

Ag Land Program – Technical Review Committee

Meeting Notes

Monday, February 11, 2008

Members Attending:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Larry Stoner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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 checked="" 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. Introductions were made with each member explaining what interested them about the task ahead and their hopes that it would be good for both agriculture and the community at large. A review of the agenda was presented. Membership of the Committee was examined. It was noted that Debi Gavette, originally appointed to the TRC, had conflicts and would no longer be able to serve. Greg Ebe, appointed as an alternate to Debi, will step into this role. Larry asked if his son/partner Jason Stoner could attend and sit in at times that he would not be able to participate. The group was fine with that but cautioned that we wanted to remain close to the committee that the Executive approved and appointed in 2007.
2. Purpose of the Ag Land Program - 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 while recognizing land values and property rights.
OBJECTIVES:
 - a. Provide the greatest farmland protection possible
 - b. Balance the impact on current landowners, future farmers, and cost to the community
 - c. Develop a functioning Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program
 - d. Develop consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.
3. Review Purpose of TRC – Henry reviewed the purpose of the TRC as to provide:
 - Technical advice to the Ag Land Program
 - Suggest and explore density transfer tools
 - Build on AAC’s Ag Land Study
 - Incorporate PDR Program into the protection toolbox
4. Determine Meeting schedule and information needs
 - a. Review support budget - \$120k has been designated by the Council to support the Ag Land Program development including the function of the TRC. The

Council indicated potential support for increased funding if the needs are clearly articulated and demonstrated to be integral to the TRC's success.

- b. Suggest data needs – The County will provide support with data, maps, etc, as time and budget allows. TRC members were encouraged to keep a list of data needs and discuss them at the end of each meeting so that we could ask the County to seek the needed information.
 - c. Public Involvement and education – It was noted that these meetings would be subject to the Open Meetings Act and that may mean recording the conversation. No member had difficulty with that issue.
 - d. Facilitation, County Involvement – The leadership of the TRC was discussed. One route was to elect a chair for the group; another was to make use of the facilitation the Whatcom Farm Friends has been contracted to provide. The consensus was to have WFF facilitate the meetings by arranging the agendas and keeping the discussions focused. Meeting notes will also be provided by WFF.
 - e. Timeline, meeting schedule – Henry noted that the Council had assumed this process would take 18 months. The members felt that we could complete it in less time. They elected to meet twice monthly, on the first and third Monday afternoons, from 2:30-4:30 at Ag Central in Lynden.
5. Outline current condition and existing strategies for ag land protection
- a. Nature of the threats – Several concerns were voiced throughout the discussion: development pressures, conflict with critical areas over productive ag lands, and a lack of coordination with cities over growth policies were often cited.
 - b. Available tools for protection – Bob mentioned the Natural Heritage Program which has helped to support the Purchase of Development Right Program. Samya provided a summary table of the PDR purchases to date addressing ag lands.
 - c. What do we need to know to do our job? – Henry noted that the original scope for the Ag Land Program included a few studies or assistance from outside consultants. Ideas that had been discussed were: TDR feasibility, Cluster Design, Ag Land Mitigation, and Cost of Community Services. Future meetings will determine if these studies are necessary. Paul discussed a community questionnaire that Farm Friends was developing in conjunction with the County to gauge how the public views farmland protection. He requested that the TRC make sure the questions addressed the information needed to develop farmland protection tools and that they were asked in the best ways to provide useful information.