

Ag Land Program – Technical Review Committee

Meeting Notes

Monday, Aug 18, 2008

2:30 – 4:30 pm

Members Attending:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Larry Stoner	<input type="checkbox"/> o Dick Yoder	<input type="checkbox"/> Greg Ebe
<input 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 type="checkbox"/> Mary Dickenson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Henry Bierlink
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Samya Lutz	<input type="checkbox"/> David Stalheim	<input type="checkbox"/>

x = attending

o = absent with notice

1. Review agenda, August 4 meeting notes – The meeting notes were perused and no changes to the draft were suggested. It was noted that September meetings are 2nd and 4th Mondays due to Labor Day. Samya reported that Dean Martin had been offered the senior ag planner position at the County. Dean is from Missouri and has experience in land use planning there as well as with soils as an NRCS employee. He begins his position on September 2nd. Samya was asked how this hire relates to her continued involvement in the TRC process and other ag related efforts. She was not sure although she expected that she would at a minimum continue involvement with the PDR program. Henry was requested to write a letter on the TRC's behalf requesting that Samya continue to help support the TRC's efforts.
2. Workplan update – Henry reviewed what needed to be accomplished in the upcoming months in order to meet the end of the year deadline the committee had set for itself.

Aug. – Dec.	Expand public discussion of resource land protection programs
October 20 th	Agree on Internal draft of TRC's recommendations
November 17 th	Finalize draft recommendations to the County Council, Executive Resources Committee
December 3 rd	Present draft recommendations to Ag Advisory Committee, Natural Resources Committee
January 15 th	Present final recommendation package to County Council

3. First Draft of TRC Recommendations - A table of Ag Land Preservation Tools was presented for review, editing, and additions/subtractions. The table lists 10-12 tools and comments on the TRC's willingness to recommend them for the tools to be included in the Whatcom County package.
 - a. Farmland Preservation Zone designation – Vicki referenced a *Capital Press* article on Klickitat County's proposed farmland preservation zone. The zone is voluntary but once the land is enrolled would order the allowed number of developed parcels over a 1-40 year period with all non-farm development viewed as secondary in nature. Henry and Paul will gather more information on this idea.
 - b. TDR receiving Areas – Bill asked about the criteria and mechanisms for indentifying receiving areas for TDR transfers. The TRC has not been charged with developing receiving areas but the members realize that no credible TDR program will develop unless some ideas about how to locate them and how to make the program attractive to potential transfers are included in our recommendations. Bill suggested that more density in non-target rural areas must be included in this discussion.
 - c. Downzoning – Bob reviewed the Whatcom County history in land use zoning since the adoption of the 1969 Comprehensive Plan which established zones. A good portion of the non ag and forest zones were placed in a General Protection Zone at that time which anticipated further clarification of how these areas would be developed/protected. In the late 1980's the subzones were reviewed and the rural zones were established. Bob viewed discussions of downzoning as neither useful nor fair and his view was echoed by the TRC. Downzoning has a significant effect on property values and will create tremendous resistance and disruption. There was a consensus that better, more fair, tools are needed.
 - d. Ag Protection Overlay (APO) /Clustering – It was noted that while the TRC had recognized the problems with the current APO the idea of clustering remained an effective tool for protecting portions of ag land. Larry felt the APO would work better if ag interests were involved in the decisions. He felt that currently the intent of the APO was in conflict with critical areas protections. It was suggested that perhaps we include the clustering idea in the parcel reconfiguration tool and either eliminate the APO or revise it so that it met the original intent.
 - e. Parcel Reconfiguration - This tool is built on Larry's ideas regarding lot line adjustments and density shuffles. Ideas concerning rules for siting houses, setback rules, location of wells and drainfields, and critical areas buffers were incorporated into the discussion. The TRC has enthusiasm for the idea of relocating potential densities within the ag and target rural zones in a manner that prioritizes the area for ag protection but accommodates a significant portion of the current undeveloped development rights in a manner that is least disruptive to ag activities.

4. Continue discussion on DR shuffles and lot-line adjustments – Larry is continuing to work on suggestions for proposed code changes that would help move us toward implementing these ideas. The TRC agreed that they were not in a position to rewrite County Code but that their best role would be to recommend the desired result to be achieved and then rely on the code writers to rework the code language to accomplish the goal. It was recognized that a farmer-based sounding board like the Ag Advisory Committee would play a vital role in ensuring that this was accomplished as desired.

5. BIA Questionnaire – Bill reiterated that the questions they posed are very likely the questions most of the public have regarding farmland protection efforts. Providing clear and concise answers would be very useful in the public forums and other public discussions. The TRC reviewed an updated draft of responses to the questions and found that the weakest area remained statistics on the actual amount of farmland we have and what we have lost over the years. Farm Friends has been working at trying to supply accurate and verifiable data to document these areas but has not achieved the goal yet. Data from the 2007 Ag census should be available in the not too distant future which would help us answer this issue more accurately.

6. Public Forums – Paul provided an update on the upcoming forums and noted that the survey results had been displayed at the NW WA Fair. A press release on the survey result and the upcoming forums will be issued soon. Bill cautioned that public education on public policy issues should always try to get to the issue of “who pays” for the recommendations we develop. He pointed to the considerable effort to develop a Countywide Affordable Housing proposal which produced good data and suggested a variety of possibilities for paying the significant costs related to implementing the recommendations.

Meeting Schedule

September 8
September 22
October 6
October 20
November 3
November 17
December 1
December 15

August 27, 2008

County Executive Pete Kremen
311 Grand Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225

PDS Director David Stalheim
5280 Northwest Dr.
Bellingham, WA 98226

Dear Pete and David:

The Technical Review Committee of the County's Ag Land Program has a few items we want to communicate to County leadership. First, we appreciate the recent hire of a new senior planner with a primary responsibility for the County's ag programs. We benefitted from Kraig Olason's time and talents in the past and hope that Dean Martin will be able to continue this support in the near and long term future. Thank you for making this position a priority in difficult budget times.

Second, we request that you continue to assign Samya Lutz to accompany Dean in the support of the TRC last few months and in the transition through vetting the recommendations with the Ag Advisory Committee and adoption through the Council's process. Samya has developed valuable experience in the issues surrounding our work and we believe that losing her experience would be a great setback to our hope of accomplishing our work by the end of the year.

Thank you for considering our request.

On behalf of the Technical Review Committee,

Henry Bierlink
Whatcom Farm Friends
TRC Facilitator

cc: Technical Review Committee members

Vicki Hawley
Bob Tull
Dick Yoder
John Gillies
Larry Stoner

Bill Querhn
Greg Ebe
Doug Dostal
Chuck Antholt