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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
Planning and Development Committee

December 4, 2007

Committee Chair Seth Fleetwood called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Present:

Laurie Caskey-Schreiber
Dan McShane

Absent:

None

Also Present:

Barbara Brenner
Carl Weimer

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

1. REPORT ON THE COUNTYWIDE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY TASKFORCE (AB2007-147A)

Gary Williams, Health Department, handed out information (*on file*) and stated Tom Beckwith couldn't be here. The survey is to determine challenges and issues about affordable housing. It is information for the Housing Task Force to understand public sentiment about housing tools for the County and City to consider, to make it's goal of having 11,000 housing units available.

The Housing Task Force will meet in January to review the results and consider recommendations that will come to the councils.

Caskey-Schreiber stated she would like to review the information and talk with Mr. Beckwith if he can come back and give a presentation.

McShane stated there are many ways to achieve different types of affordable housing, including programs, methodologies, grants and loans, zoning, and other methods. He asked if some methods are rising to the top or sinking to the bottom by the task force. Williams stated some tools don't have great value, but are easily implemented. Others may have a significant impact, but may be challenging. The task is to review the entire range of tools and possible applications. They must consider housing in terms of different populations and demographics. It's very complex. The result will be some kind of recommendation and potential political decisions.

Fleetwood stated the three big areas the task force will consider in January include cost offsets for developers. They will develop a list of things to implement that are related to decreasing the cost of housing for those who are eligible.

McShane asked if cost offsets include reducing the cost of housing overall for all housing or whether someone has to apply for the offsets. Williams stated an example is offering developers opportunities to increase their density beyond code limits to make more affordable units available. They can use the government's authority to provide something for the developer to provide affordable units.

1 Brenner stated an unintended consequence is that the developers are given the kinds
2 of incentives that they don't really want. This will answer questions about those types of
3 issues.
4

5 Fleetwood stated inclusionary zoning and public funding are the other two big areas
6 the task force will consider. The task force was unanimous in agreeing that there should be
7 some form of public financing. The question is by what means that could happen.
8

9 McShane asked if the public funding would be able to deal with the housing issue at
10 the time. Williams stated that is an attractive option because jurisdictions have local,
11 flexible funding that can leverage other funding systems.
12

13 Brenner stated many people are one paycheck away from losing their house. They
14 are also talking about local funding to bridge that gap. Make sure they are talking about
15 everything that relates to affordable housing and define their highest priorities.
16

17 McShane asked if planned unit developments would be cost offsets, voluntary
18 inclusionary zoning, or a hybrid of the two.
19

20 Fleetwood stated they are a hybrid.
21

22 Williams stated there are models to create sewer and water districts to enhance
23 areas where developers would want to create resources. There are a variety of things like
24 that.
25

26 McShane stated there is no incentive for affordable housing in the current County
27 Code. It's a potentially voluntary program that is a hybrid. The Comprehensive Plan action
28 item is to pursue that option. He was talked out of introducing that in the past. It seems
29 so simple. It would not be the only solution.
30

31 Fleetwood stated the committee should address that issue.
32
33

34 **COMMITTEE DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**

35 36 **1. ORDINANCE AMENDING THE WHATCOM COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN** 37 **MAP AND THE WHATCOM COUNTY ZONING MAP FROM THE DESIGNATION OF** 38 **AGRICULTURE TO THE DESIGNATION OF RURAL FORESTRY FOR A 39.5-ACRE** 39 **PARCEL OF LAND, ASSESSOR'S PARCEL #370522-199054 (AB2007-464)** 40

41 Elizabeth Olsen, Planning and Development Services Department, stated the
42 Planning Commission recommends this ordinance. It is in the South Fork Valley subarea.
43 She described the location of the parcel. The owners wish to pursue a conditional use and
44 operate an environmental education facility. The existing agricultural zone designation does
45 not allow this use.
46

47 The Planning Commission held a meeting on the issue. It agreed with the request
48 and recommends the map change to the County Council.
49

50 Fleetwood asked if there was public comment against the proposal and the reason
51 two planning commissioners were opposed. Olsen stated one Planning Commissioner was
52 opposed because it depleted the agricultural acreage of the county. However, the amount
53 of agricultural space on that parcel is only seven or eight acres. The rest is extremely hilly
54 and commercial forestry. Agriculture is a permitted use in the rural forestry designation.
55

1 Fleetwood asked when the land was last used for viable agriculture. Olsen stated it
2 was used as pasture. The original property owner used the land for his grandchildren's 4-H
3 projects. It was never used commercially. The land was designated open space/agriculture
4 for taxation. After the grandchildren, the land was used for growing and selling hay.
5

6 **McShane moved** to recommend approval to the full Council.
7

8 Caskey-Schreiber stated she is opposed. They need to keep agriculture land. The
9 owners knew the zone when they purchased it. Instead, work with the owners to change
10 the allowed use to include an environmental education facility in the agricultural zone. She
11 understands and approves of what the current landowners plan to do.
12

13 McShane stated he would be nervous about changing the agricultural zone code to
14 allow other activities. The current agricultural zone is 40-acre lots. Only about 20 acres, at
15 most, are farmable on this parcel. Part of the property is a swamp. This is a peninsula of
16 land surrounded by forestry land. The rural forestry zone is the best option. Agriculture is
17 allowed in the rural forestry zone. The property can't be divided further. This is a way to
18 allow permitting of the educational facility, and the county doesn't lose agricultural potential
19 on the property.
20

21 Olsen stated the valley is narrow. It receives late frosts in the spring and early
22 frosts in the fall. Nothing more than pasture can be done on the property.
23

24 McShane stated most of the land can't be used for agriculture, especially on the
25 slope.
26

27 **Motion carried 2-1 with Caskey-Schreiber opposed.**
28

29
30 **OTHER BUSINESS**

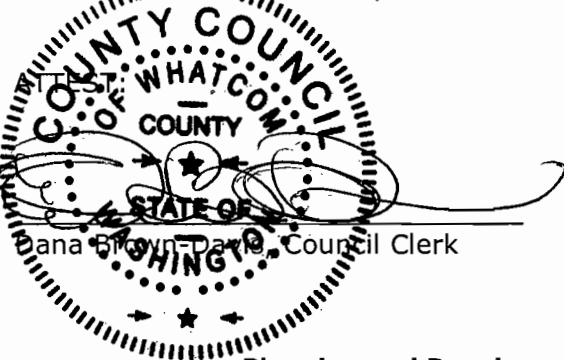
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32 Weimer stated the Council and the Planning staff were to get together at the first of
33 the year to discuss the work plan. He asked if the committee is in favor of having Council
34 Policy Analyst Rebecca Craven be a part of the conversation to plan the agenda for that
35 meeting.
36

37 **The committee concurred.**
38

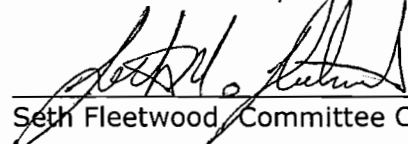
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40 **ADJOURN**

41
42 The meeting adjourned at 3:25 p.m.
43

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45 
46 Jill Nixon, Minutes Transcription



WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON


Seth Fleetwood, Committee Chair