

MEETING SUMMARY

PDR Oversight Committee

October 23, 2009, 8:30 AM

Agricultural Service Center, 6975 Hannegan Road

Voting members present: Rod Erickson, Veronica Wisniewski, Barbara Dykes, John Gilles, Allison Aurand, Paul Schissler; Others: Henry Bierlink (Farm Friends); PDS Staff: Samya Lutz, Dean Martin

1. Public Comments/Announcements: There were no public comments.
2. Review of Minutes: The July 31, 2009 meeting minutes were reviewed. Allison asked for a correction to a name on page 2 – it should read “Sara Jo Breslow”. Minutes approved as corrected.
3. Round VII Purchase of Development Rights Discussion

The Eldridge Purchase of Development Rights transaction is due to close in the next two weeks, and will be the first transaction using State RCO funds, from a 2006 grant commitment.

The VanderVeen family has requested to reduce their application to just under 80 acres (down from the original 118 acres). The committee discussed how this impacts the other property applications. USDA gave the nod to move ahead even with the reduced acreage. **Veronica made a motion that the committee continue to move forward with the VanderVeen transaction, as amended. Allison second. All in favor.**

Shannon & Larea Tjoelker’s property was discussed. Staff discovered they may have only one development right, instead of the two originally assumed. Current Planning staff are reviewing this file to confirm status of DRs. S&L Tjoelker will not continue with the program if the development right assumption (and therefore the price) changes.

Greg Ebe is looking at applying again for a property north of the previous Purchase of Development Rights transaction, up on Wiley’s Lake Rd. The committee was optimistic this property would be a good candidate for the program.

4. Program Discussion Ideas

The committee discussed ideas for how to make the Purchase of Development Rights program more successful over time. In the short-term, we’re interested in getting more strong applicants to submit to the USDA to meet the end-of-year deadline for application submittals. Over the longer term, the committee discussed a variety of ideas concerning how best to approach agricultural protection through Purchase of Development Rights (see ideas paper). John suggested working with local non-profits would be a good way to gain more consistency and dim the aversion to a ‘government’ program. Allison discussed the examples of Skagit and other counties who have moved the Purchase of Development Rights program out of the regulatory (Planning) side of government. Paul mentioned the

San Juan County Land Bank as another example to look into. Some concern was expressed (Veronica, John) over using Conservation Futures (CF) money to pay for administration costs. If money is used for this, would less be available for farmland purchases? The current Purchase of Development Rights program has not used all of what has been available in the CF fund, or had any indication of getting close to going beyond what Council is comfortable with. Allison mentioned the experience of talking with the Council Natural Resources Committee about the program, and shared her sense that Council members would like to see more movement on Purchase of Development Rights and other means of agricultural protection, and were open to a recommendation from the Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee about how to do that. Paul, Allison, and Barbara were all willing to serve on a subcommittee to look further into options on Purchase of Development Rights program restructuring to bring back to the committee.

Henry shared ideas Farm Friends in working on to pair agricultural preservation with the broader work on natural resources banking (see 2 handouts). There are potential opportunities to trade development rights for water rights, for example. The overall theme is total watershed management. Farm Friends is partnering with other agencies to submit an EDI funding proposal to develop these ideas into feasible transactions. He opened the door to the Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee to participate & offer suggestions for including their long-term thinking in the proposal as well. **Next meeting to discuss the EDI proposal is Tuesday (October 27) at 10 AM at the PUD office on Trigg Road (on the river).** The committee continued to discuss examples of potential ways in which farming and natural resources go hand-in-hand, with numerous potential transactions likely. Discussion also centered around whether cross-watershed transactions were a good option. Barbara mentioned a Puget Sound Partnership publication with guidelines for making holistic decisions about watershed health. She was involved in some of the initial committee meetings about this topic.

John, Allison, and Veronica are all interested in working with Farm Friends as a subcommittee to coordinate the EDI grant. John (and perhaps others) plans to attend the meeting on Tuesday. The Purchase of Development Rights Oversight Committee will discuss this again at the next meeting.

Paul talked about the opportunity currently for Ann Russell (on the staff of Kulshan Community Land Trust – KCLT – focusing on access to affordable land for farming, and previous staff to Whatcom Land Trust doing baseline documentation for ag lands) to assist with Purchase of Development Rights outreach with the specific goal of helping county staff package viable Purchase of Development Rights transactions to submit to USDA by the end-of-year deadline (see Scope of Work handout). The committee agreed that next year it would be good to develop an RFP that utilized each of the local nonprofits involved with agriculture and farming to participate in Purchase of Development Rights outreach efforts in a consistent and ongoing partnership with the county; but given the tight deadline that broader approach is not yet possible. **Veronica made a motion that the Oversight Committee support the Scope of Work for KCLT outreach assistance. Barbara seconded. Motion passed, with Paul abstaining.**

5. Next committee meeting: The committee will meet again on Friday, November 13th, 8:30 AM, **at the Smith & Northwest Planning & Development Services Department office – Northwest Annex conference room (note new location).**

Signed, Rod Erickson, Chair PDR Oversight Committee

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