us in so that we will support you, the venues, which support the large farms. We appreciate them all and we need them all and we don't need overzealous planners with WACs, and we surely don't need attorneys like this lady was – threatening to sue people. I'm sick of those people. Thank you very much.

(applause)

Chair Raschko: Thank you. (gavel) David Top, and then Heather Top.

David Top: Hi there. My name's David Top. I'm a third generation farmer in a sense. I lived and worked on my parents' dairy farm in Sedro-Woolley for 29 years before moving away and getting married. I'm very aware of the hardships that farmers have and I've chosen not to take over our dairy farm back when that was an option, because I could see declining economics involving in dairy. I now see my parents' farm barns in decay because of the lack of need for them. Crop farmers are farming the fields but they have no use for the barns. We purchased our own farm 15 years ago. It consists of two acres. It's not enough for fulltime farming. I'm surrounded by – well, the City owns the property around me now and they hope to make it a park addition someday.

But, yeah, so we've raised pig, chickens, cats, dogs, a cow, along with our five kids on the property. But two acres also is a lot to maintain just if you can do nothing with it. So we need something to make it worthwhile. Holding events and weddings has been something that we could fall back on so we figured we'd try that. We also went to the County, who told us, You can't do anything with it. So that was real nice to hear. We've heard objections to the ideas of holding events and weddings, like the idea that people don't want a bunch of drunk people partying at their place. And I call this foolishness because we would not hold drunken parties on our property. Like I said, we raised five kids there and we would only allow wine or beer, no hard alcohols. I think people watch too many movies and see where Hollywood presents weddings and wild parties and a lot of people get confused about that.

Another issue I have heard is that the farmers must not be hindered in their work so that the land can be preserved. We have a respect for the farmers. We've had events where farmers were spraying and working in the fields, driving tractors. We have no problem with that. This is part of being in Skagit County and it's not a problem. We understand that.



I know that the code for Agricultural-Natural Resource Land does not include allowances for weddings. I ask that it be changed. Holding events on our property in our barns and yard does not take away from the fields that are being farmed. It just doesn't at all. My two acres can't be farmed.

I also ask that special use permits on small parcels like my two acres be allowed. And agricultural work does not need to be done on the property because we're not preserving anything.

It's not something I can do in a small piece of land, and although we do the best to make use of it – my wife grows flowers –

(timer rings)

Mr. Top: – maintains floral gardens there.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Heather Top, then Mark Benson.

Heather Top: Hi, my name is Heather Top. I lived in Skagit County for 13 years. I moved here from Pierce County to marry my husband, David Top, who's lived in Sedro his whole life and was a farmer for 29 years. We bought a house just two minutes from his parents, and what a blessing it's been. We bought an old farmhouse with a huge shop, a large barn built in the '50s, and various outbuildings on two acres of land. In the thick of raising babies, I got into gardening – found a love for growing and designing flowers. This proved to be a healthy outlet for me and where I'd eventually find my way into the wedding industry. I started a floral design business and have blessed many happy couples with flowers from my gardens and other flower farms. My business is a family affair where my kids all help me and get paid to wash buckets. They maintain the gardens and they steward the land that we've been blessed with.

I have worked at several of the venues here in Skagit as a florist and love the community that serves in the wedding industry. I applaud the venue owners for preserving these old buildings and sharing the beauty of farmland that surrounds them. People drive hours to come and enjoy the beauty of Skagit to escape their concrete jungles and suburban neighborhoods. I worked at a venue last August that held a wedding on a Monday. I noticed life went on as normal for the farmers. They were out there harvesting the wheatfield while everyone enjoyed the wedding while witnessing the beauty of farm life safely from a distance. Nobody got in their way or asked them to stop. It was a beautiful day of farming and celebrating.

We've held a few weddings in our barn that we've been preserving. A few kinds from our youth group asked, Hey, can we get married in your barn? We'll help you paint, we'll help you clean it and fix a couple doors. I said sure. We soon and quickly realized, Wow, what a blessing this is to bring so many people here together to witness the beauty and history of what used to be a working farm just 20 years ago. I heard it said these building should be used for farm purposes only, not human habitation. Well, what do you suggest I do with this beautiful, structurally sound barn that doesn't have a purpose for animal habitation anymore? It doesn't hold farm equipment. It's retired. Its purpose is gone. Do I let it rot like my neighbor's building next door? Do I let the ivy and the blackberries and the weeds seep into the cracks of the wood that the hard-working farmers built 70 years ago that we hope to make a living off just like they did to support our family like they did?

I love serving others. I love a good party. I host events in my barn where I teach kids how to barn-dance, teenagers specifically. Wouldn't it be awesome to serve my community with the joy of weddings and events, sharing the beauty of Skagit-grown flowers and preserving a beautiful barn

that no longer can serve cows on just a few acres. I can offer a place to create memories away from city life, to give others opportunity to enjoy their birthday parties, retirement parties, \_\_\_\_\_. A place where kids can come and run around in the grass, play a game of corn hole, and smell the aroma of flowers. My friends from Puyallup travelled up here to experience just that. They didn't want to get married in the worn-down grange in their town or the historic movie theater with no parking and homeless people living on the sidewalks, or \_\_\_ Hotel, with no character. Every person from that wedding said, Wow, I wish I had something like this. What a dream. Thank you for sharing this with us.

We live in a time where –

Chair Raschko: Pardon me. Excuse me. Your time's up.

Commissioner Mitchell: Your timer went off but it didn't sound. Sorry.

Ms. Top: Oh, it did? Okay.

Chair Raschko: I'm sorry.

Ms. Top: Well, I hope we can work together.

Chair Raschko: Well, thank you very much. Mark Benson. After Mr. Benson, Glen Johnson.

Mark Benson: I live in Outlook Lane in Sedro-Woolley. I'm one of the principal owners of Eagle Haven Winery and we do events at our winery.

A little bit of background: When we bought it, it was neglected for a number of years with Covid. It did have a lot of events prior to us. The previous owners' option, if we didn't buy it, was to bulldoze it all down, burn it, and plant 41 acres of Doug Fir because that's what he wanted to do. He was out of that business. We took over the winery, the orchards, the vineyards. We've added another two acres of vineyards. We're adding another 500 cider trees. We're trying to bring back – if you've been around the place, we're bring (sic) back the orchard. We're trying to build back our cider capability, which it didn't really have before. Make our own wines with our own grapes, our own fruits. And be good neighbors, good neighbors with our fellow farmers. We share equipment, we share space, we share knowledge. What we have and somebody else doesn't have we give it to them and they reciprocate. We get free poo from one of our friends. We just gave 20 bales of – round bales – of hay to one of our neighbors because we didn't need it and we didn't have the equipment to do it. So we have great, great relationships with our fellow farmers.

We feel that a lot of this discussion has been adversarial – us versus them – and I don't think it needs to be that way. I think we just need a little bit more time to come to some common ground. Again I would – like so many other people here – I would recommend to the board that we extend that comment period, that input period. Give us time to work together. I'm working with the Skagitonians as a group to come up with maybe some more cohesive language that would make it easier for the board to implement into code regulations. And then more importantly, you know, once we get there it's absolutely imperative that you give us a shot of coming into compliance. You know, we bought it and, you know, bad on us. We didn't know that this was an issue, you know, until now. You know, until we went out and got – you know, tried to get permits and things like that, and then it became an issue. So give us time to get into compliance. We are a working

farm and we want to be a working farm. And, you know, we just – we need that time. We need that time.

(timer rings)

Mr. Benson: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Glen Johnson.

Glen Johnson: Yes, I'm Glen Johnson and I'm from La Conner, Washington, or the old county really. I get an opportunity in my life to make a movie out of the Skagit Valley pretty much every day of the year. I spend two to three hours inspecting all of the farm opportunities and circumstances that we have here ongoingly. I was a seed farmer, so my thoughts were international and here they came. We're feeding – we're growing people. We're growing crops but we're growing people, and people have to have, like, someone was suggesting, the respite ground where they can come to experience our daily life. We live in the Skagit for a reason. I mean, I was born and raised here but I travelled the world. There's very few places that can possibly draw me back. I can't even imagine going up to Rockport, to be honest with you. It's a little too much rain.

(audience laughter)

Mr. Johnson: But the truth is, people want to come here to experience what we get to live every day. And to take that away – I mean, I'm trying to put events together that put the hammer down, make the money in a weekend with agritourism. I know that scares a lot of people away but we stretch the Tulip Festival for a month. We could bring the Tulip Festival into a weekend event in August and most of the farmers they're like, Hmm, most of my crops are in cruising on autopilot. I don't have a whole lot of tractors on the road. Right now would be the time! This weekend we could make millions of dollars with having Taylor Swift here rather than down there!

(audience laughter)

Mr. Johnson: And put the hammer down and make the big money and then have them all go back to wherever they came from! We could have fun doing this rather than it is – most of us are eh-eh-eh! I mean, I farmed and did 50 different crops on a few acres and I scabbled a living, but it was so fun to host a wedding one time when it was simple, friends. They paid us 150 bucks! I'm sure you guys are going to throw a laugh at that! But we had a great time. We had people that talked about it for years afterwards. *One event* where the people from the city got a chance to come out and breathe my fresh air, hear my frogs in my pond, and go home and say, Wow, that was one of the neatest weddings I've ever been to.

And so I just think that we have to be open to, you know, putting clamps on edges.

(timer rings)

Mr. Johnson: I mean, when I was putting events together I had people saying no, you can't do this and that and the other.

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Johnson: Okay, I'm done. Is that right?

Chair Raschko: You are. Thank you. Are there more sign-up sheets?

Sarah Ruether: No, but we have people online.

Chair Raschko: Do we? Okay, let me ask first then. Is there anybody who wishes to speak that did not sign up?

Unidentified Female Voice: (inaudible)

Chair Raschko: Have you already spoken once?

Same Unidentified Voice: No.

Chair Raschko: Okay. Thank you. We'll do the online ones when we get done here.

Adrienne Hopkins: I'm Adrienne Hopkins. I don't live here. I live in Everett right now with my husband but was in Cle Elum for five years and we're moving back because we can't afford to live in Skagit County and we're buying a home in Kittitas. And I'm a floral designer and I do weddings and events and some of my favorite venues are here, like Christianson's and Saltbox. It's like all these different places here I just love so much, and when I thought to move over here to Everett to live with him I was excited about, you know, possibly getting to do more weddings up in Skagit Valley and be able to – you know, I use flowers from the local areas wherever I go. I travel statewide to design a rose and sparrow floral. And it's just me and I hire on, you know, extra people for extra help. But the thing I love the most is coming, you know, to this area. I buy from the local farms – Jello Mold Farm is one of my favorites and I use some of these flowers here to, you know, decorate. And most of the weddings, I've found, in this area even are kind of smaller micro-weddings, too. They're not like these huge necessarily – like, you know, 250-people weddings. So it seems to me like the discussion, it's just kind of a little blown out of proportion.

But also in Cle Elum I'm a preferred vendor for Suncadia and then also, you know, out in Ellensburg, Bright Side Vintage Farm and the Cattle Barn in Kittitas – sorry I'm nervous. I'm shaking my voice. I love designing out in these open spaces and I use, you know – I hand-forage for materials over there on that side of the mountain. And a lot of the people I know there are very hands-off. Some of the owners also. And so, you know, it's just an interesting conversation. And I thought I'd come and hear more about how maybe too much of the traffic was the problem, like people were, you know, polluting the area or something. It sounds more like that's not really an issue so I'm still a little unclear about, you know, sort of the problem actually – why you wouldn't allow venues to continue hosting weddings, except that it would take away from the farmers' ability to be farming fulltime, I guess.

So I just wanted to speak up, and I just have so much respect for everybody here, and thanks for allowing us to share. But also just – you know, I travel statewide and it's affecting me personally as well because I might not be able to do work over here and I might, you know. And so many people I know, so many other people in the industry might – you know, these small businesses that are just women trying to make a living. You know, I just got married. I'm 43. I've been single my whole life and it's like, I'm just trying to, you know, not have to move back to Oklahoma, where my family's from. So I love them but they're crazy! But I like it here so thank you!

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Hector de Leon: I'm Hector de Leon. I'm the co-owner of Tulip Valley Winery and also part owner of Eagle Haven Winery. I've been here over 20 years in the valley. I've worked with numerous farmers. I do a lot of charity and foundation work. From my own winery I make the wine, I make the hard cider. I'm a world-renowned cider maker, top notch wine-maker and earned the medals. I can show you any day. I also educate other cider makers and we grow organically and salmon-safe. I have 70 acres in eastern Washington, 70 acres we farm here. We lease out to other farmers.

I spent three tours in combat, died twice, and here I am, sitting here in front of you guys trying to cut the small farmer out. I see a lot of farmers out here. We have \_\_ micro-farmers at Viva Farms out there and they want a big piece of a barn that is abandoned and want to work it. This will feed the people. I've been to war-torn countries. People are starving. And now they're trying to crunch the farmers in other parts of the world \_\_. They're fighting back. But I'm telling you: They're good people here. The vendors are good people.

I educate the people that come from Seattle and all over the world. I get them from all over the world. We educate people at DWSU on cider making. I get them from Mexico, Africa, Alaska – you name it. They're from all over the world. England. And to see here – I fight for my country and see you guys trying to crunch the small guy. We can work with the big guys. There's a lot of new industry, a lot of new technology that can work together. We go there. We have venues. I educate the people there. They don't know anything about farming but by the end of the day they leave my venue they know about the potato farmers, they know about the \_\_ farmer, they know about everybody who farms out here. I love the animals, I try to protect the birds, I love the eagles. And I'm telling you, these are good people. Both businesses \_\_\_\_\_, I like to see them grow. I love to see the childrens in the sport. I support dogs, Children's Hospital. I spend 90% of my own personal time helping people in the community and people know it.

To sit there and put these restrictions on anybody – they're willing to work with you, but they don't want to come up there and you say "No" right off the bat. They want to comply. They want to make it safe. They love the land. They only use a small footprint, but that small footprint projects a big footprint in this outside areas. I'm telling you, I get it from Seattle, New York, you name it. They sit there and we enjoy a nice glass of wine or cider and I educate them on the beautiful farmland we have here and how all these little small farmers want to be a good farmer. And we can feed the world. We have one of the greatest seed production farmers out here in the world, and I see that. And I also worked with other \_\_\_\_\_ in Africa. We're trying to increase the bee population. I'm working with products to help people.

(timer rings)

Mr. de Leon: So we're all in this together. Thank you.

(audience applause)

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Is there anybody else who wishes to speak?

Courtney Bourasaw: Hello. My name is Courtney Bourasaw. I own The Skagit Table. I have recently opened my – well, I've had my business for eight years but I've recently opened my own brick and mortar in downtown Mount Vernon. We offer many food service-related things but at some point we use local produce in all of them.

When I started my business, I was a student at Skagit Valley College. I grew up in LA and had never heard of the term “farm to table.” I received my passion for small farmers and using what was in season while I attended college. I don’t know that I would have had that interest in farming had I attended school elsewhere. I love having access to produce the way that we do here. I love the small guys, the ones who have just started this – had just started but see this beautiful dream. Every time I see a new one on social media I do my best to reach out to them and see how I can best support them, because I know how hard it is to start up. They dream of making it, providing for their families, raising their kids – whatever their desire to do – on their own land that they bought, that they work on, that they pay taxes on that is theirs. I visit every farm I buy produce from. I hear their stories, their love for providing food and making it. I also see how incredibly hard it is to farm and then I’m blown away at how little they charge for this produce. Lots of them want food to be affordable for everyone and break their backs bringing their customers food that has value, but that alone is not enough to financially support anyone in this economy. Times have changed \_\_\_\_\_.

I get rules are rules, and I do know most of us do want to do the right thing and get permitted so their livelihoods are not at risk, but it needs to be attainable, it needs to be worth it. The current proposal would hardly allow venues to cover their costs. Unless you’ve worked in the wedding industry, you do not know the incredible amount of work it takes to maintain a property, and I’d say the same for farming. They are both extremely hard jobs. But both care about agriculture and so there needs to be a happy medium. Shutting down venues or even limiting them as proposed would impact this new adventure I’m on. It would trickle all the way down to my employees and my kids. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Hayden Blackwood: Good evening. My name is Hayden Blackwood. I am 45 years old. I am a father of four and we have a farm over on Sterling Road where we do pumpkins. My dad is 85 and is also still actively farming. And my ask is when I listen to this group in here tonight, is listen and hear the stories of my 85-year-old dad who grew up on a farm up in Birch Bay which is now an abandoned wasteland to go to the at-the-time an active Kent Valley, which was 12.7 miles of farmland which is now gone. It’s nothing but buildings. My ask is more or less to really take full accord to the venues, the preservations of the barns for wedding venues. Everything needs to work together. Otherwise my biggest fear is this beautiful valley of ours, by the time my grandkids are around an adult, may not see Skagit Valley as I am talking about it as at this moment. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Is there anybody else who would – please go ahead. Please say your name and address please.

Peregrine \_\_\_\_\_: My name is Peregrine \_\_\_\_\_, 17165 Snee Oosh \_\_, La Conner, Washington. Listening to everybody here tonight, it seems incredibly obvious that all of these issues are, all of these sides that we’re talking about are entirely complementary. We’re not talking about, you know – they don’t need to be adversarial. They don’t need to be anything like that. These are complements to each other to uphold the economic and long-term production of agriculture in this county. It should be obvious that the economic sustainability of a small farm is the foundation of its ability to be continued – to continue using it as productive farmland. If these farms can’t continue to make it economically, they’re not going to be able to use them as farmland.

If we’re wanting to limit something, maybe we should look at limiting outside investment for event venues. But when owners are venue operators they should be provided the opportunity to do so.

These are not corporate venues we're talking about. These are mom-and-pop venues. They need our support and we need them. Please keep the comment period open. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Yes? Go ahead, please.

Christine Wakoski: Good evening. Thank you so much for this amazing evening. I feel like I've been very enlightened to many things. My name is Christine Wakoski, 775 Shelter Bay Drive, La Conner, Washington. We've been here four years and I'm a board-certified holistic nutritionist. It's a little bit of a different angle here but the father of modern medicine, Hippocrates, 2000 years ago said "Let thy food be thy medicine and thy medicine be thy food." And I've had the extreme privilege of knowing Margie and Chris Dariotis of La Conner Gardens and working with them occasionally. They have the most amazing five varieties of garlic I've ever seen in my life, and as we all know, garlic is an amazing form of medicine. And I come to you tonight with this proposal and with this vision and with this comment, and that is that we hear about farm-to-table. How about farm-to-pharmacy? It's an amazing thing that we could educate people on these beautiful farms, many of them small, and we could have discussions about how the various foods like broccoli and the sulforaphane from broccoli and how it is very helpful for the immune system and for fighting against cancer and other maladies, and we could have an amazing ability to train and to teach and to educate people when they come onto small farms of what exactly they're partaking of and what the farm is producing to give us amazing health and vitality. And so my little comment is that an – and just to say please do consider keeping this discussion open because I think it is a very important discussion. Thank you very much.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. There's one other person? Please go ahead.

Jill Shipman: Hi. My name is Jill Shipman. I'm at 23073 Sagers Lane in Mount Vernon. I'm the accounts director at Pacific Party Canopies and I also serve as a board member on the Mount Vernon Farmers Market. I moved up here from Napa and Sonoma seven years ago. I came up with the heartfelt interest of starting my own venue and being about to work with other venues to showcase farm-to-table because I came from Sonoma and Napa where it is so popular. In Napa County about 15 years ago they shut down the wedding industry and I watched hundreds of my counterparts lose their jobs and have to move out of the area that they found so dear to their heart. And this topic to me breaks my heart to see it happening here in Skagit County. There are amazing people within this industry that work every day. They work hard. They work when farms can't. They work all the time. Now not to say that farms aren't important, because obviously I'm on the board of the Farmers Market. I work with many farms but do serve and go to different farmers markets and be able to sell, and by doing this it'll take away that opportunity that they have to make a living and showcase their foods at multiple locations and give it to multiple people.

Gosh, there's so much to say. I have it all written out. I wasn't expecting to speak tonight. But I do beg you, please, leave this open. Have a further conversation. There's lots to be heard through this community of strong individuals that help support the farming in Skagit County. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Go ahead, please.

Tina Champeaux: I'm Tina Champeaux. I live at 1641 State Route 9, Sedro-Woolley. I live on 17½ acres that used to be a dairy farm. I grew up a farm girl and I've lived in the 39<sup>th</sup> district either between Snohomish County and Skagit County since I was eight years old. I love farming. I also was a government worker for 23 years for DSHS. You can cry at any time. So I understand government. And I think that there's something that needs to be refreshed every once in a while, and I believe that government must be reminded of the following, and it is our due diligence and

as governed to see that all officials are notified on a consistent basis. And that is: “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

That would be all of you. That’s the Declaration of Independence, 1776, the Constitutional Convention from May 25<sup>th</sup> to September 17<sup>th</sup> of 1787. The delegates were intelligent, well-educated with vast and varied experience. Delegates agreed on basic values and principles. Among these were the God-given unalienable rights to life, liberty, and property. I hold property very dear. It appears that we have strayed from the foundation upon which this nation was built. We own land upon which we pay taxes and are so compromised by government bureaucracy that in many cases we cannot use the land upon which we dwell. Now we hear the common cry, “Save the farmlands,” so for what and for when, how, where? Our farmers are so overtaxed and so overregulated that our farms and farming has and is still dwindling. Our farmers are seeking ways to continue farming and still earn a living. That’s the right to do that. As our current administration in Olympia has never seen a tax they didn’t love, it appears that Skagit has never seen a permit fee they didn’t love with employees who act like elected judges to carry out their verdicts on us.

(timer rings)

Ms. Champeaux: I’m not done but I guess that’s enough.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

(audience applause)

Chair Raschko: Please. I asked in the beginning: Please no applause. I mean, I know you appreciate it and it’s very nice, but.... Is there anybody else who would like to speak?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: No? Okay, Jenn – not Jenn, excuse me. Sarah?

Ms. Ruether: Yeah, I think there’s some people online. Do you want to open it up to testimony online? If you’d like to speak online, please unmute or raise your hand.

Chair Raschko: Nobody?

Ms. Ruether: I think there’s an audio problem because it says somebody is talking at the top. Is that us or is it somebody online?

Jack Moore: That’s us. So far it does not appear as if anyone has raised their hand online.

Chair Raschko: Can you explain to them what to do one more time?

Ms. Ruether: Okay. If anyone wants to make comments on Zoom, can you raise your hand or unmute? If you don’t know how to raise your hand, just unmute.

(a short silence while awaiting anyone who wishes to speak online)



Chair Raschko: Okay. That's fine then. I want to thank you all for your testimony. Does any Planning Commissioner have any question of any of the speakers or staff?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay.

Commissioner Mark Knutzen: Mr. Chairman? When is it appropriate for us to make our comments? I don't want to address any particular person. Do we comment about what we've heard tonight?

Chair Raschko: I think that'd be fair.

Commissioner Knutzen: Pardon me?

Chair Raschko: Go ahead, please, and do so.

Commissioner Mitchell: That process is in deliberations. \_\_\_\_\_.

Chair Raschko: Wait a minute. What, what, what? Just one moment.

(Commissioner Mitchell speaks quietly with Chair Raschko.)

Chair Raschko: I think we need to –

Commissioner Knutzen: Perhaps staff could address that?

Chair Raschko: Well, the thing that I'm – the point had been made is that this might cross into deliberations.

Commissioner Knutzen: And that was my question to you and you're the people I need to listen to.

Chair Raschko: Yeah, well, you know, I wasn't quick enough to see that but it was pointed out to me that perhaps we should refrain.

Commissioner Knutzen: Right. So I know we're being recorded and I was asking if it was proper for me to speak to the group. And is it not? We want to follow protocol.

Chair Raschko: I think we should abstain at this point.

Commissioner Knutzen: Okay. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: All right. So once again I want to thank everybody that spoke and everybody that came. Yes?

Unidentified Female Voice: I know we're having speakers but I was wondering if I could just ask if there's a question that I had? And \_\_\_\_\_...

Chair Raschko: No, that's not appropriate here. So if there's no objection from the Commission then, I will close the public hearing. And as a reminder, please: Written comments on this proposal

will be accepted through this Thursday, July 27<sup>th</sup>, at 4:30. The way it is scheduled, the Planning Commission is to meet to consider the comments here on September 26<sup>th</sup> and deliberate on a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners on Tuesday, October 10<sup>th</sup>. It might be appropriate to extend this period, as many people have asked, but that is something that may be considered. So once again, thank you very much. I would just like to request too that our meeting is not over. So if you care to visit and mill around if you could kindly go into the lobby to do so we can continue it'd be appreciated. So everybody have a good night.

Unidentified Voice: Thank you!

Mr. Moore: Thank you, Chair. Just a couple things to mention from a County and Departmental perspective. I would like to mention to everyone, don't forget it's dry out there. We've had an uptick of the fire districts and the fire marshals responding to burn complaints, smoke complaints, brush fires, et cetera. So I just want to mention that as something that's kind of taking our focus right now.

Another thing that I don't recall if we mentioned, but we were successful in securing a state grant for our Comp Plan update. So that's very exciting news for Skagit County. It's up to \$700,000 over a two-year period to help us complete that work. So we're very excited about that and we've started talking to some consultants that might help us with various aspects of that.

Friday we are meeting again with the governor's office to discuss the latest update on the proposed Orca relocation. That's still in discussion. They have come up with a slightly modified version of how they might do that and they're going to talk to us a bit about that on Friday. So that's – I'll keep you updated as I know more.

That's all I have for this evening.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Any questions for –

Commissioner Amy Hughes: You talked about the fire warning. Has there been a change in the county status regarding rules or anything recently, or is it still the same?

Mr. Moore: Are you referring to a burn ban?

Commissioner Hughes: Yeah, that kind of –

Mr. Moore: There's a burn ban in effect right now.

Commissioner Hughes: Okay.

Mr. Moore: And Skagit County – annually we coordinate with other jurisdictions with the state DNR to do kind of a unified approach to when the burn ban goes into effect and when it doesn't, based on moisture levels, et cetera. So no, we are in a burn ban right now, which is why the fire districts are a little more – they're on the ball whenever there's a complaint out there. So fire marshals that work for the County follow up with some – any folks that might be burning in the burn ban period, we follow up with them to try to educate people why that's not the best idea at these times of year. But no, the status is still a burn ban.

Commissioner Hughes: Okay, thank you.

Chair Raschko: Anybody else?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Moore: You're welcome.

Chair Raschko: So we'll go to Planning Commissioner Comments and Announcements. Vince, do you have anything?

Commissioner Vince Henley: What? I have nothing to say.

Commissioner Knutzen: I think I've never said that in my life. I would like to thank the Commissioners here. I'd like to thank staff. I'd like to thank the four remaining people for staying with us. I don't know what side of the issue you're on. And I'd especially like to thank Kathy Mitchell for telling me not to speak to save me from gross embarrassment potentially.

(laughter)

Chair Raschko: Me too.

Commissioner Knutzen: And I'm aware this is still being recorded and that was why I asked and didn't start talking. Because I have a muffler now at least, compared to when I first came here but it's not a very big muffler yet. And as we go forward, I'm actually so excited. We finally have everybody at the table and we're going to get this thing worked out. And I hope that by October 10<sup>th</sup> we are finished with this, but I know there's still a lot more talking to go on. And, staff, you've done a good job. We'll figure this out. I'm more optimistic about this than I've ever been. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Well, thank you.

Commissioner Jen Hutchison: I just want to express my gratitude for all of the guests that came in for a public hearing this evening. It's really great to see the community voice their concerns around such a dear topic for all of us. So I appreciate everybody's attendance.

Chair Raschko: Martha?

Commissioner Martha Rose: More of the same. Ditto. I'm glad for all of the voices and the different opinions, and I know that the devil's in the details but it's nice to hear both sides. That's all.

Commissioner Woodmansee: Well, I went to a lot of public meetings in my career and this is by far the largest attended ones I've ever been at. I will say it is critical for the public to get involved and I know that we try hard to find ways to make that happen. And so, you know, hopefully maybe out of this, as we move forward on this through the process, maybe it'll spur some more people to maybe get a little bit more involved on other items. Because it's a lot easier to get the word out if people are here, and so it's a good thing to have this many people here tonight, I believe, regardless of what side of the issue you're on. So I appreciate everybody being here. I don't know if this is an appropriate time to ask this question or not, but I feel like that – well, let me ask the

question first. Can we or can we consider or are we going to consider potentially moving the public comment date out? And I – if I need to be chided for asking the question, I’m \_\_\_\_\_.

Ms. Ruether: We can. I have to re-notice it so it’s – you know, it wouldn’t – I would have to put it in the paper and, you know, set a specified time, and if you want to have another hearing or – you know, we’d have to re-notice. Because we’ve already put in the paper that it’s for this – that’s the

Commissioner Woodmansee: So if we were to do that, does that conflict with closing the public hearing here tonight? Or is it just that we’re willing to receive public comment for a longer period of time?

Ms. Ruether: I mean, we would have to re-notice it anyway because we’ve already said that the comment period would close at this time. That’s what we’ve already put in the papers so we’d have to re-notice and go through it all over again, which we could do.

Commissioner Woodmansee: I’ll be honest with you. I don’t think that’s an inconvenience at all.

Ms. Ruether: Mm-hmm.

Commissioner Woodmansee: I mean, the real issue is should we – for me, the real issue is – I mean, there was people here tonight that suggested that hey, let’s get these sides together. And so I’m, you know, not trying to stir anything up but I feel like that’s a process that we should encourage. And so my question is: Should we consider pushing that date out for public comment?

Ms. Ruether: I mean, that’s up to you. I’m just saying from a, you know, following the process standpoint that we would have to have it re-noticed in the paper and, you know, let everyone know so that it was transparent that we were opening up the comment period again. So I’d probably push the dates out, which is fine. That’s your choice as a board. If you feel like you need more time to get comment we can do that.

Commissioner Hughes: My follow-up question would be, since it wasn’t on the agenda, do we get to do that? I mean, to the real process and how things go, can we at this point have that discussion here and now, or do we need to do it at the next meeting?

Mr. Moore: I don’t see an issue in deciding as a commission to extend the public comment period.

Commissioner Hughes: Okay.

Mr. Moore: And as Sarah pointed out, we will simply re-notice it for you to ensure that the public is well informed of your decision, if you so choose.

Commissioner Knutzen: Because this is all public, when you talk about the sides being together one of the first speakers said – Allen Rozema – there is a meeting tomorrow between several members of the Ag Advisory Board, several vendors, several venue operators, and the ag association. And I’m also part of the process. We had a meeting last Wednesday and it’s all public. There’s a meeting Wednesday tomorrow at noon with all these people to try and get the process figured out. But I still – my goal is October 10<sup>th</sup> to have whatever we come up with, however the process, has to be legal, which is you folks have to decide. I don’t want to extend this another five years. We have too much work to do. But I’m concerned that if we say we’re all done, if you don’t have an opportunity after two days from now it’s going to be a problem. These people are going

to be bombarding us and you: “We never had a chance.” We know that’s not totally accurate. Is there an avenue that we could extend this to the meeting we have? The next meeting is August 8<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Ruether: Yeah. I would just have to put it in the paper that we’re extending the, you know, the comment period, we’re extending the hearing, and it would be based on the proposed code changes as they are, because that is what we’re considering. We’re not considering anything new.

Commissioner Knutzen: Right.

Ms. Ruether: It would just – it would be a repeat of what we had tonight on the 8<sup>th</sup>. But I have to make sure I get it in the paper and have your 15 days’ notice and that kind of thing.

Commissioner Knutzen: So essentially, if I understand it, we’d be giving them two more weeks.

Ms. Ruether: Yeah, but we wouldn’t – we would still be considering the same proposed code changes that we are now. We wouldn’t be considering something new. If you’re considering something new you’d have to do a new SEPA, a new evaluation, a new –

Commissioner Knutzen: We’d have to do all that?

Ms. Ruether: Yeah, if it was a new proposal that was vastly different.

Commissioner Knutzen: If it’s a new proposal?

Ms. Ruether: Yes, that’s what I mean.

Commissioner Knutzen: But if we talk about –

Commissioner Henley: There’s a proposal on the table.

Commissioner Mitchell: Right, right.

Commissioner Henley: And you have to act on the proposal that’s on the table.

Commissioner Mitchell: You can’t start over. The Board would decide that and the process is what it is. So we’re doing the process as the process was noticed and as the process is done. Even though other people may come up with ideas or suggestions, they’re welcome to do that but it does not change what the proposal was that went out. Am I correct in thinking the whole thing would have – somebody would have to start something way back at the beginning and go through the same process to change.

Ms. Ruether: Right, right. I mean, if you want us to extend the comment period, the comment period would be on what the proposed changes as they are.

Commissioner Mitchell: Right. Exactly.

Ms. Ruether: So you would be saying you’re just getting more comment on the proposed code changes as they are. If you want to do something radically different, you would have to do a new SEPA, you’d have to do a new consistency analysis with all the GMA things and new evaluations.

So it would restart it. So I guess that's the differentiation. Do you just need more input on what we have now, or if you're thinking about doing something new it would restart it.

Commissioner Mitchell: Well, quite frankly, we wouldn't have the power to do that. We're doing what the Board instructed us to do. Is that correct, Jack?

Mr. Moore: Not specifically. So what Sarah's saying is correct, but the Planning Commission has wide berth to decide what to do with the recommendation before you at this point. You're going to craft your own recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners and if that is similar to the Ag Board's recommendation, so be it, but if it's different then we may need to do some re-noticing and kind of step back a couple of steps to ensure that it is adequately analyzed and we get public input and input through the SEPA process on anything that might be different with the Planning Commission's recommendation. So there's nothing that prevents you from doing that. It's really – it's just a process difference. Certainly a timing difference, but a process difference. But that is well within your authority.

Chair Raschko: I believe – can I speak?

Commissioner Knutzen: If we don't – my understanding is if we don't make this radically different, we can extend it for two weeks. I don't know whose decision to make it radically different –

Chair Raschko: If we don't make *what* radically different?

Commissioner Knutzen: If we don't – the proposed code amendment. If we don't radically change that, Commissioner Mitchell said – my interpretation is we can't change one word. Well, my understanding is we *can* change a little bit if we don't radically change it. I don't want to extend this two more years. I don't think anybody does. But I'm concerned if we cut it off 100% it's not going to end the war. And there's a process now being taken. If we can stay within the framework that we have and finish by October 10<sup>th</sup>, and if we don't radically change this – and this was told to me by a legal person just yesterday – if we don't radically change this, we can extend comments to the 8<sup>th</sup>.

Commissioner Henley: I object from a parliamentary point of view. You're going to have to vote on the proposal that's on the table, all right? You can either accept or reject that, all right? But then that has consequences all of its own.

Chair Raschko: Okay, what I'm thinking is happening here is we basically have this proposal. We had a public hearing on what's written here, okay? Now – and we're seeking public input on what's here. Then when we closed the public hearing part of it – I mean, the public input – then we deliberate on it, but it's not a yes/no on that thing. As Jack was saying, we can amend it and change it every which way we want at that point. Okay?

Commissioner Henley: But then you'd open it up for more comments and –

Chair Raschko: No you don't. No, we make a recommendation and we can change that in the recommendation.

Commissioner Henley: So all you're doing is making a recommendation for the Board of Commissioners.

Chair Raschko: Right. So what I think we need to do is – I think there are people in the community who are going to want to make additional comments in the next week. And I think that we'd be well advised to allow that to happen. If anybody else has another opinion, please state it, but I think we should request that staff extend the comment period and move forward. Yes?

Commissioner Rose: Just to clarify, I think you're saying to extend the written comment period, not to have another hearing.

Chair Raschko: No, no, the hearing's over. The written comment period.

Commissioner Rose: Right. So the written comments, I agree with that to extend it up to a couple weeks beyond.

Chair Raschko: Anybody else?

Commissioner Knutzen: Just so I'm clear: We can extend the written comments to appease or give an avenue for people that want to comment without having another one of these.

Chair Raschko: Correct.

Commissioner Knutzen: I vote for that.

Commissioner Woodmansee: That's where I was headed, was can we do that. I really don't think it has to change our other dates, because you have all these comments already. There's a lot to compile. I mean there's – you have so many comments that might change the dates already! But you don't have to stop the process of compiling if you haven't – you may already be doing it.

Chair Raschko: So then could you please then move forward if necessary?

Ms. Ruether: Okay. I will notice that.

Chair Raschko: Okay.

Commissioner Mitchell: Can I make one comment?

Chair Raschko: Well, you know, you're next up on –

Commissioner Mitchell: Am I next up? The process is working! This *is* the process and that's the whole point. This is the process. Yes?

Mr. Moore: Yes. Chair, could I ask: Do you think that you might take a vote on the extending the public comment period and maybe specify a date for us?

Chair Raschko: I could do that.

Mr. Moore: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: All right, a date. Yes, make a motion. Go ahead.

Ms. Ruether: We're kind of wondering – our code says when I publish something it has to be 15 days, so we may be held to that legal requirement so it may not be a – if we're going to publish it,

you've got to give a 15 – our code says you've got to give a 15-day window. I can check with our attorney, but we may not have a choice in that if you're going to re-notice something.

Commissioner Woodmansee: So I would make a motion that we extend the written public comment period for a two-week period from the original cutoff date, which is the 27<sup>th</sup>. That gives you your 15 days that you think you need. And then we would close the written comment period at that time.

Commissioner Hutchison: I'll second that.

Chair Raschko: It's moved and seconded to extend the comment period. Is there discussion?

Commissioner Hughes: I have a question. Do you need to verify if we do this with legal is it still – or can we go two weeks without verifying that?

Mr. Moore: One way that we could cover our bases there is that you could say “or as the minimum required per our legal opinion.”

Commissioner Mitchell: Sounds good.

Chair Raschko: Do you care to amend your motion?

Commissioner Woodmansee: I'll amend my motion to include “or the minimum required legal notice timeframe.”

Commissioner Knutzen: I second that.

Chair Raschko: All right. All those in favor, say “aye.”

All Commissioners: Aye.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. There we go. So do you have any announcements or comments?

Commissioner Mitchell: No, just thanks for the input. And the one thing I would encourage anybody that's going to keep going after this is to read the code and proposals and the staff reports so they know exactly what was said and written and proposed.

Chair Raschko: Amy?

Commissioner Hughes: And to follow up on that, just for the public to realize that this is a process. We have a process and that's what we need to follow. Thank you all.

Commissioner Knutzen: Thank you all.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. I just want to thank all of you people. You've been really helpful and supportive. Thank you, staff. Thank all the people that are now gone and the people still here for coming and taking part. So with that, we will stand adjourned (gavel).