

# MEETING SUMMARY

## PDR Oversight Committee

September 23, 2011, 8:30 AM

Planning and Development Services – Northwest Annex Office

Voting members present: Veronica Wisniewski, John Gillies, Mark Harting, Paul Schissler, John Steensma; Guests: Tena Ondeck, Dean Martin; County PDS Staff: Samya Lutz.

### 1. Public Comments/Announcements/Agenda Review

Introductions were made.

### 2. Minutes

The July 8<sup>th</sup> meeting summary was reviewed and approved (Motion by Mark; John S., second).

### 3. PDR Eligibility

Committee members were given copies of the revised county code Section 3.25A, reflecting the changes passed by county council on July 12 that expand PDR eligibility to R2A and R5A-overlay areas.

### 4. PDR Application Rounds

Round VIII – The Jensen easement purchase is closed and recorded, with USDA reimbursement expected soon. This marks the closing up of Round VIII.

Round IX – The Weatherby property is being sold to Ed Pommeroy, and has been withdrawn from the program. The Littrell property is on hold awaiting the owners' removal of certain property that poses potential environmental risk. The Funk property appraisal is complete, with staff awaiting a final response from the owners.

Round X – The committee discussed opening Round X. **Mark made a motion to advertise to take new applications for the PDR program with no specified closing deadline (Paul second); all in favor.** Notice will be sent to the press, email lists, and various organizations for their newsletters (CD, WLT, WFF).

### 5. Program Discussion

Match funding – USDA did not get a re-allocation of funding this year as they have in the past. This, combined with their changed approach to substitutions has resulted in no present funding available. John G. noted there is a possibility more funding will be available later in the year, and we should make sure we are notified if that were to happen. Also, new grant proposals to USDA-FRPP may be submitted (or re-submitted) next spring. WA State RCO proposals may also be submitted in the spring of 2012, though they have a 2-year timeframe before money is available and closing can occur.

Market & valuation – Those present discussed the current agricultural values in the area, and noted the influence of Canadian (and Californian) buyers and berry prices, and well as macro-economic forces pushing for higher agricultural land values. A number of examples of recent sales were shared for context. This, combined with the fact that development land values have dropped and are not showing signs of picking back up, results in low appraisal easement values (raw development value – agricultural (encumbered) value = easement value).

PDR program implications – What are the implications of the match funding and market trends for the program? With roughly \$20,000 per development right in R5A areas, the values are low. The program can carry on with opportunistic purchases, but likely will not have a high demand from farmers. With the committee recommending a minimum cut-off score, and changes to the PDR Program Guidelines, it is likely better to do-away with the annual round approach, and simply bring promising opportunities before council as they arise. **Mark made a motion to recommend the elimination of rounds to the Council (Paul second); all in favor.**

The committee also discussed other types of approaches to valuing conservation easements on agricultural lands: contingent valuation, points-based approaches, and approaches similar to the ecosystem marketplace (nutrient values). Paul offered to do a bit of research to find out if there are other communities who have a different valuation approach than the appraisal approach we've used. Veronica's husband has experience in contingent valuation and works with an economist at WWU; she will also ask him for more information, and work with Paul on the research.

## 6. Old Business

Draft prioritization process – This was discussed in July; we will come back to this at the next meeting. John G. has comments he'll send to staff; others encouraged to send any comments on for incorporation in a modified draft.

Budget allocation discussion – Allison drafted a letter to Council recommending a 50% Conservation Futures allocation to PDR, which was passed on to the committee by staff in Allison's absence. The committee reviewed this draft and recommended two modifications. Mark expressed discomfort with some of the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph wording about match funding, and suggested we bring up the possibility of occasional 100% CF funding for easement purchases. Paul pointed out that this letter's focus is on predictability for farmers and the program; the idea of what makes up the full funding package can be re-visited later. **John G. moved to accept the letter as amended, and include it with a draft Resolution for Council consideration (John S. second). Motion passed (Mark opposed).** Staff will send around the amended letter, along with a draft Council Resolution by email.

Contract work – The committee had received proposals for outreach work totaling \$5,000 that included website and materials development. Tena offered to support this type of work if it is to be contracted out, as she has access to farmer databases and promotional experience. The committee discussed the desire for an open process, suggesting the work be developed as a RFP scope. **Mark made a motion to recommend staff develop an RFP for outreach contract work (Paul second); all in favor.**

## 7. Future Agenda Items

Items to include in the next agenda: revised draft of prioritization process. Veronica will be out of town until the day before the meeting; John G. offered to help staff with meeting preparations if needed.

Tena requested an updated draft of the map showing PDR applications and closed transactions that can be viewed on her computer. Staff offered to work with GIS staff to update and send around.

### Next committee meeting:

Friday, November 4<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 AM at the Planning and Development Services offices, Central Conference Room.

## 8. Committee Membership

The committee (members only present) discussed new potential members. Steve Groen is still potentially interested in joining the committee. Tena Ondeck has applied to the Executive's office for committee membership. Paul made a motion to recommend approval of Tena's application for membership (Mark second); all in favor. The recommendation will be forwarded to the Executive's office for consideration.

**Motion to adjourn at 10:24 AM**

**Signed, Veronica Wisniewski, Chair PDR Oversight Committee**