

# MEETING SUMMARY

## PDR Oversight Committee

November 14, 2008, 8 AM

Agricultural Service Center  
6975 Hannegan Road

Members present: Rod Erickson, Veronica Wisniewski, John Gilles, Paul Schissler, Barbara Dykes; Staff: Samya Lutz & Dean Martin, PDS; Henry Bierlink, Farm Friends

1. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

2. Review of minutes

The September 19, 2008 meeting minutes were reviewed and approved.

3. Joint Ag Committees Retreat follow-up

The group discussed the retreat, and potential follow-up activities. There was general agreement that the PDR committee would continue to focus on policy implementation.

Perhaps for development of policy for a workable TDR program that protects ag (as discussed at the joint retreat), a temporary advisory committee could be set up to shepherd this work through the necessary channels. Some PDR committee members may want to be part of this group, along with other stakeholders.

**John Gillies made a motion to support the formation of a joint group to advise on TDR program proposal development. Veronica seconded. All in favor.**

Who will spearhead this effort remains to be seen – it may be the county, or perhaps Farm Friends as happened with the PDR program development. Some members requested more information from county staff about previous TDR program efforts. Staff agreed to forward existing available reports (Pruetz and others) on to committee members. The group discussed the value of Farm Friends and the work they are doing with the TRC and public forums. It is expected the results of this work will feed into the development of a TDR program, as well as other ag preservation efforts.

A staff workshop is planned for December 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Courthouse (brown bag, 10-2) to discuss TDR program issues in more detail. Both Jeremy Eckert from Cascade Land Conservancy, and Heather Ballash from the state Dept of Community, Trade & Economic Development are slated to present. It is possible

this event may be able to be open to ag-related committee members and others, though many details have yet to be worked through.

Henry mentioned that the next few months may bring more clarity on the water issues front, and this information would then plug in – and add to – the land use policy issues. There was general agreement that the exempt well and water rights issues are critical to any land use planning efforts related to the rural and ag areas. Perhaps in the future there will be opportunities to trade development rights for water rights, or facilitate other creative trades that serve to protect resources and steer development at the same time.

The group discussed the limitations of the PDR tool, from their experience over the past 7 years, and the agreement that additional tools are needed to supplement it in order to meet the ag preservation goals. Veronica framed it as an issue of fairness – how to look at policies that seek fairness in preserving ag land and steering development away from ag land?

Veronica made a motion (with both Barbara and Paul seconding) to submit a statement from the PDR Oversight Committee, to staff, the Growth Management Coordinating Council, Council, Executive, or whomever else may be interested that says the following:

The combination of our seven year history working on farmland preservation implementation through the PDR program, and the current county land use policy focus on UGAs, rural lands, and the 2031 Comprehensive Plan update, compels us to urge decision makers to strongly consider agricultural preservation in the current and ongoing county-wide policy discussions.

Furthermore,

- The PDR program alone cannot do what we need to do to preserve agricultural lands;
- We are concerned about any windfalls or wipeouts that could result from changing land policies;
- UGA area expansion offers a potential opportunity to transfer development where it makes best use of public infrastructure;
- We urge a close look at alternative approaches to land use policy in Whatcom County that would steer growth to more appropriate locations out of agricultural lands and rural lands with viable agricultural practices or potential;
- Programs that deserve particular study as viable examples include
  - i. Farmland Heritage Credits, in Burlington, WA
  - ii. TDR programs across WA State and the nation;
- Regional efforts such as the Ruckelshaus “Preserving Agricultural Viability & Protecting Critical Areas” process stemming from state SB5248, and the water rights discussions among tribal, state, and local

governments, need to feed into our local land-use policy discussions;  
and

- Time is of the essence in these matters, and implementation actions to preserve farmland need to be considered as part of the UGA review and Whatcom 2031 planning efforts underway.

4. Discussion of Round VII PDR activities

All three Round VI applications on which appraisals were done have closed as of mid-October. Round VII advertisement has been delayed due to Conservation Futures fund budget uncertainties. These issues may be resolved enough to be able to advertise soon.

The committee looked at scoring of all Round VI applications, as well as all other closed PDR program transactions, in order to consider instituting a threshold ranking cut-off, or other mechanism to clearly let applicants know their likelihood of moving forward in the program.

The group suggested a closer look at the program scoring procedures at the next meeting, along with a review of the map of purchased transactions and targeted areas.

5. Next committee meeting

The committee will meet again on Friday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 8 AM, at the same location.

**Signed,**

**Rod Erickson, Chair PDR Oversight Committee**