

# Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board

## Meeting Summary – January 11, 2023

### Copper Room/MS Teams

#### Members in Attendance

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

#### Proxy Designations

#### Members Absent

John Morrison                      Kraig Knutzen

#### Others in Attendance

Peter Browning, Skagit County Commissioner  
Jack Moore, Assistant 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 6:00.

#### Approval of Meeting Summary

Minutes amended to correct third page typo, second page change “his” to “the members”, and third page change Port of Skagit/PUD to WSU Extension Economic Development. Murray Benjamin moved to accept the December 14, 2022, Meeting Minutes as amended, Justin Hayton seconded. Motion carried.

#### Guest Speaker

##### **Sarah Ruther, Long Range Planning Manager, Skagit County Planning & Development Services**

Sarah gave a brief update on Agritourism

- Hoping to have the Survey Results back from Berk Consulting by the 24<sup>th</sup> to present at the Planning Commission Meeting
- Will also present the work done on the AOI
- Spring Public Hearing
  - Planning Commission recommendation to the BOCC
- Shared the 2023 Planning Commission Schedule
- Docket was presented to the PC
  - What is the function of a Work session?
    - Sharing ideas with no decisions being made
- Document that Will prepared states \$100 per acre is that accurate? AAB recommended \$10,000 total per operation per farm, things change over the year
- Keep track of Farms- establish a schedule that eliminates many farms
- Legal questions, would want to ask those questions to Will

- Terry shared articles from the Skagit Valley Herald
  - The paper stated there are Permits for wedding venue from the County- didn't know the County gave permits for Wedding Venues
    - Will there be a code path for these things?
  - 13 Venues in Skagit did not attempt to get permits- depends on zoning on said property
- PC Schedule Questions:
  - How do they get developed?
    - Berk will work with Staff and look at feedback/Survey report to help guide for policy options
    - Will neighboring properties get any say on Special Use Permits? Opportunity to comment? Need to make sure that is noted in the policy
    - Place in code that the neighbor can voice concerns regarding events
    - Need to plan for writing protections in the policy
    - Ask that Wedding Venues remain Special Use, so they need to go through the public process to address any issues, it is not just farms that are affected
    - Properties within 500 ft may not be enough to notice, need to widen the range to get enough people noticed
    - Need to watch the details, need to be sure the board understands, can't really do enough only meeting one time per month
    - Add specific conditions along with standard conditions, things can be added
- What are the terms used by the Hearing Examiner
  - Listens to the issues, public hearings you can sign up to testify, can appeal to the BOCC if they don't like the decision
  - Site Specific will give professional opinion- noise, traffic, times, how much can the roads handle
  - Different jurisdictions have different ways, appeals go to BOCC in Skagit, not to the Court
- How do you determine what a farm is? Need to enforce the code to fix the loopholes
  - Circle back to these things, need to be thinking how to get as much as needed into the code so they can have public comment
  - Need to be sure that the farming is related on the farm where the events are
  - Least desirable for farmers: Big concerts, temporary events, wedding venues, restaurants
- What will be next? 24 events are not enough to make a business profitable
- Question: What is Admin Special Use Rural Reserve Home Based Businesses?
  - Bed & Breakfast, Kennels, Temporary Events, Churches, Gardens
- There are currently 13 Wedding Venues in AG Land that are not legal, will they be grandfathered in, need to be asked to follow laws and come into compliance with zoning laws, safety, and code
- February/March- Will be discussing Policy Options, Public Comment- March, ready to make recommendations
- Land Use Committee can meet more often than the AG Board- Members plan to attend Planning Commission Meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup>
- Discuss at next meeting: What level of notice is appropriate and how much coverage nearby neighbors to notice for comment. What are the parking criteria, make clear what will be outright permitted, what will be more structured with restrictions & guidelines

## New Business

- Last Year Docket: Small Scale Rezone wanted to wait until Agritourism was done? When does the Docket go to the BOCC? January 17<sup>th</sup> to BOCC
  - Michael prepared a letter, and it follows closely to the letter that was sent to the Planning Commission. Took out the 20-acre part and added a part about cattle. Keeps consistency, keeps the stance on “on spot zoning”. Intensive path could open the path for everyone to go around the rules.
  - Nels motion to send letter as is to the BOCC, seconded by Michael Trafton
  - Motion carried, Kim to send letter in during comment period for the BOCC Docket
- Monday to start the State Legislative Session
  - What is important to us to have the BOCC Lobby for. Is it important to write a letter to BOCC on 12:15 House Bill-Conservation Leasing Land
    - This is what is important to us and farmland in Skagit, drainage needs and no buffers
  - How do we get the Commissioners on board to understand why these things are important? How do we tell them to keep a strong stance?
  - Murray Benjamin mentioned the letter needed to include something about the “do no harm” has not been an issue or had any citations against it- Be sure to point out there has been no significant complaints regarding AG Pollution
  - Fund the VSP-State trying to fund it
  - Farm Labor-AG employment rules and regulations making less competitive with National Overtime Laws- seasonal workers, changes/exemptions from the OT Laws
  - No Buffers
  - Flood Policy- Get H2o off the flood plain- Tide doors are a danger to the public
  - Nels Lagerlund motioned to have Michael draft a letter to send to the Commissioners Murray Benjamin seconded, motion carried.

## Don McMoran WSU Update

- Funding level is good at this time- Budget Approved for 2023
- Losing San Juan Director- Will re-hire
- Currently on a hiring freeze, fully staffed at WSU Extension
- Usual Grants- three going smoothly-Puget Sound Partnerships, Agrability, & Farm Stress Suicide
- February 10<sup>th</sup> is the Ag Summit, Potato Workshop- 02/24, Berry Workshop-03/10, Farm Stress/Suicide- 01/25,
- Tractor Safety will be at the Puyallup Center

## Committee Reports

### Economic Development- Don McMoran

More Hangers at the Port. Amazon did 20,000 layoffs in 2022 and starting with 18,000 in 2023. Changes in transportation, Tesla-Semi, John Deere-Electric backhoe, Solar and green energy in the future.

### Critical Areas – Nels Lagerlund

Nothing at this time.

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

Terry Sapp spoke about Battery Storage.

- Three proposals in at the County, two of them next to AG Land, need space for plugging into facility with high power.
- 14 acres AG NRL East of Hanson Creek, the project has legs, pre-development meeting in May.
- Sounder Energy Storage targeted 46 acres for a project- Big Green Energy, a lot of money available for these big projects.
- Cascadia Daily News article, Controversial Battery Storage in Skagit County. Battery backup systems help provide power in a power outage.
- Interpretation of code need to be permitted correctly. They want to be known as minor so there is not a lot of state involvement. Minor would be like a Tesla charging station.
  - Minor Utility Project
  - Major Utility Development Local
  - Regional Utility Development Regional.
- Why has there been three proposals for Battery Storage all within months?
- The major concern is building on Ag Land. Wasted energy leaking put into the batteries to save that and use it in the future. The current power system as it is, is not antique for what federal government and state government want.
- Lithium fire is a huge issue- doesn't take much to start and can't put it out easily.
- Asking for an interpretation to be a Major Utility Local
- Store power off the dams, best would be close to the powerlines- would be able to store enough power for 100% of Skagit County Essential Functions for 12 hours- not a lot to be storing all the volatile batteries on 20 acres of farmland. Should be on their land in Newhalem.
- Current Planning is working on a response now- will revisit next month

**Flood, Drainage & Irrigation** – Kraig Knutzen (Chair), Nels Lagerlund, Steve Wright  
Nothing at this time.

### Old Business

Next Meeting: Agritourism Survey Results & revisit Battery Storage.

### Adjourn

Justin Hayton moved to adjourn; Nels Lagerlund seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Next meeting is February 8, 2023, at 6 pm.