

MEETING SUMMARY

PDR Oversight Committee

June 25, 2010, 8:30 AM

Planning and Development Services – Northwest Annex Office

Voting members present: Veronica Wisniewski, Paul Schissler, John Steensma, Barbara Dykes; John Gillies; Others: Chuck Antholt (Farm Friends), Craig MacConnell (WSU), Larry Helm (AAC), Tom Ehrlichman; County PDS Staff: Samya Lutz, Dean Martin.

1. Public Comments/Announcements/Agenda Review: There were no public comments.
2. Minutes: The May 28th meeting summary was reviewed and approved.
3. Planning and Development Services update: Dean's last day will be July 7. Management is saying that a total of 9 to 12 people may be laid off from PDS before the end of 2010, and Samya may be one of these (3 layoffs take effect July 7, including Dean; two more rounds of layoffs are likely). Two other senior planners are being tasked with agriculture assistance; Peter Gill with Agricultural Advisory Committee, and Matt Aamot with PDR.

Council committee on July 13 – Staff is going before the Council Natural Resources Committee on July 13 at 9:30 AM to talk about the Ag program, and most specifically, about how the APO fits into that (at the request of Council). No Ag staff members were present at the June 8 Council meeting, but minutes indicate many questions arose then about the APO, its functionality, and how it is related to PDR, the Rural Study Areas, and other aspects of the Ag program and ag protection priorities.

Grant awarded – Staff was notified of the acceptance of our grant proposal to the WA State Conservation Commission, Office of Farmland Preservation, for \$25,000 to assist with the PDR program changes (including farmer interviews and valuation process development), the GIS mapping of ag, and the development of an agricultural strategic plan that will feed into the 2011 Comp Plan update. The grant period runs July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011.

4. PDR Round VIII

Appraisals are still not available for the Jensen and VanderVeen properties. Preliminary numbers for Jensen indicate the value will be in the neighborhood of \$700,000. USDA will cover 50% of the easement appraised value.

5. PDR Program Discussion

Skagit trip report – Paul, Chuck, and staff reported on the visit with the Skagit County Conservation Futures Board, and with Bob Suttles, appraiser. Visitors were struck by the degree of farmer optimism and the political support. The group discussed similarities and differences between Whatcom and Skagit Counties, including that we have more upland

agriculture here, many more dairies, and a higher percentage of berry crops. John G. noted that a document entitled something like “Visual Resources of Whatcom County” was published in the 1990s, which encouraged (in part) a scenic route designation through parts of the county actively farmed. He does not know what came of it. Paul noted that a poll conducted in Skagit County helped provide clear direction and support for the county leadership when creating the program – it indicated the county was not doing enough to support agriculture, as well as people’s willingness to pay. Outreach documents from Skagit County (as well as some old Whatcom County outreach materials) were passed around for the group to view.

Skagit County only buys development rights from ag-zoned land. The meeting with the appraiser there who maintains and updates the valuation pricing formula brought to light that we would likely need to have three different pricing formula worksheets to correspond with the different types of zoning on lands targeted by the PDR program. Bob Suttles is interested in working with us, and we would need to propose a scope of work for him to provide an estimate of what it may cost.

Valuation process/ scope – Staff provided a preliminary draft outlining how the committee may want to move forward with development of this new process (see handout). Similar to Skagit, the committee may want to revisit the “critical mass v. green line” approach to ag preservation. The current guidelines stress more of a green line approach – with that line being on the periphery of ag-zoned land (the RSAs and PDR Target Areas). Does this approach work well, or would it be work exploring if targeting inside the ag-zoned land (especially parcelized areas) might be another good approach? The point system should reflect the committee’s priorities here. Staff suggests an approach that starts with a look at the current scoring criteria – comparing both the WAC guidelines, and also Skagit’s scoring (handout). The next suggested step is a review of targeted land areas to provide the appraiser clear guidelines that will determine how many valuation pricing formula worksheets will be needed. The last step would be to work with an appraiser to develop pricing formulas based on the results of steps one and two.

6. **Other Discussion: Barbara made a motion (John G. second) that Veronica, Paul, and John G. set up a date to meet with the Administration to discuss funding options for continuing staff support. All in favor.**

Next committee meeting: The committee will meet again to conduct regular business on Friday, **July 16**, 8:30 AM, at the Smith & Northwest Planning & Development Services office.

Motion to adjourn at 10:07

Signed, Veronica Wisniewski, Chair PDR Oversight Committee