

# Public Involvement Program

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## Whatcom Ag Land Work Program

**Whatcom Farm Friends**

**1/4/2008**

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This document describes the activities, timeline, and budget for the Public Involvement Program to be conducted by Whatcom Farm Friends in 2008.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2006, Whatcom County Council established the following purpose and objectives for the Agricultural Land Work Program (ALWP):

PURPOSE – Preserve the County’s agricultural, forestry and natural resource land base<sup>1</sup> while recognizing land values and property rights.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide the greatest farmland protection possible
2. Balance the impact on current landowners, future farmers, and cost to the community
3. Develop a functioning Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program
4. Develop consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

Public involvement is recognized as a critical component to a successful ALWP. As such, in December 2007 Whatcom County contracted with Whatcom Farm Friends (WFF) to develop and implement a Public Involvement Plan (PIP).

## 2. Purpose & Objectives

The PIP will provide a structured process for public involvement in development of a successful ALWP for Whatcom County. The PIP objectives are to:

- a. Inform the target audiences (see section 4) about the issues prompting the ALWP
- b. Identify and address target audiences’ concerns regarding the development of the ALWP
- c. Provide the public with opportunities to increase awareness and knowledge of the implications of farmland conversion and continued residential, commercial, and industrial development in rural areas<sup>2</sup>
- d. Solicit and integrate public input in the development of ALWP proposals that seek to limit land conversion in rural areas prior to submittal to the Whatcom County Council.

The phasing of this project consists of two tasks: (1) development of a proposed PIP including schedule of involvement activities, timelines, budget, and deliverables, and (2) implementation of the approved PIP. The Contract Administrator for Whatcom County Planning and Development Services is the designated approver of the PIP prior to its implementation. The project will begin in February and continue throughout 2008. Any work performed by WFF beyond December 31, 2008 will require an amendment to this project contract or the development of a new contract for services.

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<sup>1</sup> Title 20 Zoning and Comprehensive Plan Designations, revised June 11, 2007  
[http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/pdf/planning/gis/wczcp\\_june\\_11\\_07.pdf](http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/pdf/planning/gis/wczcp_june_11_07.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Rural areas will be defined as Ag Zone, R5 and R10 for the purpose of this PIP.

### 3. Situation Analysis

Total Farmland acreage in Whatcom County has been shrinking for many years. While the methods for designating farm acreage have varied, the overall numbers have been falling, from 200,000 acres in 1949 to 148,027 in 2002<sup>34</sup>.

The Whatcom County Council designated agricultural lands of long term commercial significance in 1992 as required by the Growth Management Act, (RCW 36.70A.170). During the Comprehensive Plan adoption process, Whatcom County established 100,000 acres as the minimum quantity of land necessary to ensure the on-going viability of agriculture in Whatcom County. In an effort to meet the “critical mass” protection goal, Whatcom County adopted the Agricultural Protection Overlay (APO) as part of the 1997 development regulations. Currently, 88,473 acres are protected within the Agriculture Zone and 19,832 acres are designated within the APO for a total of 108,305<sup>5</sup>. While this number is above the 100,000 acre goal, not apparent in these numbers is the high degree of parcelization that has occurred over the last 30 years. These parcels (typically 5 acres) are scattered throughout the Ag Zone. They represent a future and serious threat to the effective use of designated ag lands. In addition, threats to the conversion of ag lands exist from cities requesting expansion of their UGAs.

In February, 2007 a collaboration of Whatcom County PDS staff, Agricultural Advisory Committee, Agriculture Preservation Committee (now part of Whatcom Farm Friends), and Whatcom County Cooperative Extension published the “Whatcom County Rural Land Study” which identified twelve target areas for farmland protection based on six selection criteria. The total acreage represented by these twelve areas was 21,950.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this study was to help direct Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) funds to the most geographically strategic properties in the County and to focus a future TDR program into areas where densities could be both decreased and increased. Since the inception of the PDR program in Whatcom County in 2001, 77 development rights for 571 acres have been purchased with a total expenditure of \$3,550,200. Of this amount, \$1,775,100 has been provided by USDA matching funds. Not included in these expenditures are additional costs for: appraisals, closing, ongoing monitoring, and program administration.<sup>7</sup>

Additional tools are needed beyond the PDR program if Whatcom County is to conserve a critical mass of 100,000 acres of ag land. County Council has identified one of the next best tools to be used as Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). The major advantage of this tool stems from the fact that it is financed by private funds versus taxpayer funds. It also takes into account the quality of agricultural land when making citing selections. Beyond TDRs, there are other tools and strategies to be considered:

- Maintaining strong and effective agricultural zoning
- Adhering to the Comprehensive Plan and GMA goals and policies
- Enhancing existing Current Use taxation

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<sup>3</sup> Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, May 1997, 8-5.

<sup>4</sup> USDA Census of Agriculture, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Whatcom County Rural Land Study, Feb. 2007, Exhibit B, pg. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Whatcom County Rural Land Study, Feb. 2007, pg. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Whatcom County PDS, Dec. 21, 2007.

- Creating an agricultural mitigation banking program
- Recommending development impact fees for purpose of acquiring open spaces
- Finding additional acquisition funds
- Partnering with local land trusts and other agencies
- Creating a farmland acquisition and lease-back program
- Strengthening the Right-to-Farm ordinance
- Adopting water management policies that compliment agriculture
- Encouraging economic development through agricultural innovation.

An additional idea offered by Planning Commissioner Mr. John Belisle suggests Whatcom County create a new zoning classification called Industrial Agriculture. This classification would have the same rights to services as any other industry and the same usage restrictions.

Given the broad range of strategies available to protect agricultural lands in Whatcom County, the ALWP PIP will assess the current level of understanding of these farmland conservation tools with the target audiences. In addition, the PIP will gather input on the target audiences' priorities for usage of these tools/strategies in the years ahead.

#### 4. Target Audiences

There are a number of target audiences that need to be brought into conversations regarding conservation of Whatcom's productive farmlands, each bringing unique perspectives as land owners, regulators, and advocates. Some of these audiences are likely to be directly opposed with each other due to their roles as formal governing bodies, landowners with immediate or future economic opportunities and/or organizations and advisory bodies with philosophical positions on property rights.

The activities outlined in this plan will actively seek the input of a broad range of perspectives in the development of ALWP proposals and outline their views regarding the challenges and opportunities TDRs and other strategies presented. Hopefully through the process of the PIP, the differences among the following target audiences can be narrowed based on a shared vision for the future of Whatcom County as it relates to conserving farmlands. Any recommendations will include a list of concerns and advantages identified through the PIP activities.

The key target audiences to be involved in the PIP will include:

**Commercial Farmers/Producers** – Land owners of working farms in which the majority of the household income is derived from the farming business. WFF, along with the Whatcom Conservation District, has a database of this group. WFF has a long-standing working relationship with this group which will expedite the group's engagement in early baseline assessment and ongoing input on their concerns and interests in farmland preservation.

**Small Acreage Farmers** – Owners of smaller farms, typically 5-20 acres, where the farming operation does not generate the majority of the household's total income. WFF will work with the Washington

State Grange, Community Food Co-op, Sustainable Connections and other associations to facilitate this group's engagement in early baseline assessment and ongoing input on their concerns and interests in farmland preservation.

**Land Renters** – Owners of farmland that rent their properties to farmers. WFF, along with Whatcom Conservation District, has a database of this group. WFF will facilitate their engagement in early baseline assessment and ongoing input on their concerns and interests in farmland preservation.

**Land Developers** - Businesses that acquire land for the purpose of converting the land into industrial or residential uses. WFF will work with the Building Industry Association of Whatcom County (BIA) and Whatcom Association of Realtors to reach this group and facilitate their engagement in early baseline assessment and ongoing input on their concerns and interests in farmland preservation.

**Tribal Land Owners** – Lummi Nation, Nooksack Tribe, and tribal members who are land owners and may or may not currently use their properties for farming. WFF will draw from its working relationship with the leadership of these two federally recognized tribes to facilitate their engagement in early baseline assessment and ongoing input on their concerns and interests in farmland preservation.

**Municipalities** – City mayors, Council members, and Planning Commissions who are involved in developing their respective city's Urban Growth Areas as part of comprehensive planning requirements. Outreach and involvement with this target audience will be coordinated with the Port of Bellingham's facilitator for the Partnership for Sustainable Economy for engagement in early baseline assessment and ongoing input on their concerns and interests in farmland preservation.

### **Policy Makers**

There are a number of formally recognized groups involved in the policy making process regarding the conservation of ag land in Whatcom County. Exhibit B shows the overall information and policy flow from the public through to the County Council. Throughout the policy making process, the public will have the opportunity to observe and/or comment at each level of the process. The PIP outlines specific involvement strategies for each of these target audiences, given their formal role in administering and developing recommendations on the Whatcom County ALWP.

**Technical Review Committee** - The Technical Review Committee (TRC) was appointed by the County Executive in June 2007 for the purpose of guiding the ALWP. The TRC membership is designed to provide a broad representation of interests throughout Whatcom County. The initial members include:

- Larry Stoner – Land Use Planner
- Bob Tull – Legal Advisor
- Bill Querhn – Building Industry
- Chuck Antholt – Ag Advisory Committee Member
- John Gillies – Farm Friends Representative (formerly WCAPC)
- Vicky Hawley – Commodity Farmer

- Debi Gavette – Retail Farmer
- Doug Dostal – Ag Business Representative
- Dick Yoder – Whatcom Conservation District

WFF will provide administrative support to the TRC throughout this project period to assure their involvement in the draft recommendation development. This will include scheduling committee meetings, arranging venues, assisting the chairperson with building the agenda, recording and publishing the meeting minutes. WFF will also provide the TRC with periodic findings from the target audience involvement activities and make presentations of such materials as requested by the TRC. Refer to Exhibit A for a proposed schedule of these activities.

### **Agricultural Advisory Committee**

The Agricultural Advisory Committee (ACC) was formed in 2002 for the purpose of advising the County Council on ag issues. The ACC members include:

- Chuck Antholt - Truck farmer (Chairman)
- Bill DeGroot – Dairy farmer
- Todd Jones – Nursery & WCD
- Susan Kirsch – Consumer
- Marty Maberry – Berry producer & processor
- Ken Schilke – Dairy farmer
- Tom Thornton – Nursery
- Vicki Hawley – Seed potato farmer

WFF will keep the AAC apprised of project status and findings through periodic reports and presentations. Refer to Exhibit A for a proposed schedule of these activities.

### **County Executive, Natural Resource Committee (NRC) & County Council**

Throughout the project, WFF will be briefing the PDS with drafts of status and findings. These status reports will then be scheduled for review by the County Executive, NRC and County Council.

Refer to Exhibit A for a proposed schedule of these activities.

## **5. Involvement Strategies**

In keeping with the objectives of the PIP as outlined in the Introduction, the WFF team will utilize multiple platforms for engaging the target audiences outlined in Section 4.

- A. The PIP will assess the target audiences’ current level of understanding of the following farmland conservation tools. In addition, the PIP will attempt to gauge the audiences’ priority for usage of these tools/strategies in the future.
  - Maintaining strong and effective agricultural zoning

- Adhering to the Comprehensive Plan and GMA goals and policies
- Enhancing existing Current Use taxation
- Creating an agricultural mitigation banking program
- Recommending development impact fees for purpose of acquiring open spaces
- Finding additional acquisition funds
- Partnering with local land trusts and other agencies
- Creating a farmland acquisition and lease-back program
- Strengthening the Right-to-Farm ordinance
- Adopting water management policies that compliment agriculture
- Encouraging economic development through agricultural innovation
- Creating a new zoning classification – “Industrial Ag”
- Continuing the current PDR program
- Implementing an effective TDR program
- Enhancing protection of APO lands

This baseline assessment will be conducted through informal group meetings and/or electronic surveying. An invitation will be made to each of the target audiences to participate in the discussions. The purpose of these initial meetings/surveys will be to assess their baseline understanding of the issues prompting the ALWP. These early sessions will be conducted concurrently.

- B. Public meetings will be held to bring together the various target audiences listed in Section 4 to discuss their ideas and concerns about developing an ALWP for Whatcom County. These meetings will build upon the findings from the initial baseline meetings/surveys. The meetings will engage a broad mix of participants from the target audiences and will be designed to promote participant-based discussions regarding their views and rationales on the ALWP. Two sequential meetings will be held in the second and the third quarters. The third quarter meetings will include a follow up questionnaire to measure any changes in participants’ understanding of the ag land conservation tools and strategies that may be used by the County. The attendance target for each of these sessions is 100 - 150 people. In all cases, information gained in prior meetings will be taken into subsequent meetings.
- C. Timely postings will be made to the Farm Friends website of: meeting notices, minutes, and preliminary findings as the project progresses. The County may also choose to make similar postings to their site.
- D. The Farm Friends website will be available to field inquires from the target audiences and the public at large. Access to the log of inquires and responses will be provided to authorized users as approved by the PDS. Summarization of this log will be used to support information provided at the designated public meetings and included in the final report.

- E. Email and postal mail will be used for all meeting notifications. An effort will be made to capture email addresses at the meetings for future notifications to reduce postal costs.
  
- F. County-wide newspaper and newsletter editors will be provided with meeting notices (10 days lead time) and meeting recaps and encouraged to publish such information to enhance the involvement process. News outlets will also be encouraged to direct their readers to the Farm Friends website for questions and future announcements.

A schedule of the proposed meetings and workshops are shown in Exhibit A. Locations will be determined so as to maximize the attendance by each target audience. Subsequent mixed meetings will be held at desirable central locations.

## 6. Deliverables<sup>8</sup>

1. Questionnaire for establishing the baseline understanding
- 2a. Baseline of understanding by the target audiences (TA)
- 2b. Summary of concerns by the TA regarding the Ag Land Work Program
- 2c. Minutes of all TA and public meetings
3. Summary of proposal ideas from group meetings
4. Website design and setup
5. Website launch & postings
6. Website inquiry and response log
7. Summary of mailings conducted
8. Articles, for newspaper publication, regarding the in-progress findings of the project
9. Summary comments from the project tour participants
10. PDS briefings
11. Meeting minutes of the Technical Review Committee
12. Briefing documents for the Agricultural Advisory Committee, Natural Resource Committee, County Executive and County Council
13. Final project report and recommendations

## 7. Budget

The budget for Task 2 of the PIP project is shown in Exhibit C. The work will be performed by the Farm Friends team of 3-4 individuals with varying skills including administrative (Admin), web content management (Web), and senior professional management (Senior). Farm Friends will subcontract some portions of this project to specialists to meet the objectives and the timetable. Since this budget represents early-on estimates, a contingency of 7% has been included to anticipate some degree of unknowns.

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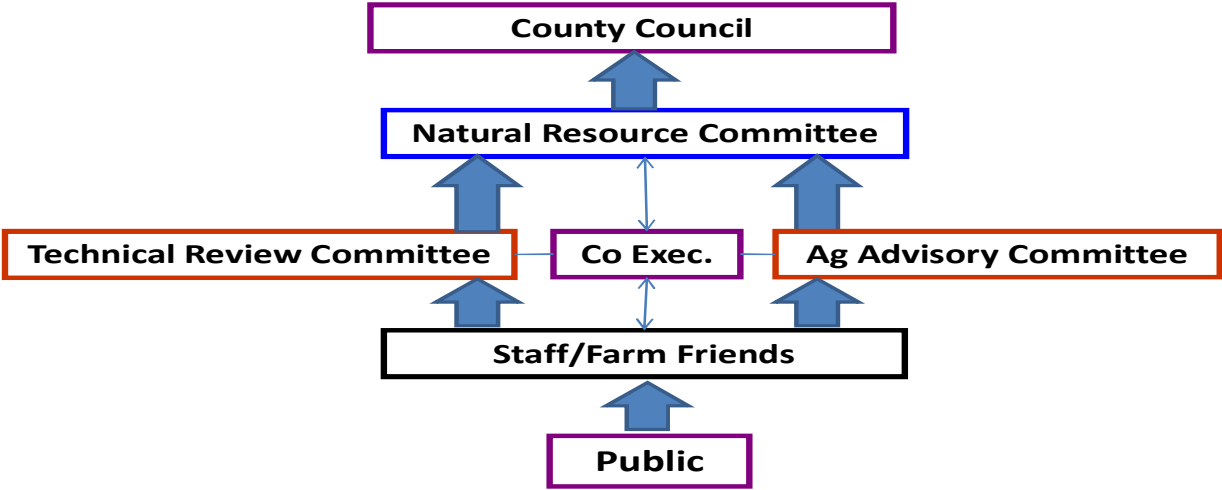
<sup>8</sup> Refer to Exhibit A & C for quantities associated with the various Deliverables.

### Public Involvement Program - Schedule

2008 Tasks	1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr	2 <sup>nd</sup> Qtr	3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr	4 <sup>th</sup> Qtr
1. Design baseline questionnaire	1			
2. Target audience meetings	6			
3. Group meetings (with target audiences combined)		2	2	
4. Website design & setup	1		2	
5. Website launch & postings	1	3	3	2
6. Website inquiry management & logging	20	30	30	20
7. Mailings	1	1	1	
8. News articles	2	2	2	2
9. Project tours		1	1	
10. PDS briefing meetings	2	2	2	2
11. Tech. Review Committee – Meetings	2	2	2	3
12. AAC, NRC & County Council - Briefings	1	1	1	1
13. Final Report & Recommendations				1

The numbers shown under the Quarter columns represent the quantity of activities projected to occur in each of the respective quarters.

### Policy Making Workflow



**Public Involvement Program – Budget Estimate<sup>9</sup>**

<u>Task</u>	<u>Labor - Est. Hrs.</u>			<u>Labor</u>	<u>Hard</u>	<u>Total</u>	
	<u>Admin.</u>	<u>Web</u>	<u>Senior</u>	<u>Costs</u>	<u>Costs</u>	<u>Cost</u>	
1. Design Baseline Questionnaire	8	0	12	\$1,200	500	\$1,700	
2. Target audience meetings	12	6	48	\$4,530	1500	\$6,030	
3. Group meetings (combined audiences)	16	4	32	\$3,260	1600	\$4,860	
4. Website design & setup	0	8	4	\$760	250	\$1,010	
5. Website launch & postings	36	0	0	\$1,080	900	\$1,980	
6. Web inquiry mgt. & logging	0	10	10	\$1,350	0	\$1,350	
7. Mailings	24	0	12	\$1,680	900	\$2,580	
8. News articles	16	8	80	\$7,320	400	\$7,720	
9. Project tours	16	2	20	\$2,190	1000	\$3,190	
10. PDS briefing meetings	4	0	8	\$760	100	\$860	
11. TRC Meetings	18	9	45	\$4,635	900	\$5,535	
12. ACC, NRC & Council Briefings	8	4	60	\$5,260	400	\$5,660	
13. Final Report & Recommendations	8	2	40	\$3,550	300	\$3,850	
Subtotal	166	53	371	\$37,575	8750	\$46,325	
14. Contingency	7%	12	4	26	\$2,630	613	\$3,243
Total Hrs.	178	57	397				
Rates/Hr.	\$30	\$55	\$80				
15. Sub-contractors				\$4,795			
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$5,329</b>	<b>\$3,119</b>	<b>\$31,758</b>	<b>\$45,000</b>	<b>\$9,363</b>	<b>\$54,363</b>	

<sup>9</sup> Refer to next page for notes regarding Budget.

## **Budget Notes**

1. The hours shown in the Budget are estimates and may be reallocated among the tasks as the project progresses.
2. The Contractor will use various internal skill levels to accomplish this project. These include Administrative (Admin.), Webmaster (Web), and Senior Professional (Senior).
3. The Contractor will engage Sub-contractors as needed to provide additional specialized expertise to accomplish tasks. These Sub-contractors will be managed by the Contractor and invoiced as a separate line item on Contractor's invoice. Estimated hourly rates for Sub-contractors will vary between \$75 – \$125. An estimate of total Sub-contractor costs is shown in the Budget but may vary depending on the amount of work performed by the Contractor.
4. Contractor will invoice Whatcom County on a monthly basis with a breakdown of Contractor's hours worked, hard costs incurred, and Sub-contractor costs. All costs will be identified by task as defined in this Budget. The invoice will also include a brief narrative of work accomplished against the respective task(s).