

Agricultural Advisory Committee

Approved meeting notes for February 11, 2009

The meeting was commenced at 3:05 P.M. by Charles Antholt.

A quorum was present under the current code (all 7 voting members currently on the AAC attended). *The revised code goes into effect on the 19th of this month and will require a majority of the appointed members (not including vacancies) to have a quorum.* The next meeting was scheduled for March 4.

Attending were: (Voting Members*)

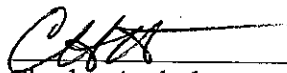
Charles Antholt	Vicki Hawley*	Wesley Kentch
Ken Schilke*	Todd Jones	Tom Thornton*
John Gilles	Dick Yoder*	John Bayer*
Larry Helm*	Dave Buys	Henry Bierlink
Bob Wiesen	Samya Lutz	Dean Martin

- Charles Antholt handed out information regarding the value of agriculture in Whatcom County and a second chart showing the monetary value over time.
- Public Comment:
 - Larry Helm commented on development issues in the area of Squalicum Mountain – battling over cluster zoning in the Rural Forestry zone; allowing clustering with certain exemptions (council and staff). Clustering in rural areas brings about the demise of the rural environment and/or farming community in about 3 – 5 years.
 - Dick Yoder – Water potentially going away for livestock (now O.K. for wells). There are bills regarding possible changes and metering. (staff sent out web links to several bills dealing with water after the meeting).
- Membership was discussed. We need more berry, dairy, and maybe small farmer representatives.
- Dean reviewed some of changes to the code for the Agricultural Advisory Committee. It should be easier to obtain a quorum under the new code. There are a maximum of 13 voting members. A new category was established for a person with expertise in farm programs. An ex-officio FFA youth member was also added.
- The role of the committee was discussed. Typically the committee reports to the county council to provide input. It can also provide input to the Planning Commission, the Department of Planning and Development Services, and other boards and commissions.

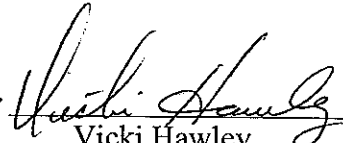
- An overview of the code (and revisions), role of the committee, business rules, and some of the current topics that the committee will likely to be involved in was provided. This included the Urban Growth Area update process, Whatcom 2031 planning, rural development numbers, comprehensive plan amendments, zoning changes, agricultural preservation, and other policies related to agriculture.
- The current business rules with proposed changes were distributed. Changes may be considered at the next meeting.
- The recently released Census of Agriculture results from Whatcom County were discussed. The committee would like for us (PDS) to explore the possibility of developing our own estimates of land in agriculture. The numbers provided by the National Agricultural Statistical Service that show a loss of over 45,000 acres of land in farms from 2002 to 2007 were questioned by the committee. A telephone conference call with Washington's NASS chief is scheduled for Friday 2-13-09 to better understand the development, uses, and limitations of the data. *During the conference call, errors in the 2002 Census of Agriculture were divulged. New estimates of Land in Farm are to be provided to us.*
- The committee discussed the issue of animal husbandry facilities in the rural zones and was of the opinion that no changes were needed (or desired) from their perspective. If any changes are proposed, they would like to have input.
- A zoning change proposal (Paradise Road AG to R5) was briefly discussed. No decision was requested from the committee, and more information will be provided to them before they provide a recommendation.
- At the next meeting - the Ag Technical Review Committee document, and documents related to the grant from the Office of Farmland Preservation will be discussed. The committee will begin working on recommendations to take to the County Council, Planning Commission, and Natural Resources Committee, as appropriate.
- The "Right-to-Farm" provisions were brought up as a possible future agenda topic.
- The Whatcom 2031 planning process was briefly discussed. One comment was that Bellingham policies don't facilitate infill. Another comment was that ag areas should be called out separately from the general category of 'unincorporated areas' in terms of population tracking. Another comment was that we need better soils-based agricultural designations. Some great soils are being built on. Is there any opportunity to stop large-scale conversion on good soils to residential? Another comment - need to balance all the rights, property rights, Ag protection, critical areas protection.
- Other issue and priorities:
 - Critical areas. There are questions related to how to get a better balance between critical areas and agriculture. There is a lack of specificity in the Ag code; the critical areas code is very specific.
 - Clustering on Agricultural Protection Area (APO) soils might be a more effective use of time to look closely at this scenario when it comes to balance critical areas and Ag.

- Henry Bierlink gave an overview of the Farm Friends' Public Involvement Plan. Whatcom County selected 100,000 acres as the threshold to support Ag and infrastructure. The Ag zone is 80,000 plus acres, with an average parcel size of 17 acres. How to get to 100,000? The AAC in 2006 did a Rural Land Study and came up with "Rural Study Areas" in response to a council request. These are areas that have on-going agriculture, larger lot sizes, and good soils. The next step is how to protect those areas. Down-zoning was considered unpalatable – so the Technical Review Committee looked at market-driven tools to provide long-term protection.
 - Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program in a nutshell – one tool in the toolbox that is working.
 - Others were recommended in the report.
 - Next steps – include review and recommendations by the Agricultural Advisory Committee to the County Council.
 - Next meeting discuss Public Involvement Plan.
 - Following meeting need to consider recommendations.
- What about the economic viability of Ag? Lots of factors come into play with Ag. This is one piece; preserving the Ag value (as opposed to speculative value).
- The members were encouraged to read the "White Papers". *Links to these were emailed to the members. Paper copies were given to John Bayer.*
- Elections –
 - Vicki Hawley moved to elect Chuck Antholt as chair. Ken Shilke, seconded the recommendation, unless anyone else has a burning desire. Chuck Antholt was elected by unanimous consent.
 - It was moved and seconded that Vicki be elected as vice-chair; elected by unanimous consent.
 - Todd Jones' status was discussed. He took George's position for a partial term when George could no longer serve. He then served a full term. He should be eligible for a second full term. *His status was reviewed and the Executive has forwarded his name to the Council for confirmation.*
- Next meeting – March 4.

Meeting Notes Approved



 Charles Antholt

3-18-09  *3/18/09*
 Date Vicki Hawley Date

