

SUMMARY

PDR Oversight Committee Meeting 6975 Hannegan Rd. Bellingham, WA

August 3, 2005

Members present: Rod Erickson, Jim Dykstra, Barbara Dykes, Veronica Wisniewski; Staff: Kraig Olason, Jason Faith; Guests: John Gillies, USDA, Craig MacConnell, WSU, Michael McFarlane, Whatcom County Parks Director.

1. Public Comments.

There were not public comments.

2. Review of Minutes.

The minutes for the 06/01/05 meeting were reviewed. Veronica motioned to approve the minutes. Doug seconded the motion. The minutes were approved as written.

3. Discussion of Cooperative agreement between Whatcom County, NRCS, and the Whatcom Land Trust.

Kraig stated that the agreement needs to be signed by Whatcom County before September 30, 2005. The Whatcom Land Trust has already signed the agreement.

4. Michael McFarlane and an update on the Parks Plan revision.

Kraig starts by mentioning the letter sent to the Parks Director from the PDR Committee stating concerns and questions regarding the open space portion of the Parks plan.

Mike stated that a survey has gone out to about 300 randomly selected households throughout Whatcom County. The survey asks the respondent to rank and place a value on parks, conservation areas, working landscapes, etc. The Parks Dept. is waiting for the surveys to be returned, which he expects to happen by the end of the month. The next step then would be to work on a draft document of the Parks plan. The final plan is due in October with final approval from the Council in November. At that time, the Council will look at and decide on funding mechanisms for implementing the plan. He stated that one method for increase funding would be to incorporate critical areas in their decisions for which areas to acquire. If that is the case, then other funding sources could be used to augment the existing budget for land purchases.

Mike provided a handout of the County's projections of future needs for parks and open space. He stated the problem is finding the funds necessary to provide the proper levels of service for existing and future parks.

John asked is the Parks Department has a recommended or preferred funding mechanism. John stated that he likes the idea of impact fees on development. Mike stated that impact fees are not

the first choice for funding. He stated that the Parks Department prefers a Real Estate Excise Tax (REET), which would be paid for by the purchaser of a home. These fees would be used for acquisition, management and maintenance. This type of funding source would be good for countywide use, whereas impact fees would need to be used in those areas where the impact fees are acquired.

Barbara referred to the letter sent by the PDR Committee and about the allocation of Conservation Futures Funds, which are competed for by both the Parks Dept. and the PDR program. She asked Mike whether the Parks plan has addressed that concern. Mike stated that the County Council has discussed having a more formal process for allocating and using money from the Conservation Futures Fund. But this has not been addressed in the Parks plan update and there is not a real solution yet to the allocation of Conservation Future Funds. Mike stated that he recognizes the need for a coordinated strategy for the use of those funds. He also stated that the PDR Committee could provide a list of priority purchases that could be added to the Parks Dept.'s own list and look into buying those areas at the appropriate time. Of course these properties would need to provide multiple values, such as critical areas, public access and use, etc. However, the PDR program's goal is to protect working commercial farmland which may have conflicts with multiple and close proximity public recreation.

Kraig stated that he was disappointed that the PDR committee did not have a chance to see the survey before it was sent out.

5. Discussion of Washington State Senate Bill 5396.

Kraig provided handouts describing WA State Senate Bill 5396, which adds two potential funding sources that could be used. One of the funds can be used for conservation of AG land and the other is for the conservation of riparian areas. Applications are submitted to the state legislature for approval. However, there is no appropriation yet for this bill. Kraig stated that it is a positive effort by the legislature to purchase threatened areas.

6. Update on current appraisal process.

Kraig stated that the county has issued \$20,000 for appraisal services, which is supposed to be complete by the end of August. He stated that he is curious to see how the appraisals come out for Alamwala and Vander Yacht, since those two properties will be losing development rights due to the enforcement of the 6-pac well limit.

Doug stated that the committee should look at the appraisals before they are given to the property owners. The group agreed with Doug.

7. Update on Round 3 applications.

Kraig stated that Herman Joneli wanted to reserve an area on his property for a future house, but NRCS said they would not accept the application for that reason. Therefore, Joneli's property is not being considered for purchase. For the Tom Fenton property, the NRCS allowed an area to be reserved for a future home based on the topographic difference on where the proposed area is and the prime ag land. However, purchase of the Fenton property is tied to the purchase of the neighboring Paul property. If the Pauls do not want to sell, then the PDR program should not purchase the Fenton property. The Paul purchase is still pending.

8. Update on revision to property ranking system.

Jason provided a handout of the most recent revision to the property ranking system. He explained that the changes were fairly minor and concerned only the points that were to be assigned to the land evaluation portion of the ranking system. When these changes were used to reevaluate properties ranked with the previous system, the property ranking came out very close to what it was originally. This ranking system however was developed with the idea that the properties soil characteristics would be expressed more than in the previous system.

Craig stated that the Committee might want to clarify what is meant by available water rights. Kraig stated that the County uses the Department of Ecology's database to assess water rights. That is the only way now to make that decision.

Veronica moved to adopt the new ranking system. Barbara seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous for approval.

9. Round 4 application process.

Kraig stated that another application round should be initiated. He also stated that a notice should be sent out soon.

Next meeting will be September 7, 8:30 am at Conservation District office.

Signed,

**Rod Erickson, Chair
PDR Oversight Committee**