

Ag Land Program – Technical Review Committee

Meeting Notes

Monday, March 17, 2008

2:30 – 4:30 pm

Members Attending:

<input type="checkbox"/> Larry Stoner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dick Yoder	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Greg Ebe
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> John Gillies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bill Querhn	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bob Tull
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vicki Hawley	<input type="checkbox"/> Doug Dostal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chuck Antholt

Others Attending:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Paul Grey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mary Dickenson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Henry Bierlink
<input type="checkbox"/> Samya Lutz	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> David Stalheim	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jason Stoner
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wayne Fitch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Martin Blackman	

x = attending

o = absent with notice

1. Review agenda, March 17 meeting notes – Henry reviewed the agenda for the meeting and called attention to a few items in the March 17 meeting notes. He noted that on the list of threat to Whatcom agriculture we had discussions at the March 17th meeting about understanding market pressures and a conversation about competition between resource lands and critical areas was scheduled for this meeting. We will touch on the other threats as we progress in the process. It was also noted that alternates for the positions on the TRC were encouraged. Currently we have the following identified:

Land Use Planner – Larry Stoner *alt. Jason Stoner*

Development – Bob Tull

Building Industry – Bill Querhn *alt. Mary Dickenson*

AAC Committee member – Chuck Antholt

Ag Organization member – John Gillies

Farmers (2) - Vicki Hawley *alt. Roger Hawley*
Greg Ebe *alt. Marlys Bedlington*

Ag Business Representative – Doug Dostal

Whatcom Conservation District – Dick Yoder

Paul noted that the notes from the meetings, once reviewed by the members, are posted on the Whatcom Farm Friends (WFF) website at www.wcfarmfriends.com. Henry noted that Keith Willnauer had sent a considerable amount of data from the assessor's office on market and current use taxation amounts for parcels in the ag and rural zones. David and Chuck asked to see the data. Value information related to parcelization is still needed. The TRC would like to get some sense of the number of parcels that require heightened protection and the costs anticipated to purchase the development rights in these parcels.

2. Competition with Critical Areas - conversation with Wayne Fitch, PDS - critical areas and land divisions related to cluster development. David introduced Wayne and Martin Blackman from PDS Long Range Planning. Wayne reviewed several examples of cases where the APO applied but farmland was not necessarily protected. In some cases the

farmland became the building sites while the remainder was designated critical areas. The criteria for inclusion in the APO are over 50% prime soils or Open Space ag tax classification.

Issues that arose in the conversation included:

- Who are really qualified soil scientists for the County to rely on in evaluating what soils are actually present and their suitability for agriculture? It is unclear if the County was truly obtaining qualified advice.
 - Siting criteria for development – predominately focused on development in APO areas but may also be applicable to siting criteria in the ag and rural target zones. There are no current siting criteria for buildings in the reserve tract in the APO program.
 - Clarity on rules for how farming is practiced in critical areas. An understanding of how NRCS’s wetland categories line up with the Counties would be useful. Could the County accept USDA management rules for wetlands?
 - Determine how much of the lands that are purported to be protected under the APO are actually ag lands (i.e. how much is actually critical areas). Dick noted the Skagit County victory in the State Supreme Court. This protects farmers from being compelled to take resource ag lands out of production in the name of protecting critical areas.
 - Explore a transfer bank –possibly for both wetlands and resource lands
3. Overview of the Role of the TRC – set milestones for accomplishing purpose – Henry observed that the hope will be to complete much of the TRC’s work before the end of the year then shepherd the recommendations through the AAC and the County Council process in early 2009. The next meeting will continue the conversation of density values and better clarify the magnitude of how many densities should be moved from the agricultural areas. Identifying tools for moving densities from areas we hope to protect to areas the County sees as developable remains our goal.

Henry encouraged members to assist the process by gathering individual thoughts on aspects of the work and putting them into a short “white paper” outlining ideas about what tools would be workable in Whatcom County and how might these tools function. WFF will gather these thoughts and help rework them into discussion papers for the rest of the TRC to consider. It is hoped that our work could be significantly shortened by some thoughtful work in this fashion.

4. Public Involvement and education – Paul reviewed the public involvement plan. The first activities centered around a:

- Questionnaire – 2,614 questionnaires had been mailed, 555 received for a 21.2% return. The survey will be tabulated over the next few weeks and used as a basis for beginning a series of meetings with target audiences.
- Presentation to County Council - David and Paul will present the status of the Public Involvement Plan and the activities of the TRC to the Natural Resources Committee of the Council on Tuesday, April 22nd.

5. Resources – Available

- Natural Heritage Plan – 1991 – copies at 3/3 mtg.
- Purchase of Development Right Program summary – distributed 2/11
- AAC Rural Land Study – distributed 2/11
- TDR Program Market Value Estimates – 2003 – Pruetz report – distributed 3/3
- Agricultural Transfer of Development Right Presentation: The Snohomish County Experience – available through WFF office – 4/21
- Proposed Ag Land Work Program – a Powerpoint Presentation by Kraig Olason to the County Council, October, 2006 – 4/21
- Maps:
 - potential build out in the ag zones
 - open space ag areas
 - CAO – Wetlands
 - CAO – Frequently Flooded Areas
 - CAO – Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas

6. Resources – Needed:

Meeting Schedule

May 5	June 16	August 4
May 19	July 7	August 18
June 2	July 21	September 1