

# MEETING SUMMARY

## PDR Oversight Committee

May 28, 2010, 8:30 AM

Planning and Development Services – Northwest Annex Office

Voting members present: Veronica Wisniewski, Paul Schissler, John Steensma, Barbara Dykes (arrv 9:30); Others: Chuck Antholt (Farm Friends), Craig MacConnell (WSU), Jared Paben (Herald); County PDS Staff: Samya Lutz, Dean Martin.

1. Public Comments/Announcements/Agenda Review: There were no public comments.
2. Decision items such as approval of meeting minutes will wait until later in the meeting when Barbara is expected to arrive.
3. PDR Round VIII

Staff and a couple committee members (John Gillies and Mark Harting) met with the county administration on May 12. We received verbal commitment to move forward with the Jensen purchase, and tentative commitment on the Funk and VanderVeen purchases. We also discussed the proposed changes to the PDR program – especially the farmer interviews and valuation changes – and also got verbal commitment to support these actions.

The same group, along with Paul Schissler, attended the Council Natural Resources Committee meeting on May 25. The committee members (and later full council) voted to unanimously support the resolution to move forward with Round VIII applicants (Jensen, Funk; and VanderVeen as a leftover from Round VII).

No appraisals are yet available for VanderVeen and Jensen.

Committee members acknowledged the motion to accept the Funk property ranking and move it forward in the process was made, seconded and approved via email communications since the last meeting. The group reiterated the excellent opportunity presented here with the high quality soils and proximity to other protected parcels that this parcel offers.

4. PDR Program Discussion

**Grant application** – Dean and Samya are submitting an application for \$25,000 to the state Office of Farmland Protection to collect key pieces of information and integrate these into a strategic plan for ag (which will fold directly into the Comp Plan update process). Both the farmer interviews and valuation process could be funded partially through this grant.

**Sub/Committee Recommendations** – the subcommittee's draft recommendations have been reformatted into a preliminary draft letter from the whole committee, with highlighted headings being the recommendations. The group discussed whether it may detract from the

letter to include information on areas not recommended. Craig asked about how this relates to the Agricultural Advisory Committee tool recommendations. PDR is one of AAC's tools – this focuses on how to make that particular tool most effective. A section may be needed on funding options. Craig noted the King County has used general obligation bonds voted on by citizens; are there other ways to get guaranteed capital to farmers? Paul offered to do some research on funding and propose text to add to the recommendations. Chuck offered to look into loan guarantee options.

The members agreed that the two priority items for accomplishing this year are the outreach and valuation changes.

**Skagit model** – Staff and other interested folks will be going to Skagit County on Tuesday, June 8, to meet with their Conservation Futures Advisory Committee and their appraiser, Bob Suttles. The group discussed information and questions we would benefit from discussing with these folks. Samya will compile and send out by email for comment, before forwarding these questions down ahead of time to the Skagit group.

**Outreach** – The group reviewed the Outreach Ideas handout. Current priority order is 1. Outreach to past participants; 2. Prepare, or include PDR in, consolidated packet of tools and assistance available to Whatcom County Farmland Owners through various organizations & businesses; 3. Update Whatcom County's Outreach Materials; and the rest remains the same as in the April 15 handout. The video concept still generates much interest, and may be a viable project for foundation funding. Barbara will look into this further (with staff). It could potentially be a priority mechanism for telling the story of successful PDR projects and peaking the interest of potential applicants in the farmland areas of interest. Another idea was to work with Farm Friends and perhaps even state dept of Commerce to develop a 'toolkit to save farmland' that would be a package of transition services and other services geared to farmers. Documents like conservation easements are quite technical – farmers need to know who to talk with about what services they may need. The group asked staff to bring in examples of past outreach materials to the next meeting.

5. Review of Minutes: The April 23, 2010 meeting minutes were reviewed and approved (Paul, Barbara).

Next committee meeting: The committee will meet again to conduct regular business on Friday, June 25, 8:30 AM, at the Smith & Northwest Planning & Development Services office.

**Motion to adjourn at 10:07**

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