

MEETING SUMMARY

PDR Oversight Committee

January 22, 2010, 8:30 AM

Planning and Development Services Office, 5280 Northwest Ave

Voting members present: Veronica Wisniewski, Allison Aurand, Paul Schissler, Mark Harting, Barbara Dykes; Others: Craig MacConnell (WSU), Larry Helm (Agricultural Advisory Committee), Ann Russell (Kulshan CLT); County PDS Staff: Samya Lutz, Dean Martin

1. Introductions & welcome of new member(s): The committee welcomed Mark Harting whose appointment was confirmed on January 12th.
2. Public Comments/Announcements/Agenda Review: Larry Helm spoke as a member of the Agricultural Advisory Committee, PDR subcommittee, saying they were interested in enhancing & increasing participation in the program, and that he was here to listen. Others were interested in ongoing cross-communication between the AAC and PDR Oversight Committee. Allison volunteered to attend AAC meetings, the next of which will be held Monday, Feb 1, 7 PM at Planning and Development Services.
3. Review of Minutes: The December 4, 2009 meeting minutes were reviewed and approved.
4. Appointment of Officers: **Allison nominated Veronica as Chair of the committee** (Paul second). All in favor. **Barbara nominated Allison to be Vice-Chair of the committee** (Mark second). All in favor.
5. Purchase of Development Rights – Status & Discussion

The Jensen application is in and underway. It was submitted to the USDA for funding by the Jan 15 deadline. John & Diane VanderVeen are still moving forward with their application from last year. All others have withdrawn or been tabled. Three other farmers have spoken with staff about applying, but have not yet applied. Ann Russell from KulshanCLT is continuing to carry out the contract to help with outreach for the Purchase of Development Rights program, and has spoken recently with Albert DeBoer who is an interested applicant.

The committee discussed outreach, as well as other issues including the ‘cultural’ barriers to overcome for farmers working with a regulatory government agency. Questions came up about how strategic our purchases have been, and whether there is opportunity to be more strategic including prioritizing target areas, ag zone properties.

What is our goal in terms of preserving agriculture strategically in Whatcom County?

Difficulties in the valuation process were also discussed, including the constraints inherent in using the appraisal formula of “development land value – ag land value = development

rights value” and sales values of ag land that are not economically feasible for ag operations.

Is the PDR program to protect open space or to protect agriculture?

Soil productivity is not only factor – land can be desirable for ag for a variety of reasons, especially when it comes to potatoes & hayland.

Options discussed included exploring a point-based appraisal system in more detail; looking at assessor’s ag tax base and the open space farm & ag program; limiting residential development in ag areas; housing the PDR program in Northwest Economic Council (Allison has spoken with Nancy Jordan, director, about this & she is interested); branding the PDR program to increase recognition in the community – “Skagit Legacy Program” as example (core outreach needs to come from within program, not outside), but need clarity on program focus & goals prior to branding.

6. Other Discussion

The committee expressed a desire for an additional meeting to discuss these issues in a more focused way, with the following tentative discussion item ideas:

- Overall goal of PDR program
- Measurable/strategic objectives
- Ways to simplify process
- Increase leverage to get land
- What are we branding?
- What’s good about our current program & what do we want to change?
- What’s working elsewhere?

Larry Helm said he thought this committee is doing great work & he doesn’t really see a need for an Agricultural Advisory Committee subcommittee on this issue.

7. Next committee meeting: Prior to the next business meeting, the committee will have a ‘mini-retreat’ meeting for 2 hours at a time and place to be determined via email. Samya will survey members to determine the best date. The committee will meet again to conduct business on Friday, February 26th, 8:30 AM, at the Smith & Northwest Planning & Development Services Department office.

Signed, Veronica Wisniewski, Chair PDR Oversight Committee