

**Skagit County Planning Commission
Workshop and Discussion: 2016 Comprehensive Plan Rural Element
May 19, 2015**

Commissioners: **Josh Axthelm, Chair**
 Keith Greenwood, Vice Chair (absent)
 Kathy Mitchell
 Kevin Meenaghan
 Robert Temples
 Tammy Candler
 Annie Lohman
 Amy Hughes
 Matt Mahaffie (absent)

Staff: **Dale Pernula, Planning Director**
 Kirk Johnson, Senior Planner
 Ryan Walters, Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney

Speakers: **Ellen Bynum, Friends of Skagit County**
 Bill Dietrich
 Maggie Sullivan
 Tim Rosenhan
 Wilfred Voigt, Birdsvew Brewery

Chair Josh Axthelm: We're going to go ahead and start the meeting. I'd like to welcome you all out tonight to the Planning Commission meeting officially. It's Tuesday, May the 19th at 6 p.m. and we call this meeting to order. We'd like to have you take a look at the agenda. Actually it's kind of two agendas. You have the official agenda. I'll just go ahead and turn the time over to Dale to take care of the meeting.

Dale Pernula: Okay. Were you going to have the Planning Commission members introduce themselves? Why don't you do that?

Chair Axthelm: Okay, if I could have the Planning Commission members stand up. First, I'm Josh Axthelm. I'm the Planning Commission Chair.

Kathy Mitchell: Kathy Mitchell.

Kevin Meenaghan: And Kevin Meenaghan.

Robert Temples: Robert Temples.

Tammy Candler: I'm Tammy Candler.

Annie Lohman: I'm Annie Lohman.

Amy Hughes: Amy Hughes.

Chair Axthelm: Okay. So with that, I'll turn it over to Dale.

Mr. Pernula: Okay. My name's Dale Pernula. I'm the Skagit County Planning and Development Department Director, and I'll go over real briefly what's going to be on the agenda. From 5:30 to 6 was the open house in the lobby. At 6 o'clock is the beginning of the workshop. When I'm done I'll turn it over to Kirk here who will introduce the people who will be making presentations, and there are five people here who will be making those presentations. That'll be at 6:10, then 30 minutes later at 6:40 we will break into some small group discussions, small groups where everybody will have the opportunity to make comments regarding a series of questions that are being asked, and those will be reported back to the larger – to the Planning Commission and the larger group when those reports are done. Those small group reports will take place at 7:25 and it should take about 20 minutes. Then at 7:45 we'll have a period where individuals will have a period of time to make comments individually to the entire group. That will last about 15 minutes. There will be a brief break – about 10 minutes – and then the Planning Commission will discuss the issues with whoever wishes to remain to listen to that discussion. That should occur at about 8:10.

The goals for tonight are to review the Rural Element of the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan, to take a look at – to help define what the rural character is for Skagit County, what that character is and what the county values the most. Concerns about the rural character of the county can be identified and there will be an assessment of the current policies, and that should be as outcome of the response to the questions that are provided. The Rural Element is not the Natural Resources Lands Element of the Comprehensive Plan. That's more for the areas that are to be protected and enhanced, such as timber lands, ag lands, and fisheries, and that includes zones such as the Ag-NRL zone, Industrial Forestry, and so on. But we're talking specifically about the Rural Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

So now I'd like to turn it over to Kirk Johnson.

Kirk Johnson: Okay, I guess I'll sit here. So as Dale said, tonight is an opportunity for all the participants to share in the discussion of what the terms rural character, rural lifestyle, and rural opportunities mean to them, and how well the current Comprehensive Plan and the development regulations are doing at protecting and enhancing rural lands and communities.

So we're going to start off with five brief presentations of about five to six minutes each from residents of different parts of rural Skagit County, and they were selected to provide a variety of geographic and perhaps philosophical viewpoints on the Rural Element and related issues of rural character.

So I'll introduce the five speakers now and then we'll move into their presentations, and after that we'll talk about the small group discussions. So we would like the speakers as they get up to speak to go up to the podium there. And the first – and I'll introduce all of them together and then we'll hear from them.

The first speaker is Ellen Bynum, who's Director of Friends of Skagit County, which is an organization that's been actively involved in land use planning issues in the county since the early 1990s. I believe Ellen lives in Shelter Bay – you can correct me if I'm wrong, Ellen – one of our rural communities, and she's a frequent presenter to the Planning Commission and the County Commissioners, so we'll have her get up first. She knows where the microphone and the like are.

The second will be Bill Dietrich who's a resident of South Fidalgo Island and a noted writer. In addition to writing extensively about the special character of Skagit County and the Pacific Northwest, Bill, like many Fidalgo Island residents, was active in the South Fidalgo subarea planning process in the early 2000s. That's the one of the three rural subarea planning processes that have been initiated since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1997 that didn't go all the way to conclusion and adoption. We've had two others, Alger and Guemes Island Subarea Plan, that were adopted.

So the third speaker is Maggie Sullivan, a resident of the Alger area and a painter by profession. Maggie served as the Chair of the Alger Subarea Plan Citizen Advisory Committee from 2005 to 2008. The Alger Subarea Plan is one of the two rural subarea plans that have been developed and adopted in the county.

The fourth speaker is Tim Rosenhan, a resident of Samish Island who runs a small recreation-based company. Tim was one of 12 members of the Envision Skagit 2060 Citizen Committee, appointed by the County Commissioners and City Mayors to develop recommendations for the long-term future of Skagit County, including both its urban and its rural areas.

And the fifth speaker is Wilfred Voigt. He is the owner with his family of the Birdsvew Brewing Company, which I didn't realize until today was named the best brewery in Skagit County in 2014. It was established in 2006 and the brewery has become a popular meeting place for residents and visitors alike in eastern Skagit County. One of our Commissioners was talking about the importance of rural prosperity and so we thought this was an example of a business that's really making a go of it and in the rural part of the county. And one thing that has impressed me about the business, although I've never stopped there, but they have a lot of supporters in the community and they've done things like "Birdstock" in the past, and so they seem to be becoming a real community institution.

So with that, the first speaker is Ellen Bynum.

Ellen Bynum: Good evening and thank you very much for inviting us to speak. We come and speak to the Commissioners quite a bit but it's a privilege to speak to the community.

I want to start out by doing something a little bit different. I'm usually up here saying, you know, Do this, do that, do whatever. But I didn't exercise last night based on a book that I'm reading about how to sell yourself and how to sell your idea. And one of the things that you want to do is you want to tell a fairy tale about what's going on, so I did a fairy tale about planning which is, you know, a little bit oxymoron, but here we go.

Once upon a time the citizens, leaders, and planners of the county tried to write a plan for how to use the land. Every day hundreds of citizens worked together in small groups and by themselves to put thousands of important ideas into a land use plan that became the law. One day some of the county leaders decided they didn't have to follow what the people had written down in the law. Because of that, a group of friends filed appeals to correct the county's errors and because of that the county corrected its land use plan, policies, and codes until finally the county's land use plan was in compliance with the laws, and what the friends and citizens wrote saved the county land for the future.

And I get really choked up about that because I wish we had done that, you know? We didn't quite get to saving for the future. We're still in process. And this group and this gathering is a

piece of the essential work that we have to all keep doing to make certain that Skagit remains the quality that we want it to be, that we see now; that our natural resources are preserved; and that people can live here. You know, that's the biggest thing. If we don't have people here, what's the point, right?

So Friends has a long history of appealing. I went through the appeals because I'm not a lawyer and I don't keep it in my head, and I had to print them out. And there's sort of like 15 pages of appeals that we did, and they addressed everything from agricultural land to procedure. A lot of the work that Friends did was procedural work to clarify what the Growth Management Act meant and to get the County Commissioners at the time to understand what their responsibilities were. And we were pretty effective at doing that. We had 68 issues that we brought before the Growth Management Hearings Board – which, by the way, you can do that as a citizen; you don't have to be an attorney to do that, so if anybody who has issues that they think they might wish to appeal, there is a way to do it – and the 68 issues were consolidated into 33 cases. And of those cases Friends prevailed on 30 of them and three of them – two of them were settled and one of them is an outstanding settlement in which Friends is owed about \$200,000. If you want to know anything about the details of that I can tell you. I don't keep what – I don't keep all these decisions in my head, but the thing that I know is that I know where to go and look up the information. I know who to ask. When I want to know something about what Skagit was like, you know, 40 years ago, 50 years ago, I know who to go to and ask about that, and I also know that the people who are serving on the Planning Commission now are a new group of people and they don't have the history, and they're asking questions of the citizens as well. So I think one of the challenges for today is for us to interact more with the County Commissioners and give them information that they really need to have to understand what the history of Skagit is about and also what that might mean for the future.

So I started thinking about: What is rural? And, of course, if you just look in the dictionary "rural" is anything that is not in the city, and so that would include, you know, just the general landscape that you look at when you are driving down I-5 or whatever. But for this exercise today we're talking about the Rural Element, and that's legally defined in the WAC, the Washington Administrative Code – right? It requires the identification and protection of the resource lands – so we take agriculture out, we take forestry out, and we take mineral out; then we remove all the cities; then we eliminate all the UGAs. And everything else that's left, that's the rural lands. And the GMA was written in a way such that the existing uses on the rural lands had to be recognized and contained, and so that's why we have quite a number of different kinds of rural zones.

Kirk kindly put together the acreages, which are exhibit A on the back of your handout. And if you look at it, you'll see that there's – if you take out Rural Intermediate and Rural Reserve together, you have about 80,000, say, acres that you have to know what to do with. And that might not seem like a lot – we have 1.1 million acres in the entire county, 59% of which is not taxed; 8% of it is in farm land and about 5½ to 7% is in forestry – so 80,000 acres is not that much. But I think that part of the character that we love about Skagit is this rural view that we get and the rural landscape with the small homesteads and the small farms. And those are the – many of those are not zoned Agriculture; they're zoned Rural Reserve. So we really do need to pay attention to what we do with the Rural Element of the Comp Plan and what we do in Rural Reserve.

One of the things that I noticed that we don't know is we have no baseline. In 2002 we did a GFI study about measuring where we were going to put half of the new homes in Rural Resource

rather than in resource lands, rather than on farm lands. I think we've probably done that, but I don't have any numbers that say that we have. So we need some baselines on that.

And the second thing is we need to know how much – within that rural zone – how much is being used for agriculture, despite the zoning? Because I think we want to keep our food supply in-hand for food security. And if that is how it's being used, how do we need to further protect that?

Then we need to talk about how much land is restricted by previous uses, like landfills or steep cliffs and slopes, or critical areas that are on that land. So if we identified all that, we would really know how many acres we're talking about and how many acres would have to be not built on because of the other restrictions.

Mr. Johnson: Ellen, your limit –

Ms. Bynum: Yeah, okay, I'll wrap it up. So the things that I'd urge people to think about is: What do you need to know about building on that rural land? Obviously, water is an issue. We have 200 coordinated – the Coordinated Water System Plan lists 200 local water systems. We have 72 different taxing categories that the Assessor taxes us at. It's a little bit complicated but I think that unless we know the bottom data we're not going to be able to make very good informed decisions. And I usually get up here and, you know, tell you what I think you should do, but I actually think the people need to tell you what to do because I don't have an answer for this problem and I think that, you know, in a democratic republic we generally listened to the people. So I wanted to ask, How many people wanted to do a town hall people instead of small groups? Raise your hand. Just FYI. We're still going to ask for that because we think that's a good thing.

So thanks very much.

Mr. Johnson: Okay, thank you. Bill?

Bill Dietrich: Hi. My name is Bill Dietrich. I live on the west side of Fidalgo Island. I'm on the Friends of the Forest board in Anacortes and I've served on the boards of the Skagit Land Trust, the North Cascades Institute, and the Northwest Straits. But I'm speaking here tonight only for myself. I appreciate the opportunity to address what all of us cherish, the rural character of Skagit County. I'm going to focus on Fidalgo, which epitomizes the urban-rural balance I think planners should be seeking. My goal is to sustain the island's special character.

I was born and raised in Tacoma, graduated from Western, and had my first newspaper reporting job in Skagit County in 1973 when the population was less than half what it is now. I lived and worked in Bellingham, Everett, Seattle, Olympia, and Vancouver, Washington, Journalism assignments took me into every corner of the state, and when my wife and I decided to relocate from the Seattle metro area 17 years ago, Skagit County was the most special place we could think of. I am grateful for the combination of luck, foresight, hard work, financial and labor contributions, and difficult decision-making that has preserved so much. We have more beauty, a lower cost of living, lower taxes, less traffic, and less crime than our more urbanized neighbors to the south.

Fidalgo Island sometimes benefits from obscurity. I've met folks in Skagit County surprised to learn that Anacortes is on an island; surprised that Fidalgo Island is part of the county – of Skagit County; and disbelieving that several other major San Juan Islands are also part of Skagit County. A million visitors a year race across Fidalgo Island to get to the ferry and the *real*

San Juan Islands or to that other island that they have heard of, Whidbey. This keeps Fidalgo from being loved to death. But discovery is creeping up on us.

In the 21st century, landscapes are the result of human choice. At 41 square miles, Fidalgo Island is larger than Manhattan Island, and if it had Manhattan densities it would contain three million people. Instead, it has roughly 25,000 sprawled across an area of perhaps about one-third the size of Manhattan. Fidalgo as a whole is split between urban and industrial acreage to the north and west, and forest and park to the south and east. It includes two major refineries, a substantial boat building industry, two marine college facilities, a big gravel mine, car dealers, junk yards, a casino, and two tribes. It also has roughly 3000 acres of Anacortes forest and park land, 2000 acres of state park on the Fidalgo side of Deception Pass, and 7500 acres of Swinomish Tribal uplands, much of that in forest. Fidalgo's eastern half is sometimes out of mind of Anacortes residents, but we actually have two narrow isthmuses connecting east and west, one of them the golf course between Fidalgo and Similk Bays. The island has a dozen lakes and large ponds, a mountain 1273 feet high, probably at least 50 miles of shoreline, and at least 70 miles of hiking and biking trails. Fidalgo has fragments of old growth, pasture, cliffs, rocky meadows, at least surprising waterfall, and a view from the summit of Mount Erie as inspiring as any on earth. Our secret is world class.

Growth has not been repealed. Traffic as increased significantly on the road that I live on. Many new developments have popped up in the last 17 years, and the Highway 20 corridor near one of the largest heron rookeries in the nation is, to my mind, ever uglier. A few high-end homes have had a disproportionate impact on the island geography and our historic pattern has been single-family homes with car and _____. And that includes my own home.

However, the overall island development pattern makes sense: denser – we're already developed to the north and west – and greener to the south and east. South Fidalgo Island has been zoned Rural Reserve and Rural Intermediate and this encourages a sensible growth pattern that I believe most island residents endorse. Under the Growth Management Act, Anacortes is accepting the bulk of population growth by infilling. The southern half is a mix of quasi-suburban along the high-value coastline and rural acreages in the interior.

Our challenge is to sustain this balance and think carefully about the kind of incremental change that can let our blessing slip away. I've travelled to the chaos of some of the world's developing mega-cities, such as Cairo or Bangkok or Katmandu. I've also inquired about the tidy landscapes of Europe. I once visited an Umbrian winery and marveled at its preserved palazzo and undulating farm lands so close to Rome, congratulating the owner on her good fortune. The owner said it wasn't luck at all and that such views came at the cost of annoying regulation. She complained that she couldn't change the faucets in her historic home without government permission. But in her next breath she said that without such policies there would be no house and no grapes and no wine, and that our view that day would have been of Italian sprawl. The political tradeoff, she said, was difficult but necessary.

Fidalgo's beauty is its most important resource, the attribute that adds value to every house and lot. I believe the right thing environmentally is also the right thing commercially, and that future generations will put a higher and higher premium on Fidalgo's green beauty and special character. And as you update the Rural Element, please don't betray the island's present and future. Sustain Fidalgo's quality of life with creative balance. Thank you.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Bill. Maggie?

Maggie Sullivan: Hi. I'm Maggie Sullivan. It's nice to see some familiar faces around here. Sorry, I've got to wear glasses now! My name is Maggie Sullivan and I live in Alger, and I'm here tonight to share my perception on Skagit County's rural character and whether or not I think the County's land use policies and regulations are doing an adequate job of protecting that rural character. Thank you for listening, and I will try and be frank.

Kirk asked me to attend because I was a member of the Alger CAC and helped draft the Alger community plan. It was quite a process. We were very thorough. For 18 months we met every other week. We had three community workshops. We met with the Planning Commission, the County Commissioners, and many individual meetings with a lot of the residents. So it was quite thorough. It lasted from January '06 and it finally got signed off in December of '08.

So what is rural character? As I was thinking about what I was going to talk about tonight, the first thing I had to decide: What is rural character? And briefly, I could see that the GMA defined it as natural landscape predominates – *predominates* – over the built environment. Traditional lifestyles; historical lifestyles, such as cottage industries – to me, that means rural; visual rural landscapes; living with wildlife and their habitat; reduce inappropriate conversion to low density; minimal government services; and the protection of natural water flows.

Now that was the Growth Management. But how do my and my fellow Algerians define rural?

- Acceptance of and dealing with inconveniences – in other words, no public sewer, water – having to deal with what you have.
- The bare minimum of infrastructure services. As a neighbor and friend defined to me one time, an aspect of rural is a caring capacity of the land.
- Living within the natural environment.
- Living alongside wildlife, where change is consistent with historical rural character.
- A place with elbow room.

So that's how we define rural. So in planning for the future of the rural Alger, what are some of the issues we raised and what are some of the things that we did that we thought would help maintain that? Well, in the Alger Village we did add some commercial space within the Alger limits. We asked to link up specific natural habitats for nature corridors. And we wanted to expand the allowances on owner-operator home-based businesses, because a lot of the people in Alger thought that if you lived there, worked there, raised your family there you have investment there, and they thought that that was a natural thing that happens in rural areas.

And so what do I and my neighbors see as a threat to rural character? The first thing that came to my mind was the CaRD, which is the Conservation and Reserve Development. In our plan we even asked specifically the County to carefully review the impact on rural character from the development of CaRDs and review their requirements to ensure that they achieve the protection of rural character for which they were intended. I remember that we went out onto a field trip to look at the CaRDs. We all went out together in cars and we saw some CaRDs, and some of the comments that we heard that night and at other times at workshops was, That's rural? It looks more like a housing development to me. Looks more like Bellevue. But mostly we were honestly appalled when we discovered that the open space designation which comes along with a CaRD may not be permanent and could be developed at a later date, you know, depending on the category of the open space. That was quite surprising to people. And if there's a promise of a protection, is it a promise or is it just a fly-by-night, let's-get-this-through thing? Do CaRDs protect rural character in perpetuity or save it for future, low density sprawl? That would be

something that I would hope this process would address. Also, to be honest with you, the use of CaRDs in areas where water concerns are prevalent, their use should be examined there, too.

And now the big elephant in the room is what I feel is a real driver for sprawl is public water and public sewer. I think that it should be kept in abeyance to prevent low density sprawl. That's what the Growth Management Act is for, I believe, in the rural area.

And, finally, we were very careful to prevent the expansion and gentrification of the Rural Village. That was an issue that was brought up.

So that was my definition of rural and what I think some of the issues that need to be addressed. Thank you.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Maggie. Tim Rosenhan.

Tim Rosenhan: She put her glasses on to see. I'm taking mine off. My name is Tim Rosenhan. I live on Samish Island. I was on the Citizens Committee for Envision Skagit 2060. I have roots in Skagit County going back to my great-grandfather who was the Fire Chief in Mount Vernon from 1911 to 1943. I've lived here and moved away and come back to Skagit three times in my life and I guess I'm a repeat offender in that regard.

Envision Skagit held about 12 public meetings across the county and in cities and in rural areas. The question that we wanted primarily to have – to ask these folks is what they valued most about Skagit Valley that needs to be retained over time. What we heard was remarkably similar regardless of the venue. Let me read a few of these responses. And the way we did this was we asked people to throw some ideas up on paper. Those sheets of paper were put up around the room and people got to vote with dots, and these are the top five responses, first from Anacortes.

What do you value most about the Skagit Valley that needs to be retained over time?

Visual and physical access to the natural environment; water; forest; maintain waterfront access; healthy ecosystem; pursue smart development; no net loss of ecosystems; access to locally grown food and enabling small local growers to survive; farm land.

Concrete: natural resources; quality of life; safe, small communities; recreation opportunities; healthy, local food; solitude; quiet.

Edison: natural beauty; diverse natural resources; fish, water, habitat, et cetera; local food; wildlife habitat; diverse agriculture.

Sedro-Woolley: rural diversity; agriculture; small business-oriented local owners; wildlife, bird life, swans, eagles; farming capability; local source of food.

La Conner: small, diverse farms; no more farm land loss; green heartland for Puget Sound forestry; farming and fish; wildlife habitat; several different populations that thrive; farmers; Hispanic; tribes; and so on. You can see I'll just repeat myself if I go any further on that.

Clearly nature and agricultural open space in Skagit are what people want to pass on to their children and grandchildren. People don't move here to raise families because of the nightlife.

Another thing we learned from Envision is our precarious location; that is, we are the dark spot on the satellite photo of Puget Sound, positioned between two enormous expanding galaxies of light, Seattle and Vancouver. Skagit is within an hour-and-a-half's drive of 5 million people. Skagit is bisected by the I-5 artery of light connecting these huge populations. As we were told by Envision presenter Dr. Robert Lang, the manifest destiny of our region's cities is to grow together. We are not isolated. We cannot stop the galaxies on either side of us from growing.

So how do we resist the encroachment of light and maintain our dark nights and our green days? How do we keep the rural Skagit Valley in its desirable pastoral Eden from becoming the Paradise Lost of Kent Valley? I believe we best protect our rural values by encouraging what people are already doing in Skagit County, and that is moving into the existing cities. Census figures indicate well over 80% of the new population is self-selecting to live in Skagit cities. This urbanizing trend is prevalent elsewhere in Puget Sound and Seattle has experienced the greatest urban population boom in our lifetime. Here in Skagit, perhaps paradoxically, preserve our rural character by focusing on making our cities better. Make them interesting, vital places that are delightful and economic to occupy, and the rural areas will benefit, which begs the question: How does rural Skagit improve its rural character by adding more people into the countryside?

Another factoid we learned in Envision is that unincorporated Skagit County has over 13,000 unbuilt development rights. To perhaps oversimplify, we could add 65,000 more people into Skagit County with 80% of them moving into existing cities and not have a need to subdivide anymore of the rural lands. That may be enough rural land housing capacity for over 50 years at current growth rates. As in medicine, land use planning should have as its first principle, Do no harm. Therefore, I am not a fan of increasing rural populations through fully contained communities, new towns, new Rural Villages, new LAMIRDs, or TDRs for increasing densities in rural receiving areas, all of which, I believe, are infernal mechanisms to add more people into a rural landscape that is perfect enough.

I look forward to the discussion on these topics. Thanks for inviting me to the party.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Tim. And, Wilfred – for our last speaker.

Wilfred Voigt: Well, thank goodness I'm the last one. I'm new at this so bear with me. First off I want to thank the gentleman over there for allowing me to give my presentation this evening. There's a lot of people that care about this valley in here – I see that right now – including myself and my wife back there. There's a lot of work to be done. There truly is. I don't have any of the answers. I have some of the solutions but – I guess we all do – but then again...

Well, first off, let me just say my name is Bill Voigt. People call me Wilfred because that's my legal name. My wife Kris over there, we are the owners and operators of Birdsvew Brewing Company in Birdsvew, Washington. My wife and I moved up in the valley back in 1982, raised our children, and they couldn't wait to move out, but you know what? They're all back again. Go figure. Yeah!

There's one issue that I would like to address. And we're in eastern Skagit County and only a part of the big county. The rural element to me (is) assuring economic prosperity in rural areas. How do you do that? Well, I don't know but in our case what we've done is we've created a successful business and I'm lucky to be able to do what I do and I'm proud to do what I do. And my whole family works with my wife and I and, believe me, I am a blessed, fortunate man. Let me tell you that.

So we deal with a lot of tourists that come up to the valley. They love to camp, fish, hike. We get a lot of people in the brewery that just absolutely love the valley. And get this: They want to move here! Can you believe that? I can't blame them! I truly can't blame them. But the people are going to show up. The people are going to want to live here. It's just a beautiful place. You can't blame them.

So in our case what we've tried to do is we've tried to accommodate the people that come during the summertime and the wintertime. What we're trying to do in our case for our economic prosperity is to put in a larger food service area – a complete kitchen. And we're not allowed to do that where we are because we're zoned Rural Reserve, so we're trying to change the Comprehensive Plan to allow under a Small Business context or Tourism, so that's what we're trying to do. And we're going through the hoops and hopefully we'll be able to accomplish that.

So I don't know how that's going to turn out. I hope it turns out in our favor because I think that, first off, we're a community-based business. And I don't know who it was that mentioned home-based business – that's a beautiful thing. That's truly a beautiful thing. You don't build a big warehouse. You don't build, you know, malls. It's a beautiful thing. It remains rural. I like that idea. Both my wife and I had small, home-based businesses, so I liked that idea. But I'm not sure really how we're going to get there. These guys over here have a hell of a job ahead of them. They do. This is the first time I've been to an event like this, and it's important. And workshops I don't know, but public meetings, yes. People need to know. People need to hear what's going on. Not so much a bashing, but just information. We need information and they need input to make an intelligent decision on everybody's behalf.

So, like I say, I don't know what else I can add to this but other than the fact that I'm the last person up here. Thank you for listening to me and thank you for your time and thank you so much for having me speak, and thank you.

Mr. Johnson: All right, thank you. So if we could just have a round of applause for all the speakers.

(applause)

Mr. Johnson: And hopefully they've given everybody some food for thought. I won't make a beer joke, although I'd like to. So basically we're going to move to the small group discussion part of the meeting now and probably about half of the people who are here have done this with us and maybe the other half haven't. So we are going to break up into five different small groups and we'll count off. Group 1 will meet over on this side of the room, Group 2 here; Group 3 in a room out there called the Quartz Room; Group 4 on this side of the lobby; and Group 5 on the far side of the lobby. And, let's see if I can remember – let's see. Dale will be working with Group 1; I'll be with Group 2; Gary Christensen – Gary, can you raise your hand? – Group 3; Ryan Walters, Group 4; and Betsy Stevenson, Group 5. And we'll just ask the groups to discuss several questions about rural character: How do you define it? What do you cherish about your rural community? They're on the back of the agenda. What concerns do you have for the present and the future of Skagit County's rural areas? And then the fourth question is, Are the current Comprehensive Plan policies and development regulations doing an adequate job of protecting various aspects of the rural area and rural character?

(Skip to Planning Commission Discussion.)

Chair Axthelm: Okay, so let's continue the Planning Commission portion of it. So we have the questions. We can just go down through the questions and back and forth. Does that work, like we've done previously?

Mr. Meenaghan: Do you want to do that or just all want to make comments?

Ms. Candler: I think just one set of comments.

Chair Axthelm: One set of comments for the whole thing?

Mr. Temples: Yeah.

Chair Axthelm: Okay. That sounds good. So, Tammy, do you want to start it out?

Ms. Candler: Yeah. Thank you. I don't have a whole lot to add to what's already been brought up tonight. I know that the County needs to lead by example, of course, and I always try to keep that in mind. So I don't have anything else to add.

Ms. Mitchell: I think one of the things I'd like to reinforce that was brought up tonight. It's pretty loud and clear that the rural element and the rural character are concerned about the water issues as they move on. And I realize that keeps being brought up and that's a sticky wicket, as we've seen in the past. We all know that. But it keeps coming up time and time again and it's pretty essential that we have understanding of who gets what water, when, and where. And people do need to know when they can access, how they can access, and with consistency. And I think the consistency is one of the important parts. One of the good things about the state ruling is that the water belongs to the people. As a part of that, the people should be able to use water on their own property. That's my personal opinion.

I was really pleased to see a number of things come out tonight about what people saw and felt about the rural character and the rural element. There's a lot of commonality that we have in understanding how special it is, and I would like to do whatever we can to maintain that and work together. One of the big pieces that came out also loud and clear is that there was a sense of community that the rural folk have, and that seems to be passed over unless you live it. And a lot of folks that come in from other areas don't understand even though we're spread out we are a strong community and we have a lot of common values and do an awful lot of work to keep it cohesive and working and functioning well.

So that's all I have at this point. Thank you.

Mr. Meenaghan: As I listened to tonight's comments and made a few myself, the things that really stood out for me were, first of all, access and having the ability to have cities in our county and still be able to get out and have access to the rural environment – hugely important. That ties in very closely to the concept of elbow room and open space, which seemed to be very important to a lot of the public. It was important to me, as well. Like Kathy mentioned, community is very important. You know, the thing about the rural community, as in most of our cities in this county, is we really do take care of each other and that's why that sense of community is so important and something that we all value, whether we live in the city or we live in the county.

I thought it was interesting – Ellen mentioned that, you know, there's a graying of ag and rural, and I think that the perception in the county and the perception of the public is probably, Hey,

what's the difference? And so there's a graying of those two different areas and that zoning. And so I think we need – as we go through the Comp Plan – we need to take a good look at what is zoned ag and what is zoned rural and make sure that is right.

I thought it was also interesting that as important as we consider our rural character in this county that (a) it's only 7.3% of the acreage and (b) it is one of the smallest chapters in the Comp Plan. And I just say to myself I'm not sure that makes a whole lot of sense. So I'm just kind of scratching my head at why there seems to be that dichotomy.

And I also wanted to – I'll just finish with I very much appreciated Bill's – Bill Dietrich's comment about it epitomizing the urban/rural balance. And I think that word "balance" is absolutely the most important thing when we look at the Comp Plan between, you know, How do we handle population growth, job growth, economic opportunity, and still keeping that rural character? How do we do that balance? Thank you.

Ms. Lohman: I share the same thoughts that have already been spoken, but when I was reviewing for tonight and also listening, I kept thinking about our rural communities but they're not all zoned the same. Some of them are Rural Intermediate, some are Rural Reserve, some are Rural Village, some are Rural Center, some are Rural Resource with a teeny, tiny dot that says Rural Center. So I don't think that's the diversity that we're talking about, and maybe those kind of communities – like why isn't Birdsvie or Allen or Blanchard or Conway – why are they so vastly zoned different? And maybe we need to have some community outreach and ask those questions of the folks there. Because when you have a certain zoning imposed over you – for example, Blanchard with the Ag-NRL – there're certain restrictions that don't always make sense when it's already a platted community. So I think there's an opportunity to examine what we have now and see if we want to change it, but I think it should be the folks *there* that have – need to have the dialogue. Because I don't think we as Planning Commissioners should go in there and wave magic wands and do things, because that's part of what's so wonderful about Skagit County is we have these – I don't want to say isolated, but these unique places that have something about them and you don't want to destroy them and make them like the I-5 corridor where it's exactly the same. You could close your eyes, drive 500 miles and open them again and it looks exactly the same. We don't want that here so that's not what I'm referring to. I'm referring to making sure that we preserve the ambience but also the economic opportunity, and is the zoning appropriate that allows that to happen without being urban sprawl or turning it into suburbia. Because that isn't what Skagit County is. And that all goes back to the community thing. Because if we have our zoning codes so restrictive that we kill a community, did we accomplish what we wanted? And I don't think that's what we want to do. So that was what I thought of.

Mr. Temples: I've given this a lot of thought because, number one, I haven't been here that many years, though I've probably transited through Skagit County since about 1960. Now that I'm here, I'm learning to highly respect what a lot of – everybody here who lives here, works here, appreciates about being here. My early youth was spent growing up in what was probably called rural Snohomish County. Well, where I was growing up is now huge developments. I mean, I don't even recognize the area that I grew up (in) as a kid – farm fields I played in and everything. And the Growth Management Act really meant to change a lot of that, to prevent that from happening as much, and it's been quite a strong tool that's directed every part of our community since then. It's been a real challenge for other parts of the communities to adapt and sometimes work with these documents that have been handed down from government to government entity. And then we take that and we look at what our county encompasses. We have a rural element all the way from our seashores up to mountain pass. We're very similar to

Snohomish County in that _____. So diversity and what's going to be happening in our community is something generations are going to have to face. And I'm sure everybody here has seen changes, some of them they like and some of them they never liked. And part of what we're responsible for is trying to help direct these things that the community would like us to direct. I don't think there's anybody who sits here or sits in the audience – you're all volunteering your time, your energies to try to make this place and our community a better place. And with 80% of us living and working in this community, which is one of the highest in any county in Washington state, the ones that are here are the ones that care about being here. And the rural element is something, I think, that's endeared to all of us. You know, to be able to go upstream and you see eagles flying around and wildlife any everything – assuming you don't hit deer on the highway, but anyway this is part of life and how we relate to all the creatures that live here besides ourselves. I'm kind of glad we're going through and asking ourselves these questions. Thank you.

Ms. Hughes: Twenty years ago we were talking about saving agriculture and how we needed not just farm land but we needed farmers to save agriculture. Well, I see the same thing going on here, but in the rural element we need community. And what does community bring? And one of it – one of the things we need is economic diversity. I heard conversations about, How can we make it possible to live in our rural communities? And what that does, it helps keep that community more viable so it doesn't just become a bedroom community where people drive in and out of. And I think that's very important.

We talked about how we needed our urban areas to be vibrant so people wanted to live there, but we need to find that community and to support it in our rural areas. To get that, we talked about we needed baseline numbers. We need to know what's going on a little bit better. Kirk mentioned that GIS – is that correct? – was available, so that's things that we should maybe be looking at. But also I was reading the Rural Element part and I saw two inconsistencies. In one goal it was we needed to minimize service demands and costs on County governments. We have – what I have heard – 78 taxing districts in our county, so we're not even talking about County government. We're talking about all those taxing districts – that it's very important to them to have the best services they can. There's another goal just a page away that says we need to assure that public facilities, services, roads, and utilities are properly planned and provided for, consistent with rural character, needs, and lifestyles. So we have kind of a tension going here between be careful of how expensive rural growth is and plan for it, but then it needs it. And I think we need to have conversation with that.

And then finally I heard comments about we don't want to be Kent Valley. Well, Kent Valley was 25 years ago. Now we have Issaquah Valley, and Issaquah just lost their last farm to growth and they said that that was because the taxes for residential growth had gotten too high. So if we want to be projecting into the future I think now is the time we start having the conversation that starts with getting those baseline numbers of what are we looking at.

Chair Axthelm: Some of the comments was the water rights. I think we just – well, and that's a whole different issue on rural. But in order to make the rural viable I think that needs to be fixed.

One of the comments – I was talking to a Commissioner earlier – I like – sometimes I think that the zoning is so complicated with all the different zones that are there, and the rural zones are just numerous. And I was talking to one of the Commissioners about it and saying, you know, I don't understand why all these subarea plans and stuff. But after hearing people tonight and talking about this in groups I understand, because – a bit more – because rural, the rural areas are so diverse. You know, there's so many different areas. We have areas by the water. We

have areas that are up in the mountains by the forestry. We have areas that are in farming areas. And they're all so different but they all can be rural in some aspects. So I think we just need to embrace that diversity a lot more, and it seems like we're doing that somewhat.

Another comment I had somebody had made was that the Planning Commission is quite new. I would like to address that in that I was born here in Mount Vernon. I actually moved away and I came back, but my grandfather, who's 90 years old, farmed here many years ago as well and some of his family had been here previous to that. So, I mean, I think that some of the other ones I think is the same situation. And, you know, we do go away and we come back with different ideas. We see different communities. And I think if we, as Skagit County, I embrace some of the different opinions because they bring something else. They bring something new to the county maybe that we didn't see to help maintain our character or to help keep our area viable. Sometimes, you know, you get stuck in one little spot and you can't economically make it, and if we see other options it helps us to understand and helps us to grow in the right direction instead of the wrong direction.

Embracing the diversity: These little pocket communities, I think they're great little assets for Skagit County. Each one seems to have its own character. Each one seems to have its own story to tell. And some of them, maybe they could make it better; some of them, they're kind of falling away. What can we do to embrace that a little bit better? I don't really have answers necessarily, but I just – things that come to mind for me.

The other comment is, you know, sometimes we have a mentality that we don't want others telling us what to do. We don't want others telling us what we can do with our land. I'm party to that sometimes too. I want to do with my land what I want to do with it. But I think we all need to see past that a lot more to make it better, to find ways to be involved and to help our community to become better. And then having people that – even though it may not be something you directly want to see, being open to opportunities or open to different visions of community and different visions of what the rural character could be. So I guess there's a balance between maintaining the rural character and looking at it. Sometimes there's things in the past that never will be again, and how do you adapt to that and how do you move forward in a positive way and keeping the rural character that it is and moving towards the future as well?

So I'm really thankful for all the people that talked today. I think it's really been a good opportunity. There's lots of people with different, diverse visions, especially in this aspect. Thank you.

Do we have any other comments for the Rural section?

Ms. Lohman: I have a question.

Chair Axthelm: Okay.

Ms. Lohman: Are we going to spend more time on this? What's the plan to come back to us? Because we've – this is – what? – the third element?

Mr. Johnson: Yeah, so the plan is to come back to each of the elements that you discussed in the workshops. Part of the challenge has just been finding available time before you when you're not considering the marijuana ordinance or something like that. So we're actually ready to come back with you on Housing when we can find the available time, and then we would do Transportation and then Rural.

Chair Axthelm: I did have one more thing and – is that we keep going back to the GMA and what the GMA requirements are. I think that we need to push past that and be better. What does Skagit County want? What's better for Skagit County? Sometimes I think that it's – you push a percentage of housing in Skagit County: Is that appropriate for us to do or not? Just a question.

Ms. Mitchell: I've got one thing to add. I've got one thing just to add very – in general. I liked seeing that little bit that you added with the town hall format at the end. It allowed people to speak that wanted to get up and let us know something else that they could not say in an individual group. One of the things that's difficult about breaking into the groups is you don't get to hear what all the groups say. And I wish I could clone myself into five where I could hear what every single one of those is saying. So I'm relying on somebody else's interpretation. And it's lovely having that little bit at the end where we've added that time to allow people to speak up that are willing to do that. That probably allows us to hear something we might not have heard otherwise. So thank you.

Chair Axthelm: Any other questions or comments?

(silence)

Chair Axthelm: Did you want anything more from that? All right, so we move on to the next portion on the agenda. Okay, so we move on to the next portion – the Department Update.

Mr. Pernula: I really don't have much to update you on other than your next meeting will not be next week. It'll be in two weeks from now, June 2nd.

Chair Axthelm: Okay. Any other Planning Commissioner comments?

Ms. Lohman: I have something. I listened to the Commissioners' talk about marijuana and they – I was under the impression they wanted to hear our comments and more comments. And I almost think that it needs to come back before us again because now that they've codified some medical marijuana issues – because I think we need to – I think we have more work to do on the marijuana, so I was asking that question.

Chair Axthelm: How's the Commission feel?

Ms. Mitchell: I think Annie's right. My sense of it is if when we made our recommendations and then staff had more recommendations past what we had. There was more information there that we probably need to see or kick around, especially if there's some more legal aspects or code issues that we either were not aware of or were not clear on. It feels like we need to have more time. And I also listened to the County Commissioners' meeting the other morning – last Tuesday – about the medical marijuana and the recreational marijuana issue and it seemed like they had the same sense that the work wasn't quite finished. And maybe it's because we made our recommendations and our work was sort of backwards from what we really intended – Finding of Facts versus Recommendations. And maybe it's one of those things where it's such a deep, complicated topic and the County's so new with dealing with it, I sure would like to get it as right as we possibly can from the start.

Chair Axthelm: We may not have a choice whether it comes back to us or not. But we can also – we *can* voice our opinion.

Ms. Lohman: Right.

Ms. Mitchell: Right.

Chair Axthelm: So, I mean, I – would somebody like to make a motion in that effect?

Mr. Meenaghan: What do the Commissioners want us to do?

Mr. Temples: Yeah.

Mr. Meenaghan: I mean, if they would like us to help them get to a decision by listening to the public and discussing it again, and making recommendations back to them, I think we could do that.

Mr. Pernula: Okay, I guess we can listen to them, see if they have some additional questions. I think very specifically what Annie talked to me about is she felt that the Planning Commission did not establish some standards for special use permits for retail uses, and that was kind of a disconnect between the Planning Commission and staff on that issue. Because if you're going to have a special use permit, particularly an Administrative Special Use Permit, you really do need to have those standards. So that's just one comment that I would have. And Ryan apparently wants to say something as well?

Mr. Walters: I would just say that when the County Commissioners considered this issue a week or so ago – last Tuesday – Commissioner Dahlstedt suggested that this be sent back to the Planning Commission, which is one of the options that the Board of County Commissioners has, under Skagit County Code 14.08, when a legislative proposal passes from the Planning Commission to the Board. The Board can do a number of things, one of which is hold another public hearing, which someone has to do if there are new concepts in the proposal that are outside what has previously received public comment. Another option is to remand it to the Planning Commission for additional work. But the Board didn't decide to do that. The Board decided to put out a *final* final proposal that includes all the options that the Planning Commission identified, that staff identified – put that out for public comment and public hearing, and that public hearing is scheduled for June 16th with a written comment period to end two days later. The proposal will get published on Thursday, along with the legal notice in the paper, and the results of that written comment period and public hearing will get crunched by the Board and then they'll make some additional decision. So they might decide then just to adopt something or they could then send it back to the Planning Commission or put out a third proposal. You know, they have a lot of additional options at that point. What they can't do is adopt the Planning Commission's recommendation outright. That was never an option for them because it included things that did not yet receive public comment. And the rule under GMA is that if there's some aspect of the proposal that hasn't received public comment, it needs to receive public comment – some substantial aspect – before it can be adopted. So there's got to be some process for getting additional public comment before that happens.

So at this point the proposal's moving forward. The new second draft of the permanent rules will have all those options in it and you'll get public comment on all of those options, and then the Board can do something else with it. So if you want to ask the Board to send it back to you you could, and they would have that option after the comment period is closed. But, otherwise, it is on a track to get the comment now.

Chair Axthelm: Now in watching that I believe I did catch that they called for us to come to them and talk about why we made the decision that we did. He was asking for the Planning Commission or Planning Commission members to come to that hearing.

Mr. Walters: Yes. I think they didn't ask for the body, but individual Planning Commissioners to be able to – yeah, I think the comment was made that anybody could come and that the Planning Commissioners individually should feel free.

Chair Axthelm: Yeah, but I think –

Mr. Walters: And they wanted the staff to relay to the Planning Commission what the staff recommendations were, which we did at the last meeting.

Chair Axthelm: I think Commissioner Dahlstedt specifically addressed that – calling for the Planning Commission – if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Meenaghan: So on June 16th we could show up and testify.

Chair Axthelm: Right. Yeah, as an individual.

Mr. Walters: And I always encourage people to put their comments in writing. I mean, you're free to come to the public hearing, but the written comments can get submitted earlier – more time to crunch through those – and Commissioner Lohman has already submitted some comments that are really helpful because they're in depth and much more detailed than you can get done in three minutes.

Chair Axthelm: I don't think there's enough time for us to discuss it as a Planning Commission to give them any updates on how we were. We can't really necessarily do that anyway because it's not on our agenda. I was thinking if we – because of the changes in it, if we wanted to talk about it as a whole and have something come directly from the Planning Commission, but that's not really our choice, is it?

Mr. Walters: Well, you don't really –

Chair Axthelm: It's better for us individually to go to the hearing.

Mr. Walters: I would suggest that because you definitely can do that.

Ms. Lohman: I just wanted to also see what the will of the Commission was, if we as a body are wanting to or willing to look at marijuana again, too. Because that question came up. Commissioner Janicki, I believe, was the one who was concerned about our schedule. So I wanted to give us the opportunity to talk about, Is it too much for us to take it back again? Because if it's just about the schedule, this Commissioner – I would make time to re-look at it.

Mr. Temples: Mr. Chair, I've got a question for Ryan. I thought I heard in the beginning – it sounded like when the Board is done with their review, their hearing, and getting all of their comments, did it sound like or are they planning to send any of this back to the Planning Commission, I think is the question perhaps on the table here.

Mr. Walters: I don't think that – I am reluctant to divine their intent, but I don't think that they are planning to send it back to you because they had that option already and they chose to hold their own public hearing.

Mr. Temples: Okay.

Mr. Walters: But they could. I mean, I can imagine a hypothetical wherein they receive a whole bunch of public comment, including public comment that reaches far beyond the options discussed in the proposal, and they could decide to go in a whole different direction, in which case maybe they send that back to the Planning Commission. I don't know. I'm just saying that that's an option for them after the comment period is concluded.

Chair Axthelm: It's up to the Commission. If somebody wants to make a proposal, at least they'll know – a motion.

Ms. Mitchell: Well, I'm willing to work on anything else we would need to do, whether it was this topic or another one. With nine people, maybe there might be a way to do a quorum on any issue, if something came up again. I'd be willing to do it again if that's the will of the others.

Mr. Temples: Well, my only concern is right now – and I'm sure staff would probably reflect this, too – is our schedule is seriously impacted already. And if the Commissioners are reviewing this on their end and taking more public, then let's leave it in their lap until they say, Send it back.

Ms. Lohman: I just wanted to find out if we were willing as a body and I'm getting the sense that we probably are.

Chair Axthelm: I think we're willing. We're just – we're busy, and the question is – I mean, because it's important to us – but can the Commissioners do as good of a job and I'm sure they can. Well, it's a public comment that comes with it _____. Any motion in that direction, or should we just leave it in their lap?

Mr. Temples: Motion to what?

Ms. Lohman: I don't know that we need one, do we?

Chair Axthelm: Well, if you wanted to – okay, maybe it's not a Commission – who would be in favor of having it come back to us? Who wants it to come back to us at this point? That's what I'm trying to get at is some type of vote on it or –

Ms. Mitchell: I'd second, too.

Mr. Meenaghan: Maybe we could simply convey to the Board of Commissioners that we are willing to do that if they want us to.

(sounds of assent from several Commissioners)

Chair Axthelm: That's a good way to put it.

Mr. Meenaghan: And just leave it at that.

Chair Axthelm: Is that the will of the Commission?

(Several Commissioners voice assent.)

Chair Axthelm: Okay. I think that's unanimous then. We're willing to if they see that it's needed.

Mr. Pernula: I'll talk to them about it.

Mr. Walters: They might dock your pay if you're not willing...

Ms. Mitchell: We were always afraid of that!

Mr. Meenaghan: Not to push back the SMP, though.

Chair Axthelm: The other thing I'd like to address is we have more of these town hall things – or not town hall – more of these workshops coming, right?

Mr. Pernula: This is the last of the ones that we were going to hold here. We were also going to do some at other areas in the county. Do we have some dates for those yet or anything? No dates yet. But we had intended, and that was part of the scope of the project.

Chair Axthelm: And that would be items on our agenda that we would need to go to?

Mr. Pernula: Well, I don't know how that was going to be set up.

Mr. Johnson: I think the idea was like we might hold a meeting in Concrete and so those of you from that Commissioner district might want to attend that meeting. I think we don't want to – it becomes much more complicated to have the whole Planning Commission go up and hold a meeting in Concrete because then we get into recording issues and the like, and then you're doing it on a Tuesday and that's – so I think the idea was we would go to the four corners of the county and the Planning Commissioners from that area – or actually any Planning Commissioner who wanted to attend could attend that, but it wouldn't necessarily be the whole Planning Commission going to the four corners of the county.

Chair Axthelm: Okay.

Mr. Walters: There's also one work session coming up too, isn't there?

Mr. Johnson: Yeah, there is, basically a month from now on codes – proposed code changes. There's a list of about 28 that the Commissioners included in the scope for the 2016 Update, and so the plan was to present those to you. We've had some thoughts that that may not really be – it may not lend itself to a workshop format where we have small groups or even town hall discussion of fairly specific, technical code amendments, but we certainly thought that there would be some public engagement, some public comment opportunities. Part of that may be do the first five code amendments and then say, Is there anyone who would like to speak/comment on those five code amendments? Then do the next five and something like that. So we're still kind of figuring it out, but we've definitely noted that several of the Planning Commission members like the town hall aspect being part of the meetings.

Chair Axthelm: I think we could work it in a little bit better or earlier and then go to discussion afterwards. It was – Dale and I talked about it and the concern I had with the town hall set up is that a lot of people don't feel comfortable talking to a big group. It seems like whenever we have

hearings and stuff that people will talk in the audience or come up to the stand and people on the list at partway through don't feel comfortable with it or wave it off, and then afterwards they'll contact any one of us and have something more to say. And I think that sometimes those people that don't feel comfortable with a big group and the smaller group is better for them. So a combination of the two is what I was trying to get at, because I was very aware of the comments that came in about asking for the town hall, and we wanted to integrate it. It just went a little long on the presentations at the end. So maybe if we do it next time that we have a time limit to open it up and maybe have the town hall portion of it at the beginning and then go to the groups, or is there a different format the Commission would like?

Ms. Lohman: I think like question number 4, it had, like, five sub-categories that almost makes it ten questions, or nine questions. But it almost made the list too long. And also a lot of people said that they weren't that well-versed on the Comp Plan, which was the final question, in and amongst itself, so trying to answer those specifics about the Comp Plan, it made it difficult because without it right there or them being schooled about it it was almost – it was almost impossible for a lot of people.

Mr. Johnson: Yeah, that may have been – the intent wasn't that somebody could directly connect a Comprehensive Plan policy to a development regulation to the condition on the ground in the rural area. It was more to read the goal – Are there adequate housing opportunities? Well, yes, I think there are, or there aren't. Or, Is there adequate economic opportunity? But I could have explained that or described that more clearly – that you didn't need to be able to document that there was a connection between the policy and the regulation and what you were seeing. It was more: These are the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, so are the goals being achieved? I don't know if that makes more sense. Because people definitely seem to have the sense that, Yes, we need economic opportunity in the rural areas, and that was one of the goal's statement. So I think that's more what we were driving at. But, yeah, it did double the number of questions basically in the list.

Ms. Mitchell: And from that sense – I would still have loved to have visited those in depth – and from that sense, I feel like we still don't have enough time for us from hearing from the public that's, to me, still like that's a big piece that's missing and I'd like to hear what the people have to say.

Ms. Lohman: And maybe a little bit of room for things that didn't get asked. Because it's easy to kind of limit the discussion to those four things on that piece of paper, but when people get in their cars and go home the conversation is always going to pick up stuff that we didn't capture, and so maybe if we had room in the agenda for that other stuff.

Ms. Hughes: Was there written comment on this topic provided?

Mr. Johnson: Do you mean have comments come in on the topic?

Ms. Hughes: Yeah.

Mr. Johnson: Not to date. There was a comment box and anyone can – oh, are there? Okay.

Ms. Lohman: I did put one.

Chair Axthelm: Why don't you bring them forward? Are they long or are they shorter?

Mr. Walters: One is a treatise. The other is just a sentence.

Mr. Temples: A treatise!

Mr. Walters: It's from Commissioner Lohman.

Ms. Mitchell: Well, I'd like to hear what she says. I get the sense from the other people that the Comp Plan's such a big deal. It *is* a big deal, and that's why we do it every seven years, and we would like to have as much input as we possibly could get.

Chair Axthelm: So as far as future meetings, how do we want to incorporate the town hall? If we have a meeting like this.

Mr. Meenaghan: My suggestion would be do the town hall up front; limit the – like we do with the public comments – limit the time. You get a certain amount of time, even though if it's three minutes or something different – but limit the amount of time; and then we break down into the small groups like we did to address those specific topic questions and debrief them like we did. I thought that format was great. I think it serves the public comment portion, the town hall portion, and I think it serves the discussion and answering those questions portion, so I think that's an easy way to do it. I mean, we do on all things we usually call for comment up front and then we do our discussion, so that works.

Chair Axthelm: I would like to see those comments so people understand that if we go off track it takes a lot more time to get through. And so if we stick to the subject at hand – in this case, rural – and that there's some things we just can't affect. We have no – the Planning Commission we have no control over, and although that's good information and that's great information, but it's just the context and what ability we have to even do anything about it.

Ms. Candler: May I make a comment? We left, on this agenda, 50 minutes for our discussion, which I guess we didn't really have because it was 8:30 rather than 8:10 when we started. But I think __ distribution of time I would prefer to give more input coming in to us than us giving it out – at this stage. So I would think that that would be appropriate to reduce that time in favor of the town hall a little bit.

The other thing I would just add is that, you know, we are very jam-packed and I understand the more time the better, but I would like – maybe I'm alone in this – but I would personally like to try to keep ourselves on track to where we can start doing the Department Update at about at least ten to nine so that we can adjourn on time. I don't know if I'm alone in that, but that would be my preference.

Chair Axthelm: You're not.

Ms. Candler: Okay. Or however much time Dale needs.

Chair Axthelm: It's up to you guys.

Ms. Mitchell: Dale, you're down to two minutes.

Ms. Candler: Yeah, I don't want to give Dale not enough time, but just going on past experience, about ten to nine.

Mr. Temples: At this point in time, would you consider a motion to adjourn this meeting?

Mr. Meenaghan: I would second that.

Chair Axthelm: Okay, we have a second. All in favor of adjourning the meeting, say “aye.”

All Commissioners: Aye.

Chair Axthelm: All opposed, say “nay.”

(silence)

Chair Axthelm: (gavel) The ayes have it. The meeting is adjourned.