

# Ag Land Program – Technical Review Committee

## Meeting Notes

Monday, March 3, 2008

2:30 – 4:30 pm

### Members Attending:

Larry Stoner

John Gillies

Vicki Hawley

Dick Yoder

Bill Querhn

Doug Dostal

Greg Ebe

Bob Tull

Chuck Antholt

### Others Attending:

Paul Grey

Samya Lutz

Mary Dickenson

David Stalheim

Henry Bierlink

x = attending

o = absent with notice

1. Review agenda, February 11 meeting notes, introduce members missing at last meeting

The meeting began with introductions of those who had not attended the prior meeting. Doug and John provided background on their interest and experience in land use and farming issues. David Stalheim was introduced as the new manager of Whatcom County Planning and Development Services.

The notes from the previous meeting were reviewed and it was noted that the first and third Mondays of the month had been published as the meeting times for the remainder of the year. Henry mentioned that it was probable that some of these meetings may be canceled as we may not always have needed information to proceed with our work and that farmer schedules are challenging at different times of the year. The Committee will decide at the prior meeting if they should cancel the next meeting or not. Vicki noted that alternates to the appointed members should be indentified and approved by the TRC and the County. She offered Marlys Bedlington, a seed potato grower and member of the Whatcom Legacy task force, as a potential backup for Greg Ebe. Members are encouraged to identify other backups and we will approve the list and send it to the County in a future meeting.

2. Inventory of Threats to Ag Lands

The Committee spent the bulk of the meeting listing issues/threats to keeping ag land in production. It was mentioned that having some realtors or appraisers at a future meeting might be helpful as we seek to have accurate information and focus on the high priority threats. A summary list of the issues/threats identified included:

- Clarity about what are ag lands – for the TRC purposes we should concentrate on:
  - Ag zone
  - Land targeted in the Rural Land Study

- Parcelization in the ag zone
- Open Space Ag Taxation
  - Is there misuse of the intent of this program? Is this intended for rural residences or for active farmers? Do tax breaks for rural homes cost the County in both less taxes and increased cost of services?
  - Should reduced taxes also apply to farm buildings as they are integral to the operation of the farm?
- Market Pressures – economics will always apply – how do we deal with the influx of Canadian dollars from those selling farmland there at highly inflated prices? Bob wondered about the question of ag economics and if our efforts were an exercise in futility. Henry noted that is possible but that there are encouraging signs for the ag economy as well as concerns. Chuck would provide some clarity on this concern.
- Enforcement of existing laws, codes
  - Shop/homes
  - Lot consolidations
  - Siting criteria for homes on rural parcels
- Ag Protection Overlay (APO) – not effective or fair – need more finely tuned tools
- Competition with Critical Areas – wetlands, stream buffers – why do critical areas have more value than resources lands?
- Cooperation with Cities on urban growth boundaries, receiving areas
- County needs to consider creating receiving areas outside of cities – urban enclaves

### 3. Determine Data needs – items to consider include:

- Maps
- Tables, stats
- Studies that have been considered in the past:
  - TDR feasibility
  - Cluster Design
  - Ag Land Mitigation
  - Cost of Community Services

The TRC was most impressed with the maps that David had brought to illustrate the potential build out in the ag zones and the open space ag areas. They encouraged more use of the County's GIS capabilities as a means of assisting us in our work.

There was limited discussion about future studies. David noted that the State had a study underway in the metro counties examining the potential of a transfer of development right program. This report is due out this spring from CTED.

Bob wondered if a map illustrating assessed valuations might be useful. David questioned if it should be assessed valuations or market rates. He would consider what might be useful. The real estate community would be useful to talk to about this issue. Reuben Dawson was mentioned as a potential resource. A map indicating the percentage of ag lands impacted by critical areas would also be valuable.

#### 4. Public Involvement and education

- Questionnaire – a draft public questionnaire was distributed. Larry had the most extensive comments which had the major theme of “simplify”. John suggested more statements followed by an agree – disagree scale which aids in tabulation. The issue of a Public Survey by the Whatcom Legacy group was noted and how these questionnaires might compliment or compete was raised.
- Meeting summaries – David indicated the meeting summary prepared for the first meeting was adequate as a public record. Farm Friends will continue to provide these summaries and help to set agendas so that our work progresses. TRC members are encouraged to react to the accuracy of the summaries and help Farm Friends in setting agendas and locating pertinent information that assists our mission.
- Future public forums – Henry noted that as this is an open public process we will need to consider opportunities to communicate our issues and draft solutions to a larger public.

#### 5. Resources – Available/Needed

- 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 – Bob may have updated and more complete information.

Next Meeting – March 17, 2:30

#### Meeting Schedule

March 17

April 7

April 21

May 5

May 19

June 2

June 16

July 7

July 21

August 4

August 18