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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
Public Works and Capital Projects Committee

March 11, 2003

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. by Committee Chair Barbara Brenner in the Council Chambers, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Present:

L. Ward Nelson
Sam Crawford

Absent:

None

Also Present:

None

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

1. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE 2003 INTEGRATED ROADSIDE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (AB2003-121)

Joe Rutan, County Road Engineer, stated the missions and objectives of the program are listed on Council packet page 89. The program has a variety of mechanical, manual, chemical, and biological tools. The benefits of the program are listed on Council packet page 91.

There are two best management practices (BMP's) in the brush program. One BMP is tree trimming in the right-of-way.

Brenner asked if the County already has had the equipment listed as requested in the tree trimming BMP. Rutan stated it has not. It is something they are interested in.

Brenner asked if someone in the private sector does that work.

Mike Roberts, Assistant County Road Engineer, stated the chipper is a replacement. The lopper is to take down limbs over sensitive critical areas.

Brenner stated they should bring forward information on the cost to do that work if it is contracted out.

Crawford asked what is wrong with sawdust. Roberts stated they currently use a wand saw to trim trees. The lopper would be used instead of a wand saw. They don't want to drop sawdust into creek areas if they don't have to.

Rutan stated sawdust covers up spawning gravel. There are biological issues with it. They are talking about large volumes of sawdust.

1
2 Brenner stated this isn't something the County will need on short notice or
3 very often. It is probably a big-ticket item. Roberts stated it is not a big ticket
4 item.

5
6 Brenner asked if the Public Works Committee would ever receive information
7 on how many miles of tree trimming they've done this year. Roberts stated he will
8 bring something forward in the future.

9
10 Rutan stated the second BMP is the right-of-way tree removal.

11
12 They will skip over the herbicide program and address it later in the
13 presentation.

14
15 The hydro seeding program equipment will arrive this year. They have not
16 done this service yet. This service allows the County to be flexible and responsive
17 to any exposed soils caused by the County when working on roads, even if it is a
18 five feet square section.

19
20 Brenner asked the cost.

21
22 Mary Green, Equipment Rent and Revolve (ER&R) Manager, stated the cost
23 is about \$30,000.

24
25 Brenner asked why someone wouldn't just go out with a bag of seed. Rutan
26 stated hydro seed is a mixture of mulch and other materials. It provides erosion
27 control prior to germinating. It is more effectively done with the machine than by
28 hand.

29
30 Roberts stated hand application would require a second spraying. The
31 emphasis is to be good neighbors. They also recognize the short amount of time in
32 which they must stop erosion.

33
34 Rutan stated this is something the County requires of developers. They
35 need to make sure the County sets a good example. They would use it enough to
36 justify buying the equipment. They would also be more apt to use it if it is
37 available. It is intended for the small, flexible, areas needing a quick-response.

38
39 The mowing program is self-explanatory. It includes long-arm mowing and
40 shoulder mowing.

41
42 There is a missing page in the Council packet, which he provided (*one file*).
43 He also provided examples of the public notices and letters he sends to people and
44 the "owner will maintain" documents.

45
46 Regarding the herbicide program, it is one of the available tools they have
47 available. An example of a mechanical tool is the long-arm mower. An example of

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1 a biological tool is releasing insects to take care of a noxious weed. There are
2 many other examples. County herbicide applicators are currently going through
3 training in integrated pest management (IPM), which is part of the biological tool.
4 A manual tool is people picking weeds. The chemical tool is herbicides.
5

6 The herbicide program is about 15 percent of the entire vegetation
7 management program. There are also six BMP's in the herbicide program. The
8 County Code requires that chemical use be minimized. To achieve this goal, they
9 use all vegetation methods available, and coordinate the work done with the
10 vegetation management crew leader. Herbicides are only one tool used. Other
11 tools include the mechanical, biological, manual, and cultural tools. They use the
12 best method for the specific vegetation issues involved. To make sure they use
13 the minimum amount of herbicide, they properly time application and reconnoiter
14 the area to make sure they only apply what is needed.
15

16 In putting this presentation together, he was very impressed with the people
17 involved in this program. They spend a lot of time reconnoitering what they need
18 to do in the field, and then using the absolute minimum amount of herbicide.
19 Between them, they have 28 years of application experience, they are state-
20 trained, and they receive continual training. These people know what they are
21 doing and are making good decisions.
22

23 Brenner stated she's had firsthand experience with that crew when she
24 restored a slope on deer creek. She couldn't have done it without their help. They
25 provided to her advice and support. She asked if the shoreline management
26 program includes any areas near creeks that have salmon spawning in them.
27

28 Christy Sands, Service Worker II, stated the County shoreline management
29 program language came into the program within the last few years. The
30 jurisdiction has expanded a bit. The jurisdiction is not necessarily on a salmon
31 creek. There is map they follow. She's spoken with shoreline management
32 people, the State agency, and she goes by their guideline.
33

34 Brenner asked if all of Mosquito Lake Road is not sprayed. Sands stated it
35 was petitioned as a no spray area. The County does not spray there. Asplundh
36 sprays there for Puget Power. There is not really an environmental reason why the
37 County doesn't spray. They simply don't because they were petitioned not to.
38

39 Brenner asked if the Nooksack is part of the Shoreline Management
40 Program. Sands stated the program is a document in process. She tries to use
41 setbacks.
42

43 Brenner asked if the tributaries that feed into the water are a part of the
44 program.
45

46 Jeff Monsen, Public Works Director, stated the shoreline areas are defined by
47 their identification on the map.

1
2 Brenner stated she heard they could spray certain things near these creeks
3 and tributaries if they only do it during a certain time of year and only using a
4 certain product. Roberts stated the County vegetation program has a 150-foot
5 setback from critical areas, which are water bodies. Within that area, both the
6 biologist and vegetation crew leader get together to decide how to handle it. For
7 areas that don't fall under the shorelines management program, but that may be a
8 water body, there is a standard setback in the vegetation program.
9

10 Rutan stated that highlights the amount of homework that staff puts into an
11 area before putting down the herbicides. A large portion of the time in this
12 program is doing homework.
13

14 Rutan stated he would discuss the six BMP's of the herbicide program, and
15 then highlight what they do in the program.
16

17 The first BMP is bare ground shoulder application. Water flows off the
18 roadbed and bio-filtrates through the grass. If they only mow, vegetation builds
19 up on the roadway and obscures the fog line, doesn't allow water to flow off the
20 roadway, and will pool in low spots, causing erosion. It also damages the
21 roadway.
22

23 Brenner asked if there are machines that scrape the roadway instead. Rutan
24 stated there are. The machine is called a shoulder picker. They have to run the
25 machine more frequently than if they use herbicides. When they use the shoulder
26 picker, the state of the shoulder is pretty bad. It is labor intensive and costly. A
27 small truck with adjustable nozzles applies the herbicides.
28

29 The next BMP is dormant brush control. They control brush at roadway
30 intersections for safety reasons.
31

32 Nelson asked if they ever thought about building stormwater detention areas
33 at intersections. Blackberries would have a hard time growing. They would not
34 have a visibility problem. Rutan stated they could install a quality treatment pond.
35

36 Brenner asked whether blackberries die off if you keep cutting them back.
37 Sands stated the County doesn't have the time or manpower to do that
38 countywide. The turnaround time for using the long-arm mower is two to three
39 years. People who cut down blackberries on their own property have the time to
40 do it frequently enough to have an effect.
41

42 Rutan stated a third BMP is for noxious and selective weed control.
43

44 Brenner asked what is wrong with knapweed. Rutan stated the County has
45 to do noxious weed control by law. Citizens are required to control noxious weeds,
46 and so must the County.
47

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1 Brenner stated they have to do the higher priority weeds first.

2
3 Laurel Shiner, Noxious Weed Control Coordinator, stated knapweed is in the
4 top six for high priority weeds. It so easily spreads here. It grows down to the
5 tide line, which is unusual. This plant secretes toxins that will limit the growth of
6 nearby plants.

7
8 Rutan stated knapweed also does not provide the bio-filtration that other
9 plants do. If left unchecked, it becomes costly to deal with.

10
11 The next BMP is signpost treatment. They do this so the person running the
12 long-arm mower sees the post. It prevents things from growing up and blocking
13 the sign. Last, if the sign is damaged, destroyed, or missing, they know where it
14 belongs to replace it. Someone with a backpack sprayer puts on a minimum
15 amount directly around the post. Treatment also keeps the post wood from
16 rotting.

17
18 The next BMP is guardrail treatments. It is difficult to mow between the
19 guardrail posts. It is important to keep guardrails free of blackberries. People
20 need to see the guardrails for safety. Staff must make sure it is in good condition.
21 Guardrails are designed to absorb energy and move back if hit. If the guardrail is
22 hit, emergency personnel like to get back there without having to climb through
23 blackberries.

24
25 The last BMP is miscellaneous projects, including equipment maintenance,
26 building maintenance, and preparing the wildflower islands for planting.

27
28 Nelson asked if they do anything in the parks. Sands stated they've had
29 special requests from Parks. At Hovander, they treat the barnyard area.

30
31 Crawford asked if blackberries on the side of County roads are sprayed and
32 make the berries inedible. Sands stated they are not. However, don't eat the fruit
33 because of the car exhaust. Blackberries are sprayed during the dormant season.
34 Also, the chemicals are not systemic. One can't die from them.

35
36 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape one, side A.)*

37
38 Brenner stated she is very impressed with this presentation.

39
40 **Crawford moved** to recommend approval the 2003 Integrated Roadside
41 Vegetation Management Program to the full Council.

42
43 Nelson stated there isn't anything on alternative methods for maintaining
44 corners or areas with sight constraints. He asked if there would be a chance of
45 including that information. He'd like to know those costs. Rutan stated that every
46 time they look at a problem, they choose the best tool. If they are putting down

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1 an herbicide, it's because they've determined it's necessary through experience.
2 It's their tool of last resort.

3
4 Sands stated they try to work in an integrated manner with other control
5 methods, such as manual methods. They don't choose to spray everywhere.
6 When they choose other methods, they enable mowers and summer help to
7 concentrate on those areas they are not able to treat with chemicals. They are
8 able to do Mosquito Lake Road and guardrails. They only have the summer to do
9 that work because that's when they have the summer help.

10
11 Rutan stated he should probably give this presentation to his project
12 engineers in the Engineering Division so they know what the Maintenance and
13 Operations Division is doing, and they can design for avoiding the need to apply
14 herbicides. He will continue to be open to creative ideas and solving two problems
15 at once.

16
17 Brenner asked the percentage of neighbors that have to petition for a no
18 spray zone. Roberts stated 51 percent of the property owners or 60 percent of the
19 residents have to sign the petition.

20
21 Brenner asked what's happening with the maintenance program, given the
22 concern about the West Nile virus. Sands stated they cannot treat for anything
23 other than vegetation. It is something they will have to look at.

24
25 ***Motion carried unanimously.***

26
27 Monsen stated he would request reconsideration of the financial approval to
28 purchase the materials.

29
30
31 **OTHER BUSINESS**

32
33 There was no other business.

34
35
36 **ADJOURN**

37
38 The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

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42 _____
43 Jill Nixon, Minutes Transcription

44
45 ATTEST:

46 WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
47 WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

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Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barbara Brenner, Committee Chair