

# **Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting**

Approved meeting notes for November 3, 2011

## **MEETING HIGHLIGHTS**

- ◆ There were 28 people in attendance (13 of the 13 voting members; 4 ex-officio, contributing, or staff members; and 11 guests).
- ◆ The Committee voted to support contracts that would enable consultants to assist with Agricultural Strategic Plan implementation, provided they do not include assistance with the Ruckelshaus process.
- ◆ The committee voted to keep the current chair and vice-chair: Lesa Boxx and Debbie VanderVeen.
- ◆ The next regular meeting was set for **December 8, 2011**, 3-5 PM, Whatcom County PDS, Northwest Annex Conference Room, 5280 Northwest Drive.
- ◆ A special meeting was set for either November 16 or 17 at a time and place to be determined in order to discuss the Ruckelshaus/Voluntary Stewardship Program and hear from a number of informed speakers on that subject.

## **MEETING NOTES**

### ***Quorum***

A quorum was present at 3 PM with 13 of the 13 voting members in attendance (see sign in sheet at the end of the meeting notes). Lesa Boxx called to the meeting order at 3:00 P.M. at the county Planning and Development Services Department, Northwest Annex Conference Room at 5280 Northwest Road.

The chair noted one change to the agenda: Subcommittee reports will happen under AAC deliberations.

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

**Brain Cieslar moved to approve the meeting notes from May 12; the meeting notes were approved by all voting.**

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

Five members of the public spoke during open session:

Percy Hoekema – Expressed the desire to use farmers and those closely connected to the farm community for committee and consultant work.

Jeff Rainey – Came wanting to learn about Ruckelshaus; would like this committee to be involved with that process.

Sara Kuljis – Also came wanting to learn about Ruckelshaus. People do not know what is going on with this, and need to be informed.

Bob VanWeerdhuizen – Concerned about treatment of ditches. As board member of Whatcom Farm Bureau, explained his vote on that board to recommend opting in to the Ruckelshaus process. He has reservations, but does support it. The vote was unanimous.

Chris Hatch – He encourages education and understanding of the Ruckelshaus process and the alternatives. Discussed meeting that took place last Friday in Lynden at Dutch Mothers restaurant to discuss Ruckelshaus and the many perspectives.

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

#### Staff Presentation/Report

Planning staff discussed the activities that have taken place since the last AAC meeting in May (referring to the back of the agenda handout), and discussed the direction articulated in the Agricultural Strategic Plan (ASP) within the tasks and the Gantt chart in Appendix A. The PDR Oversight Committee is focused on the PDR-related tasks. There has been interest from at least one County Council member in moving the ag mitigation task forward sooner than what is indicated in the ASP, at least in part due to the FEMA biological-opinion that takes effect this fall. The Ruckelshaus Bill (ESHB 1886) took effect on July 22, 2011, providing an option for counties to opt into or out of a voluntary stewardship program that would govern agricultural activities in critical areas.

Larry Helm asked about the water system planning task listed in the plan, whether it could be moved up in priority, and whether anything was currently occurring. Peter Gill and Henry Bierlink both responded, saying that the Public Utility District had gotten EDI funding to work on the Coordinated Water System Plan, and that the hope was that potable water and agricultural water would be discussed at length. No process has begun yet, though it is anticipated that there will be meetings beginning sometime in the next 6 to 12 months. The only other existing water-related process is the watershed management process that has been going on for years.

Henry Bierlink of Whatcom Farm Friends noted he and Lesa Boxx had met with the Executive and Deputy Administrator to discuss ideas of how to get the ASP implemented. The message they got was that there would be no new staff hired to help, and alternative implementation avenues would need to be pursued in order to get more assistance than the estimated 1.0 FTE of staff time dedicated to the ag program, as written in the ASP.

Staff discussed the development of the Request for Proposals for consultant assistance, after direction was received from PDS leadership and the Executive's office to do so; the subsequent consultant interviews and scope development (split scope between two consultant firms); and the consideration by the Council Finance Committee of the first scope, with a decision to hold it in committee for further discussion on November 9.

A number of members commented on the cost of consultants, and wondered how and if some of the work (esp. Ruckelshaus) could be done by a subcommittee.

Todd Jones asked if we needed a motion reaffirming that the AAC recommends implementation of the Strategic Plan. Debbie VanderVeen responded that the committee already voted on that in May.

Henry stated that the question is really about *how* to implement the ASP. In his mind, the AAC is the best one to focus on the Rural Study Areas, APO and map review process; other tasks make sense to do with help as there are specific legal and code consistency issues.

John Bayer asked where the money would come from. Roxanne Michael, PDS Planning Manager, responded that it represented most of the savings this year from two unfilled staff positions that were lost through attrition early in the year.

Larry Helm asked about potential conflict of interest with Whatcom Farm Friends being one of the contractors. Henry responded that he did not dictate *how* the plan should be implemented; that direction came from the Executive.

**Brian Cieslar made a motion to recommend approval of the contracts. Vicki seconded.**

Todd and Lesa both stated that they would appreciate having an outside consultant host outreach meetings and gather facts about the repercussions of different Ruckelshaus decisions.

Debbie shared information from the bios of the members of the Berk consulting team, saying she did not see any strong ag background reflected there. She would have liked to see more involvement from the AAC in the consultant/scope process.

Larry Helm also stated he'd like to see folks with farm experience working on this.

Peter Gill responded that the consultants would be hired to do professional outreach, planning and analysis, and will not be giving their own opinion but packaging the input from the community.

Debbie stated that Kathy Kershner and Bill Knutzen from the Council volunteered to start their own process to discuss Ruckelshaus, and have invited Eric Johnson from WA Assoc of Counties to come to the Nov 9 Council meeting (12:15) to discuss it.

Vicki Hawley asked for George Boggs opinion, and noted this is the first time the AAC has talked about Ruckelshaus.

George notes that there are many sides to the issue. The bill language is clear about the process, but what people feel uncertain about is the outcome of the process, which can only be known with time.

**Lesa called for the vote (roll call): Motion Failed 8-4**

John Bayer	no	Mike Finger	yes
Ed Blok	no	Wes Kentch	no
Lesa Boxx	(abstained as chair)	Todd Jones	yes
Dave Buys	no	Leroy Plagerman	no
Brian Cieslar	yes	Debbie VanderVeen	no
Vicki Hawley	yes	Dick Yoder	no
Larry Helm	no		

**Larry Helm made a motion that the AAC host a special meeting to discuss Ruckelshaus on either November 16 or 17 at a time/place to be determined, and invite Lesa Starkenberg, George Boggs, Roger Almskaar, and Jason Overstreet to speak. Wes seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

Henry asked if the message of the AAC is that they don't want any consultant help on ASP implementation, or that they don't want that help to include the Ruckelshaus process.

Mike expressed frustration, saying he hopes that is not the message. We have spent over a year developing a plan and to say we don't want help implementing it sends a bad message.

**Wes Kentch made a motion to recommend approval of the contracts without the inclusion of the Ruckelshaus portion. Larry seconded. Motion passed with one dissenting vote (Debbie).**

### Subcommittee Reports

Ag Buildings Subcommittee – Wes reported that they have done nothing since meeting with Sam Ryan, PDS Director, last year; but would like to keep the committee alive as he feels there is still work they could do.

Ag & Critical Areas Subcommittee – Larry Helm reported that they have been focused on the Brown-Malloy drainage in Drayton Harbor area. George Boggs stated that the Conservation District, due to budget reductions, will be no longer able to host these meetings. Larry suggested that the AAC discuss this committee more at the next meeting.

### AAC Work Plan

Staff asked for clarity on what the AAC expects to focus on at future meetings in the coming months. Henry directed attention to pages 11-12 in the ASP, asking if indeed the committee wanted to begin by focusing on the “Review Rural Study Area Agricultural designation process” task. Committee members expressed a general consensus that yes, that is what they expect to do, and asked if staff could bring maps and information on other counties’ agricultural zoning designations.

### Elections

Todd nominated Lesa Boxx as committee chair. Lesa accepted the nomination. Larry nominated Debbie VanderVeen as chair. Debbie declined the nomination. Dick nominated Debbie as vice-chair. Debbie accepted the nomination. **Dick moved to elect the officers as nominated and accepted. Mike seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

### Other Business

Debbie brought a City of Bellingham agenda bill to the attention of the committee. It is numbered 19370 and was from the 10/31 council meeting. It is suggesting metrics for indicators the city is developing in relation to Whatcom County’s legacy and maintaining a vibrant and sustainable economy. One has to do with agriculture and uses the acreage in ag land as the metric. The committee discussed whether farmgate value may be a more appropriate, or additional metric to use, to provide a better picture of what is happening here with ag. Debbie asked if staff could distribute this agenda bill to the committee so that the AAC could discuss it further at the next meeting.

Wes Kentch asked about having a spokesperson for the AAC, and if this is something the committee needed to decide on. Lesa Boxx read from Section 5 of the Business Rules and Procedures in response, which states “The chairperson has the responsibility of presiding at meetings of the AAC, placing items on the agenda, calling special meetings, canceling meetings, excusing members for valid reasons from attendance at AAC meetings **and shall be the spokesperson for the committee.**” (emphasis added)

Lesa discussed the formation of a Review Committee if the Council does approve the contracts. She has appointed Wes, Debbie, and Todd to be on this committee as representatives of the AAC. The Review Committee would serve as a liaison between the consultants and AAC, and consist of other members including agency staff.

***Next Meeting***

**The Agricultural Advisory Committee will meet again on December 8<sup>th</sup> at 3 PM at the Planning & Development Services, Northwest Annex Conference Room**

***The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 P.M.***

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Lesia Boxx, Chair, Agricultural Advisory Committee

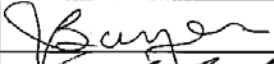

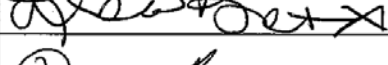
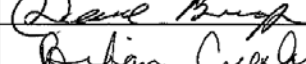
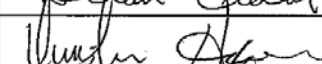
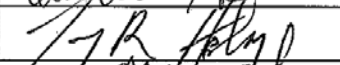
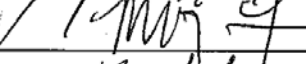
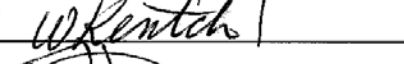
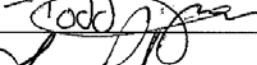
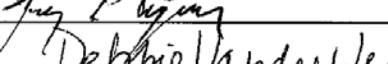
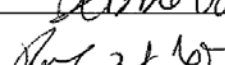
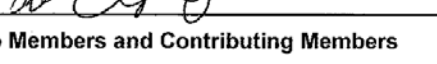
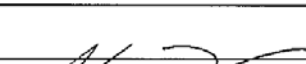
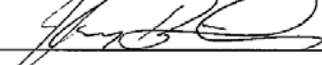
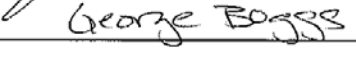
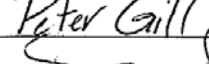
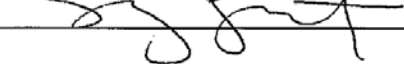
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Date

Included in the meeting packet for Nov 3, 2011 (or provided at the meeting):

- ◆ AAC November 3, 2011 Meeting Agenda
- ◆ Draft meeting notes from May 12, 2011meeting
- ◆ Published Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan
- ◆ Copies of Request for Proposals and two draft contracts as distributed to the Executive's office in October
- ◆ Copies of AAC Code and Business Rules

### Agricultural Advisory Committee - Sign in Sheet - November 3, 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
				FFA Youth
Hall	Alex			NRCS
Benedict	Chris			WSU Extension
Gill	Peter			Whatcom County staff
Lutz	Samya			Whatcom County staff

