

Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board
Meeting Summary – November 9, 2022
Commissioners Hearing Room/MS Teams

Members in Attendance

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

Proxy Designations

Terry Sapp for Steve Omdal

Members Absent

John Morrison Justin Hayton Rachael Ward Sparwasser

Others in Attendance

Peter Browning, Skagit County Commissioner
Hal Hart, Director, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)
Sarah Ruether, 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 6 pm.

Approval of Meeting Summary

Murray Benjamin moved to accept the October 12, 2022, Meeting Minutes, Steve Wright seconded. Motion carried.

Guest Speaker

Hal Hart, Director, Skagit County Planning & Development Services

Hal gave a monthly Planning Update

- PDS working with FEMA
 - Meetings on floods and who is the most impacted
 - Sharing helpful information such as big animal rescue plans
 - Will update AAB on the outcome of the meetings when they are completed
 - Some of the Tribes provided their feedback as well
 - Last flood could have ruined Skagit, need to prepare and work together towards the same goals
 - Money is a big issue for funding, need to see the issues to be able to apply for the programs
 - How do we make our case to receive those funds?
 - At 97% Capacity, Dam Relicensing, we need to draw down the levels and have retention in place at the right time
 - Used to Mine gavel out of the river bottom every year
 - Haven't done that in years, river not as deep anymore

- Need to manage riverbeds more
 - River bottom is higher than the ground currently
 - Farmland is also important for food production, limited resource, will need to feed
 - Regulations is also an issue to get work done- let them get the work done, give them the needed permits
- New Permit System
 - The BOCC has made a key decision to move ahead on new Permit Software they have selected “Intergov.” This has many advantages over the competition.
 - Easiest for the public to navigate & very intuitive to use.
 - Permit tracking from inside the system and outside will be easier.
 - Whatcom County is currently using this software. It took them about 2-3 years to bring the new system online.
 - This replaces a legacy software (Permits Plus) we have had since at least 1989
- Key Developments continue making progress
 - Overall, Skagit County has seen 166 new homes we are accounting for and over 30 remodels thus far for 2022 (about where we were last year as well). The interest rates may have put the brakes on projects we will continue to monitor the projects.
- Tour Highlights BYK Arlington Project
 - BYK Tour with Joe Woodmansee and the site superintendent last week.
 - 500 plus units on approximately 20 acres
 - **Why this matters?**
 - Cities can take more growth than they currently are. Skagitonians has helped with these discussions in the past we will have them again in the future.
 - Housing costs of many new projects are up to 40% of the person’s income.
 - Keep agricultural land in Ag. Send growth into the cities where the infrastructure is. Try to keep it affordable.
 - BYK Tour Housing for a Rapidly Expanding Work Force – More Health Care Offices/More Senior Housing – Aviation related business and some 10,000 square feet of new logistics centers.
- Farmers are having problems with transients homeless people....fencing and gates are allowed. Call our compliance office

Sarah Ruether, Skagit County Planning Department

Sarah gave an Agritourism Update

- The meetings for Public Outreach are Sedro Woolley Senior Center, November 10th 10:30-11:30 am, La Conner Maple Hall, November 16th 6:30-7:30 pm, and Skagit County Commissioner’s Hearing Room December 6th 6-8 pm
- The Survey has approx. 460 responses and 86% of those say they want to protect Ag Land in Skagit
- Terry Sapp asked if the AAB would get the Survey results, can the public be able to comment and will the report of all survey results be shared to the public?
 - Working on closing the Survey after the last Town Hall Meeting- December 9th. Hoping to work with Burke on getting the results report- hoping for December 13th to go to the Planning Commission and to the AAB for the December 14th meeting.
- Growth can be mainly in the cities not the ag land

- Need to watch for runoff water from places near the port, farms are getting most of the runoff
- Farmers dealing with Transients on their property- call Code Compliance line

New Business

Docket/Comp Plan Discussion-

- C22.1: Allow wind turbine 30 klw, 1 per lot, size requirements. PC Meeting had a lot of public testimony to oppose.
- Small scale setbacks are so great you have to have a structure
 - Noise
 - Huge lots
 - Startup costs are super high
 - Maintenance cost high
- LR22-01 Small Scale Recreation & Tourism Rezone
 - Bertelsen, Starbird Road: Plan is to rezone from Rural Reserve to Small Scale Recreation & Tourism
 - Build out land. Micro-Brewery, Restaurant, Camping, General Store, Gas Station
 - They are currently on a well and will need to be on PUD Water
 - This has happened twice: Guemes Island Resort & Birdsvie Brewery
 - Would like to rezone 69 acres
 - They should need to produce 50% of the grapes for the winery- it is currently a tasting room with food
 - Potential for more people to want to do the same
 - Need to look at this as a board to consider: Where it is, what will be there, what can we preserve, spot zoning?
 - This will open the door for Rural Reserve to be changed, all Rural Reserve is adjacent to Ag Land
 - This is a yearlong process to start to change zoning, all groups get to weigh in on this
 - Prepare a letter, this proposal is too broad, too many commercial issues, spot rezoning issues, jumping the Agritourism process, would increase economic location not effecting as many people
 - Option C from Agritourism-AAB did not support this option
 - Motion to prepare a letter to the Planning Commission on LR22-01 with a suggestion to set the limit to 20 acres, jumping the Agritourism Process, Board seen as Commercial use as a template to rezone other Rural Reserve
 - Prepare a comment letter as proposed- five in favor, one opposed. Motion Passed- Steve Wright first, Kraig Knutzen, seconded
- Also discussed the need for a Part-Time/Full Time Admin Staff that works for the AAB
 - Needed more information on the Docket earlier on
- How to make the Board work better? Would like some feedback from the BOCC On what they are wanting from the Board and how to work with the County Employees

Don McMoran WSU Update

- Funding level is good at this time- Budget has been submitted to the County
- WSU is currently hiring back staff
- Usual Grants- three going smoothly-Puget Sound Partnerships, Agribility, & Farm Stress Suicide
- Ag Summit is scheduled for February 10th, may or may not happen
- Pizza for Producers was on October 27th good turn out!
- Upcoming Workshops:
 - W. WA. Seed Workshop January 13th
 - Skagit Ag Summit February 10th
 - W. WA. Potato Workshop February 24th

- W. WA. Berry Workshop March 10th

Committee Reports

Economic Development- Don McMoran

Island Grown has a USDA Grant to help livestock producers with beef producing and packaging meat. N. Cascade, Puget Sound Food Hub, VIVA Farms have a 3.1 million COVID Grant. Where will they use that money? They will be building a dry storage to store pumpkins and squash; they will also need water storage and may lose PUD line.

Critical Areas – Nels Lagerlund

Nothing at this time.

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

Site determined for electrical battery storage in Sedro Woolley, 10 acres of Farmland. The batteries can help power approx. 200,000 people for 36 hours in the event of a power outage. They are working with the County Attorney now. Need to preserve the farmland, but zoning doesn't matter when it is something of importance. The port would be a better location for this.

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

Nothing at this time.

Old Business

Next Meeting: Board Nominations & Voting for Chair/Vice Chair

Adjourn

Nels Lagerlund moved to adjourn; Tim VanHofwegen seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:07 pm.

Next meeting is December 14, 2022, at 6 pm.