

Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board

Meeting Summary – March 8, 2023

Commissioners Hearing Room/MS Teams

Members in Attendance

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

Proxy Designations

Members Absent

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
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works-Farmland Legacy
Mike Hulbert, Community Member

Call to Order, Introductions

Michael Hughes called the meeting to order at 6:00.

Approval of Meeting Summary

Murray Benjamin moved to accept the February Meeting Minutes, Justin Hayton seconded, Motion carried.

Old Business

BESS Update: Comment Period has ended. Decision made was just an Interpretation to determine what part of the code this proposal would fit under. Jack Moore stated it will be considered a Major Utility. This just determines what processes they need to go through to receive permits. Developers now are applying individually, and the determination was just a process determination and the first step. There will be more comments on the actual individual applications. Jack with check in with Brandon Black on timelines and other questions. Do they need to be on AG-NRL Land?

Committee Reports

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

Terry Sapp & Michael Trafton gave a recap of what the Land Use Committee has been working on in preparation of the joint Planning Commission/Agricultural Advisory Board Meeting that will be held on March 14th. They have been doing a lot of research/observations for the last two years. Understanding what Agritourism really is, what is the definition? What are the positive and the negative effects with other jurisdictions that have Agritourism. From the beginning of the research there has been six core issues the Ag Board seems important and consistent of their message. The AAB would also like to participate with the Planning Commission Work Sessions. The Land Use Committee has very specific recommendations need to be sure the code includes responses to the six core issues that were given at the last meeting.

Motion read by Michael Trafton:

The Agricultural Advisory Committee at this time approve the current Land Use Committee and others to engage in ongoing work sessions and related discussions with the Skagit County Planning Commission, Skagit County Planning Department, and Skagit County Commissioners. The Land Use Committee representing the Agricultural Advisory Board will carry forward our consistent and well-focused position on Agritourism and its relationship to current and future agricultural activities in Skagit County through six issues of importance.

*Amend the motion to include the six consistent core items in the motion:

1. *Skagit County Code be written to identify activities associated with agritourism.*
2. *Agritourism activities allowed in the Ag-NRL be subject to a close connection to actual ongoing agricultural production on the site of the producer.*
3. *Qualifying agritourism activities in the Ag-NRL be codified as accessory to agriculture and have finer resolution.*
4. *All accessory agritourism activities be subject to renewable permits and scaled fees.*
5. *Non-qualifying agritourism activities associated with public participation be directed to zones and places outside the Ag-NRL*
6. *Skagit County restrict new agritourism activities until enforcement mechanisms are designed and implemented.*

*Motion amended to change the word Committee to Board in the first sentence. Justin Hayton seconded; Motion carried.

Terry Sapp discussed that he and Sarah Ruether found two permits that are available now- Special Use Permits for basically wedding facilities on the record. Need to establish a clear foundation for what and how the County will continue with these as right now the rules are a little fuzzy. Kendra Smith in 2012-2013 proposed Ag Accessory Activities in support of her cut flowers & Wedding Venue. The Ag use was cut flowers on the tables at the weddings. Is having a flower garden sufficient activity to have a wedding venue with 250+ guests. Permit states the applicant must do a self-certification annually, what do you do about things that get permitted with conditions then they sell the property? Do the conditions get transferred? Need to establish a good policy to enforce the conditions with the Planning Commission.

Joint Meeting with Planning Commission & Board of County Commissioners on March 14th at 6 pm in the Commissioners Hearing Room. Need to come in with an opening statement consisting of what we have been working on. Any questions will be directed to Michael Hughes, Chair and he can delegate who is best to answer the question. Michael will prepare the opening statement and send to the Board to review in the next few days. Biggest thing to get out there, Why is this so important, what is the big deal. Need to be sure everyone understands why this is so important.

Don McMoran offered to give a 1-hour farm tour to any Planning Commissioner that would like to have one.

Economic Development- Don McMoran

Ken Dahlstedt looking at a lot of business ideas and opportunities. He is looking at a facility that used to be NW Hardwood Facility. Preliminary plans with Port of Skagit as well. Excitement for Agriculture.

Critical Areas – Nels Lagerlund

Buffer Bill not going anywhere, Volunteer Stewardship expansion is going forward, moving to legislature for voting. Expanding to reopen the program.

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

Cap/Trade issue, line items that are exempt from fees on diesel fuel. Carbon Credit program, save 47 cents on diesel and 30 cents off your fuel. Ag is exempt from these fees. Keep records of all or you will have a hard time recouping on these. Need to separate out this as a separate line item.

New Business

Don McMoran WSU Update

- Signed interlocal with Skagit County
- WSU is taking a 6% cut, usually balance the budget with retirees
- Usual Grants- Puget Sound Partnerships, Agrability, & Farm Stress Suicide
 - one AG related suicide in Skagit this month and one in Whatcom two months ago- still a really relevant topic, report anyone in duress to the 988 number
- Berry Workshop March 10th-Pestiside credits- send anyone that needs these, last chance for the credits
- 20-24th of March National Agrability Conference in Spokane. 250 people signed up
- Speaking National Risk Management Conference Speaking in Chicago
- Full Staff- Still hiring

Farmland Legacy Update- Sarah Stoner

- 1.8 Million Budgeted for purchasing easements
- Last year closed smaller 10–20-acre farms
- Last year \$70,000-\$100,000 per development right
- Raise the rates? Talking to Board about it, have a subcommittee refining the scoring systems to adjust the rates. Need to come up with a fair applicable process to be able to adjust the rates.
- Takes about 2-3 years to close with a property using partner funding. Self-Funding, we close in about four months on a property
- Still looking for applicants for the program, open to as many as we can get

Next Meeting: Joint meeting with Planning Commission & BOCC March 14 at 6 pm.

Adjourn

Murray Benjamin moved to adjourn; John Morrison seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:02 pm.

Next meeting is April 12, 2023, at 6 pm.