

# Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board Meeting Summary – September 14, 2022 Commissioners Hearing Room/MS Teams

## Members in Attendance

Michael Hughes	Terry Sapp	Michael Trafton	Nels Lagerlund
Kraig Knutzen	Murray Benjamin	Steve Omdal	Steve Wright
Tim Van Hofwegen	Justin Hayton		

## Proxy Designations

## Members Absent

John Morrison                      Rachael Ward Sparwasser

## Others in Attendance

Hal Hart, Director, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)  
Kim Adams, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)  
Don McMoran, WSU Extension

## Call to Order, Introductions

Michael Hughes called the meeting to order at 7 pm.

## Approval of Meeting Summary

Murray Benjamin moved to accept the August 10, 2022, Amended Meeting Minutes, Justin Hayton seconded. Motion carried.

## Guest Speaker

### **Terry Sapp, Chair, Land Use Committee**

Terry Sapp and the Land Use Committee met on Monday September 12, 2022 to review the Draft Survey sent out to the AAB on September 6, 2022 (Letter attached at the end of the Minutes)

- Terry went over a Report that the Land Use Committee prepared for the whole Board
  - The Draft Survey was too redundant, hard to follow, and the terminology could be confusing to the general public.
  - Very wordy, most people won't complete a 14 page survey
  - Kraig mentioned it is opening up for a lot of arguments, zoning is there for a reason
  - The average person will not really understand the questions they are answering, very unfocused & too broad
  - Hal asked if we should scrap the survey and go to Policy?
  - Steve Omdal's comments- Long survey, it is a tool to come up with a final idea. The Survey is not perfect, not meant to be. Zip codes are important to see where the people & opinions are coming from. The survey is not the code or the Policy
  - We are trying to preserve farmland; it is up to the Commissioners on where to go from here
  - AAB sent in clear recommendations to the BOCC already. Very Critical of last survey, it was too bias.
  - Hal said he will look over the survey and come back with a simple survey
    - Is stripping down the survey and making it less complex worthy of anyone's time?
    - Survey going to 16,000 households in the Unincorporated areas

- Some of the public doesn't have access to technology, will there be staff available to answer any questions?
    - Simple questions: "Do you agree?" Take out the permit information as it is too complicated for the general public
  - A 14 page survey is not what anyone wanted
- Special Use Permit
  - When did it change to 24 events in a year- thought it was 11 at some point?
  - Take all the existing venues and make sure they are regulated and in compliance
  - Who will count and keep track of how many weddings there are per year?
  - Don't want to displace farmers- need to educate the public and the survey could be a good tool to do that. Maybe have a cover letter
  - Can't use Ag Land for non-ag purposes- is it a conflict of interest, Conservations adding land and allowing commercial activities
  - Need to highlight the impacts of Agritourism to Ag Land- Benefits/Non Benefits. Add that to the Survey
- Commissioners need a clear idea what the Ag Community needs
- Agriculture is the Economic Driver of Skagit County
- Next Steps is Hal making the survey shorter/easier with a simple survey
- The AAB/Land Use Committee has a lot of time into the studying, researching, education, provided comments, letters, documents. Have worked very hard on a lot of these topics so we can get it right

#### **Hal Hart, Director, Skagit County Planning Department**

Hal Hart gave his Directors update

- Written Comments for the Compensatory Mitigation are due Thursday, September 29, 2022 (AAB will send the letter they sent to the BOCC to the Planning Commission)
- Planning Commission Update
  - Last night the Planning Commission Heard the Staff Presentation from the Prosecuting Attorney Team of Jason Avignon and Will Honea with regards to Compensatory Mitigation.
  - Planning Commission Public Hearing on this will be held on September 27th 2022 at 6 P.M.
- Agricultural Related Permitting in the Que at This Time
  - BP 2202 0749 Barn Demolition and New Construction.
  - BP 2202 0767 Restoration Projects – Mill Town.
  - BP 2022 0790- Wesen Manure Storage.
  - BP 2022 0334-Agricultural Facility at Ershig Road.
  - BP22-0154 – Smith Morrison Farms 19,250 Sq. Ft. Bag Processing Facility.
  - BP 20 -0607 – Turner Road Restoration Project.
  - BP Raise the Elevation of Wiley Dike by 3 feet.
- New home near Whatcom County/Alger Area
  - Example of a 5000 plus square foot home in Skagit County Rural Areas may require indoor fire suppression/Sprinkler System/water tank.
- Other Projects in Review this Week
  - Pacific Dream Seafoods
    - Family owned business – founded by a fishing family from Kodiak Alaska.
    - The sustainable seafood movement is on the rise and we're proud that Pacific Dream Seafoods is at the forefront.
  - Lindell Yachts

## New Business

### **Don McMoran WSU Update**

- Funding level is good at this time- Submitted the Budget to the County with increased wages/benefits. Hoping for full support from the Commissioners
- Lost Several Staff due to Pandemic, now fully staffed again and doing well
- Have a lot of outside funding from Federal Grants- approx. 10 million for pasture management
- Workshops this year to continue
  - Seed, Ag Summit, Potato Workshop, and others
- Don McMoran received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of County Agricultural Agents
- There will be an Ag Tour coming up- Legislature
- October 27<sup>th</sup> Pizza for Producers at the Bread Lab- come have free pizza and network with other farmers

## Committee Reports

### **Economic Development-** Don McMoran

Island Grown Cooperative moving forward. Amazon waiting until 2024 to start up- the volume is currently not enough to open. They are using the facility for Conveyer Belt Technology for now.

### **Critical Areas** – Nels Lagerlund

Nothing at this time.

### **Land Use** – Terry Sapp (Chair), Kraig Knutzen, Murray Benjamin, Michael Trafton, Steve Omdal

Nothing more at this time.

### **Flood, Drainage & Irrigation** – Kraig Knutzen (Chair), Nels Lagerlund, Steve Wright

Discussion about Seattle Court Decision on Wild Chinook. Most loss of salmon is in salt water.

Also, a discussion about ditches and can they take on more capacity- a lot of different things is why they cannot. Pumps are expensive, water runoff is ruining crops and fields.

## Old Business

### Adjourn

Murray Benjamin moved to adjourn; Justin Hayton seconded. Meeting adjourned at 9:02pm.

Next meeting is October 12, 2022, at 7 pm.

Report on  
Skagit Agritourism Survey Fall 2022  
DRAFT September 6, 2022 Skagit County

Agricultural Advisory Board  
Land Use Committee  
September 14, 2022

The Land Use Committee of the Skagit County Agricultural Advisory was tasked to review the draft “Agritourism Survey Fall 2022.” The Draft Survey was received September 7. The Committee met September 12 to review and to generate comments for consideration by the full AAB during its regularly scheduled meeting September 14.

With the existent timeframe and availability of members, the Committee made a diligent effort to review and evaluate the DRAFT Survey and it generated recorded comments, a general conclusion, and a recommendation for AAB.

**Conclusion:**

**The DRAFT Survey, as presented, fails to meet a standard for meaningful solicitation of policy-level opinions from members of the public in Skagit County.**

The Committee found problems with the DRAFT Survey in several topical areas:

- 1 The DRAFT Survey is too complex for general public respondents who may be largely unfamiliar with the Agritourism study effort that has been underway for more than two years. It is not simple.
- 2 The DRAFT Survey is too lengthy and wordy for general public respondents. An expectation that a large number of unprepared recipients will thoughtfully complete any or all of the questionnaire is unsupportable. 14 pages is too much.
- 3 The DRAFT Survey has obvious bias in favor of Agritourism activities in the agricultural zones, both a) those currently prohibited by code and b) those that are allowed or for which code is ambiguous or contradictory in code and require updating or clarity.
- 4 The DRAFT Survey seeks opinionated responses on issues which the County could not forfeit authority, i.e. the application of health and safety standards, septic, water, parking, and access, etc.
- 5 The DRAFT Survey elements regarding demographics is too extensive and the purpose of many questions is unclear and may deter respondents from answering because of perceived privacy concerns.
- 6 The DRAFT Survey seeks responses to broad and open-ended questions that would likely duplicate information already gathered from concerned stakeholders through extended answers. Open-ended solicitation will obscure the results of highly focused (preferably simple) questions.

**Recommendation:**

**The Agricultural Advisory Board approve an advisory statement to the County Commissioners that this version of the DRAFT Skagit Agritourism Survey Fall 2022 not be distributed to potential recipients in all zip codes of**

**Skagit County, and that, instead, the County move directly to the stage of drafting code revisions for consideration by stakeholders and the public.**

In lieu of another attempt to obtain consensus on Agritourism activities, the Committee encourages the County staff to take the obvious next steps to propose legislation. Much effort to reach stakeholders, interested parties, and the public has produced an abundance of opinion and a vast realm of ideas. Additionally, many parties have contacted the Commissioners or staff directly and repeatedly. While some of these efforts have been insufficient to assure full “buy-in” of the process, it is clear that stark differences remain among those who have contributed. The agricultural community has spoken and the AAB has settled on an unambiguous position it is unlikely to change. Differences and controversy are likely to continue in a way that a far-reaching and unsupportable questionnaire will not resolve.

**Recorded comments:**

The Land Use Committee endeavored to write some of the essential comments that led the group through its review and evaluation. Those comments are under edit because time has not allowed for more careful drafting. Nonetheless, the attendant committee members thought the comments could be instructive to the Board or to others who are diligently committed to this ongoing Agritourism project. Comments are available separately.

Respectfully,  
Land Use Committee