

# **Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting**

Approved meeting notes for April 14, 2011

## **MEETING HIGHLIGHTS**

- ◆ There were 19 people in attendance (3 guests; 12 of the 13 voting members; and 4 ex-officio, contributing, or staff members). The guests were Dean Martin, Cathy Lehman, and Skip Richards.
- ◆ The Committee endorsed sending a letter requesting the County Council to consider adding 25 foot setbacks as part of the Rural Element / Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development (LAMIRD) process that would apply in rural Commercial and Industrial zones where they are adjacent to an Agriculture Comprehensive Plan designation.
- ◆ Staff presented and the committee discussed a revised draft of the Agricultural Strategic Plan.
- ◆ The next meeting was set for May 12, 2011, 3-5 PM, Whatcom County PDS, Northwest Annex Conference Room, 5280 Northwest Drive.

## **MEETING NOTES**

### ***Quorum***

A quorum was present with 12 of the 13 voting members in attendance (see sign in sheet at the end of the meeting notes). Lesa Boxx, Committee Chair, was absent; Debbie VanderVeen, Vice-Chair, was the acting chairperson of the meeting. Debbie called to the meeting order at 3:03 P.M., at the county Planning and Development Services Department, Northwest Annex Conference Room at 5280 Northwest Road.

### ***Meeting Notes Approved***

Debbie pointed out a few corrections to the minutes under the 'Open Session for Public Comments': the word 'certain' should be changed to 'Nutrient Management dairy inspections' and the references to Department of Agriculture and Department of Ecology should be switched. **Larry Helm moved to approve the meeting notes as corrected from February 17; the meeting notes were approved by all voting.**

### ***Open Session for Public Comments***

There were three members of the public in attendance.

John Gillies, a Contributing Member to the committee, spoke as a liaison from the Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee. He recognized the AAC's role as a committee working on a broad array of big picture issues, and the PDR OC's role as a committee working on one specific piece of that picture. He shared information about the PDR program's accomplishments and current work. New applicant farms will be coming before the Council at the end of April, of which the PDR committee is recommending moving forward on the top two. AAC members asked questions and discussed the merits, roles, efficiencies, and costs of the program. Todd Jones recalled Chuck Antholt's previous work that conveyed the economics of why each dollar spent on an easement through the PDR Program is a net gain for the county, due to the relatively high cost of servicing residences vs. the comparatively low cost of servicing agriculture. He suggested one of the committees revisit and update this information in the future.

## ***Reports, Presentations, and Deliberations***

### Agricultural buffer issues

Committee members received in their packets a letter from Farm Friends to the Whatcom County Council in which they raised the question of why the Planning Commission recommendation to have 50 to 100 foot buffers between rural commercial/industrial zoning and ag comp plan designated land was removed. Henry Bierlink added that the Farm Friends board has had further discussions about this issue, and suggests that some setbacks are needed (greater than 0 feet), with a preference at 50 feet.

The language under consideration is as follows: When a parcel within this [rural commercial or industrial] district adjoins an Agriculture comprehensive plan designation (as designated on map 8 of chapter 2 of the Whatcom county Comprehensive Plan), setbacks from property lines adjoining this designation shall be increased to 50 feet.

Debbie passed out a letter from the Whatcom County Farm Bureau addressed to the Whatcom County Council in which the Farm Bureau stated their opinion that ag land and commercial and industrial development are often compatible, that large setbacks may be a burden and would impose on private property rights, and recommended no change to the current setback regulations.

Nick Smith, Whatcom County Planner with knowledge in the current setback code and administration, joined the committee during this discussion to explain what is currently allowed adjacent to ag land. Side yard setbacks are in some cases at 0 feet, allowing development to be theoretically right up to the property line. He also explained the currently required setbacks of ag buildings from residences, and other existing setback requirements.

Dick Yoder asked why ag buildings need to be setback from other uses, but other uses do not need to be setback from ag. Todd Jones pointed out that buildings at or close to a property line could preclude certain ag practices, such as manure, fumigant, and pesticide spraying on the ag land near the buildings.

**Larry Helm made a motion to recommend a 50 foot setback with the language as considered.** The committee discussed how much room may be needed, considering spray drift and equipment needs. **Leroy made a motion to amend the suggested setback to 25 feet. The amendment passed 9-2, with Larry Helm and Mike Finger voting against it. The motion to recommend the Council adopt the following language – “When a parcel within this [rural commercial or industrial] district adjoins an Agriculture comprehensive plan designation (as designated on map 8 of chapter 2 of the Whatcom county Comprehensive Plan), setbacks from property lines adjoining this designation shall be increased to 25 feet” – passed 10-1, with Wesley Kentch voting against it.** The committee requested that staff draft a letter in coordination with the Chair and Vice-Chair to be sent to the Planning Commission and Council that communicates this recommendation.

### Staff Presentation/Report

Samya Lutz, Planning staff, presented a PowerPoint slide show and hand-out on the revisions reflected in the current draft of the agricultural strategic plan. Both Samya and Peter Gill provided details about the changes to the plan.

### Discussion

The committee discussed the changes on page 6, in Section 2.0 under the ‘Available for Agricultural Use’ subsection. Larry wondered if the sentence that begins “A clear process must be established....” leaves things too open, and would be better being more specific. Henry suggested the AAC be given a clearer role. **Larry made a motion to change the sentence to read: “The AAC will establish a clear process to**

**allow a landowner, or a group of landowners, to petition for inclusion in the designated agricultural area in order to access the agricultural land protection policies and incentives afforded to farmers within the core agricultural areas.” All in favor.**

Wes asked that the committee look at Appendix E listing ‘Governments, County Agencies and Organizations involved in Agriculture’. **Wes made a motion to remove RESources from that list.** Discussion included concern about legitimizing RESources role, and frustration at their enforcement actions. **The motion passed 9-1, with Mike Finger voting against it, and Todd Jones abstaining. The committee requested a number of additional groups be added or revised, including: add the Agricultural Advisory Committee; change Farm Bureau to WA State and Whatcom County Farm Bureau; change Farm Product Commissions, Cattlemen, etc., to list the specific groups including the Seed Potato Commission, Beef Commission, Strawberry Commission, Raspberry Commission, Blueberry Commission, Whatcom County Cattlemen, WA State and Whatcom County Dairy Federation, and WA State and Whatcom County Dairy Women; and add Ditching, Diking, and Flood Districts.**

Announcements

Wes Kentch discussed information he learned at a forum he attended on April 8 entitled “Time to Act: Adapting to Climate Change in Whatcom County” that he thought was useful and worthwhile, and he’s happy to share materials and information with members of the committee.

***Next Meeting***

**The Agricultural Advisory Committee will meet again on May 12<sup>th</sup> at 3 PM at the Planning & Development Services, Northwest Annex Conference Room**

***Future Agenda Topics***

Finalization of the strategic plan, along with a letter of endorsement.

***The meeting was adjourned at 4:54 P.M.***

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Debbie VanderVeen, Vice-Chair, Agricultural Advisory Committee

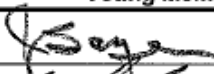
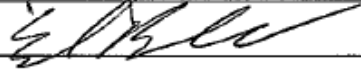
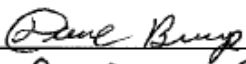
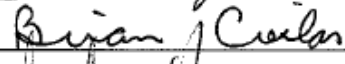
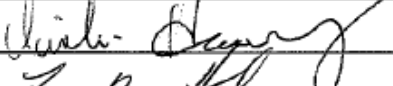

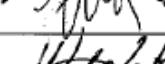


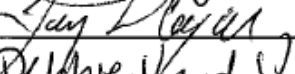
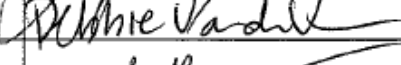


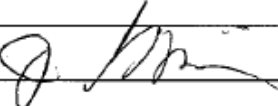
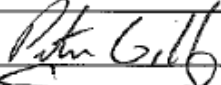
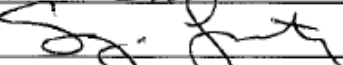
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Date

Included in the meeting packet for April 14, 2011 (or provided at the meeting):

- ◆ AAC April 14, 2011 Agenda
- ◆ Draft meeting notes from February 17, 2011 meeting
- ◆ Draft (dated 3/31) of Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan – tracked changes text, and clean appendices
- ◆ Letter from Farm Friends to County Council dated 3/24/11
- ◆ Announcement of the Forum for a Coordinated Healthy and Equitable Food System coming up on May 11, 2011, from 8:30-3:30 at St Luke’s Community Health Ed Center, 3333 Squalicum Way
- ◆ PowerPoint presentation slide handout on revisions to the Ag Strategic Plan
- ◆ Letter from Whatcom County Farm Bureau to County Council dated 4/14/11
- ◆ Updated committee list with names and contact information

**Agricultural Advisory Committee - Sign in Sheet - April 14, 2011**

NAME			Voting Members SIGNATURE	Affiliation
Bayer	John			Farmer
Blok	Ed			Whatcom Farm Friends
Boxx	Lesa			Consumer
Buys	Dave			Farmer
Cieslar	Brian			Expertise in Farm Programs
Hawley	Vicki			Processor
Helm	Larry			Farmer
Finger	Mike			Farmer
Kentch	Wesley			Farmer
Jones	Todd			Farmer
Plagerman	Leroy	✓		Farmer
Vander Veen	Debbie			Farmer
Yoder	Richard			Conservation District Board
<b>Ex-officio Members and Contributing Members</b>				
Antholt	Charles			Chair Emeritus
Bierlink	Henry			Whatcom Farm Friends
Boggs	George			Conservation District
Gilles	John			Farm Expertise
Gliva	Carly			FFA Youth
Hall	Alex			NRCS
Benedict	Chris			WSU Extension
Gill	Peter	✓		Whatcom County staff
Lutz	Samya	✓		Whatcom County staff

