

Skagit County Conservation Futures Program Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 18, 2010

Members in attendance:

Carolyn Kelly, Chair
Dave Hedlin
Mike Hulbert
Keith Wiggers

Scott DeGraw
Andrea Xaver
Alan Merritt

Staff in attendance:

Kendra Smith, Skagit County

Guest attendance:

Gary Christensen, Skagit County Planning
Linda Christensen, Skagit County Planning
Betsy Stevenson, Skagit County Planning
Ryan Walters, Skagit County Prosecuting Attorney
Jeff McGowan, Skagit County, Public Works
Josh Greenberg, Skagit County GIS

Open:

The meeting was called to order 7:05 a.m.

Mike Hulbert announced he needed to leave at 7:30 a.m.

Dave Hedlin announced he needed to leave at 8:30 a.m.

Member Updates:

Mike Hulbert gave an overview of the Draft Interim Conservation Subdivision Proposal submitted to the Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) recently. The AAB decided that a letter should be written to voice their concerns and opinions regarding the interim ordinance.

Keith Wiggers continued a discussion raising concern of segueing off properties on Cockerham Island and how that may affect agricultural properties. Kendra Smith shared what the Forestry Advisory Board discussed. A discussion continued amongst the CFAC members.

Keith also mentioned that there are several articles in the current report from the American Farmland Trust that are worth reading and had e-mailed a copy to everyone.

Andrea Xaver would like to see a soil survey and a county map at each meeting. The laminated FLP map would be helpful too.

Financial Reports

Kendra gave an overview of the current Conservation Futures financials. She mentioned that the bulk of the professional services went toward appraisals and the remaining for the Conservation District contract for monitoring. She felt the advertisement and postage is high and will report back next month on the detail of spending.

The costs of appraisers were discussed amongst the CFAC and there was concern that they may be higher than if done by someone else. Kendra mentioned that after Hans Timmers a RFP was issued and Bob Suttles was chosen because of his experience and certifications that federal grants require. Also, when seeking a 3rd party appraisal for the RCO grant, it became obvious that our appraisals were fairly priced. Staff contacted three others with the same credentials. It also saves money when it is known that the federal and state will accept the appraisers work and not ask the County to spend time researching items. The Board commented that it is fair and makes good professional sense to continue to hire Bob Suttles for future appraisals.

Kendra commented that the Elde and Kruse properties closed recently.

USDA Update

Kendra mentioned that the USDA is receiving less money this year than from previous years. Hoffman and Axelson ranked 1st and 2nd; another entity ranked 3rd, Nelson ranked 4th, and Young ranked 5th. An additional \$900k is needed to fund the Young property. There is hope that additional funds will be available in April. A total of six properties were submitted to USDA. TNC will fund ½ of the Hoffman property.

RCO Update

Carolyn Kelly discussed that the recent grant submittal is through the Conservation Commission and a match is not required. The VanderKooy property was included although a formal offer has not been made. Keith Wiggers expressed his concern that the Board has not voted or scored on this property prior to the grant submittal. Kendra explained timing was crucial for submitting the grant application and was not able to bring this to the CFAC's attention prior. Dave Hedlin expressed that he understands the situation and it would be good for staff to send out an e-mail making the Board aware of these types of circumstances.

A discussion ensued regarding the scoring/ranking system. Scott DeGraw mentioned that possibly there should be an expiration date on the purchase offer. Keith Wiggers asked if there are contingencies on offers and feels there seems to be a lack of accountability. If the procedures/policies on offers are developed, they need to be extremely clear.

Funding Properties:

Dave Hedlin mentioned the possibility of in the future to bring in additional income as we do not want to miss out on the potential of securing easements. Funding properties is becoming ever more difficult with less grant money and the limitation of tax dollars. Kendra Smith suggested a more lengthy discussion is necessary.

Acreage of Ag-NRL presentation by Joshua Greenberg (Skagit County GIS Department)

Josh presented the results of some GIS analysis he performed as a part of the Alternative Futures modeling effort. The purpose of the analysis was to quantify Agricultural activity in Skagit County based on some satellite derived land cover data. The satellite analysis was on 2006 images processed by NOAA's coastal program (called CCAP) which is a national level program. Although the data is not perfect it is a good approximation of land cover. The counties Ag-Nrl zoning is roughly 89,000 acres (88,779 exactly), and using

the satellite land cover analysis, 76% of the zone (66,976 Acres) is shown as being active agriculture. The other major land use categories in the Ag-Nrl zone are; Forest (9%), Wetlands (6%), Developed (6%), and Open land such as grassland or shrubs (3%). Outside the Ag-Nrl zone there is an additional 14,758 acres of Agricultural land use, making the total Agriculture land use for Skagit County almost 82,000 acres. There were questions about the scale of the data and accuracy. There was also some discussion about wetland areas that are really agricultural areas as well as the non farmed areas in the Ag-Nrl being unable to convert to Agriculture practices.

Draft Interim Conservation Subdivision Proposal – March 15, 2010

Ryan Walters from the Prosecutor’s Office presented a proposed code amendment that would allow for “conservation subdivisions”—divisions of land that would be exempted from the subdivision code if they imposed conservation easements and met certain other specified requirements. The proposal as drafted would prevent such divisions on lands zoned Ag-NRL. Jeff McGowan from Public Works was present and discussed his experience when attempting to subdivide agricultural land on Cockreham Island. This draft proposal is for a 6 month interim ordinance and they are gathering input from various groups. Betsy Stevenson explained that there is a current project pending the approval of this draft proposal. It is to create a conservation subdivision allowing division of land for conservation easements. It takes away the restrictions of the Subdivision Code.

Scott DeGraw is concerned how the proposal will affect wildlife feeding lands. Andrea Xaver mentioned the concern that this proposal may create a “piecemeal” effect. She is also concerned with wetland language. Other CFAC members expressed their concern for making code changes for a single purpose. They felt this needed more thought as to further consequences.

Adjournment

Chair Carolyn Kelly adjourned the meeting at 9:15 a.m.

Submitted by: *Linda Christensen*
Linda Christensen

Approved by the CFAC Board on April 13, 2010
Carolyn Kelly
Chair Carolyn Kelly