

MEETING SUMMARY

PDR Oversight Committee

January 23, 2009, 8 AM

Agricultural Service Center

6975 Hannegan Road

Members present: Rod Erickson, Veronica Wisniewski, John Gilles, Allison Aurand, Barbara Dykes (phone-in); Visitors: Craig MacConnell (WSU), Henry Beirlink (Farm Friends), George Boggs (Conservation District); Staff: Samya Lutz & Dean Martin, PDS

1. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

2. Review of Minutes

The December 12, 2008 meeting minutes were reviewed and approved.

3. Round VII PDR Ranking Discussion & Review

Water rights – Staff introduced the questions at hand: reviewing applicant's water rights to determine a yes/no for purposes of ranking the application; and reviewing applicant's water rights to feed information to the appraiser for purposes of establishing ag value.

The committee discussed the challenges of the water rights issues, and difficulty coming down to a determinate yes or no. CM thought the PDR program should encourage or even require some action to secure water rights from applicants prior to final purchase of conservation easements. Others felt that preserving the agricultural potential of the land is primary, whether or not water rights are available to the parcel at the moment. The committee agreed that taking some steps to secure water rights was a positive action, and should be rewarded. **Therefore it was decided that any valid (not cancelled) water rights documentation associated with the applicant parcel(s) would result in a 'yes' for purposes of ranking.** For purposes of assisting the appraiser with information for valuation purposes, all information will be passed on, but valid certificates, permits, and certain claims will be highlighted that grant water usage and volume beyond what is available from an exempt well.

Deed histories – Staff asked for comments from the committee on getting deed histories from a Title Company vs. a private consultant. AA asked whether USDA had an opinion here. She also offered follow-up information (if needed) on a consultant w/experience providing deed histories based out of Bow.

Skagit points-based appraisal model – Allison again discussed Skagit County's points-based appraisal process for PDR applications, which takes a base value (which is adjusted periodically to correspond w/market changes), and uses points to adjust

that base value up or down depending on specific criteria. It could be a good tool for developing preliminary estimated values, comparing properties, and informing landowner discussions. It would not likely replace appraisals, but could potentially delay them until the property was more certainly moving toward the closing process.

Discussion ensued about how development rights values come into play in the ranking process, and whether they factored into the choice of one property over another. Typically, good soils and strategic location are the dominant factors by design. The committee does have some discretion, however. In addition, the PDR program is limited by who applies to it.

In order to create a very useful tool that could hold up against appraisals, we'd probably need to hire an appraiser (and/or math wiz) to set it up initially, based on our local ag and development market circumstances. Then the question is whether USDA would allow this for purposes of grant submission (if not purchase).

Incorporating adjacent lands & scoring threshold –

John made a motion to include adjacent lands (lands immediately adjacent to AG zone lands, RSAs or PDR Target Areas) in the 'target area' definition for purposes of ranking applications. Allison seconded. All in favor.

The committee also discussed the issue of retaining a development right on a property. They felt there should be some strong disincentive for doing so. Perhaps the scoring criteria of 'conservation values' could be used here as a positive for those not retaining a DR, and a negative for those who do. Staff will look at this further to discuss next meeting.

Preliminary applicant ranking – Due to the factors above (water, target areas, other), the ranking will occur at the next PDR meeting. Staff will bring a laptop & projector in order to be able to adjust as the committee discusses the issues.

4. Other Business

Henry handed out some copies of the final Public Involvement Report from Farm Friends and mentioned it can be downloaded from the Farm Friends website.

5. Next committee meeting

The committee will meet again on Friday, February 6th, 8 AM, at the same location.

Signed,

Rod Erickson, Chair PDR Oversight Committee