

Skagit County Agriculture Advisory Board

Meeting Summary – December 13, 2023

Commissioners Hearing Room/MS Teams

Members in Attendance

Michael Hughes Terry Sapp Michael Trafton
Steve Omdal Justin Hayton Steve Skrinde

Proxy Designations

Justin Hayton for Kraig Knutzen Michael Hughes for Murray Benjamin

Members Absent

Nels Lagerlund

Others in Attendance

Peter Browning, Skagit County Commissioner
Jack Moore, Director Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)
Robby Eckroth, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)
Kim Adams, Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS)
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works, Farmland Legacy Program
Don McMoran, WSU Extension
Madeline McGonagle, Community Member
Quinn Estep, Community Member
Emma Estep, Community Member

Call to Order, Introductions

Michael Hughes called the meeting to order at 6 pm.

Approval of Meeting Summary

John Morrison moved to accept the November Meeting Minutes, Justin Hayton seconded, Motion carried.

Guest Speaker

Robby Eckroth, Long Range Planning Manager, Skagit County Planning & Development Services

Robby gave an introduction of himself and his visions with Long Range Planning. He also provided an update from the Planning Commission Meeting on December 12th regarding Agritourism.

- Terry Sapp mentioned having the Ag Board participate in the Comprehensive Plan
- Should there be a sub committee for the Comp Plan, more than Monthly Meetings may be needed to keep updated
- When will Draft Language begin? Summer 2024
- Comp Plan to be completed in 2025
- Have Consultants that will begin working on this as it is a large process- Kimely Horn-Lead Consultants, Cascade for Climate, Transpo working on Transportation, Berk- Rural, Watershed-Critical Areas
- Kick off meeting in January to discuss timeframes and rolls and work out a schedule, then to BoCC with a Scope of Work for approval. February or March for AAB Timeline.
- How can we be sure we get the information needed? Robby will provide frequent updates on the process to the public and boards.
- There will be a web page that will have comments, drafts, and the steps of the process. Listserv to be established for updates as the process progresses.

- Does the AAB have a vision with the Comp Plan and the Agricultural Future. Michael will make a note to discuss at the January meeting.

Planning Commission Meeting Review:

Jack Moore, Director Planning & Development Services

Jack provided an update from the Planning Commission Meeting on December 12th regarding Agritourism.

- Motion to approve the AAB recommendation as presented, there was a second, but it then went into a further discussion.
- Food Production primary goal to protect
- Discussed state level laws regarding protection of Farming
- Growth Management Act types of uses and development where they should be. Many zoning districts in Skagit that may be able to accommodate the non-ag activities
- Worries that the current law and proposal is too strict, maybe needs another pathway. People that have been in business for a while and rely on the income to survive, even if they were not legitimately established to begin with.
- Ag Land is taxed lower, non ag businesses benefiting from that not appropriate
- Split vote- forward a recommendation of adoption the Ag Boards recommendation as it was written 5-2 vote.
- What is next? Jack has reached out to the Commissioners Office to find out the next steps. Schedule a possible work session. Hopefully next month.
- Will comment period happen again at the Commissioner level? Not usually after a public hearing that happens
- Terry attended the meeting, thought it was a very thorough discussion. They did a lot of studying to understand the establishment of code and policy and the comp plan.
- Did not deliberate or discuss any changes or alterations from the AAB Recommendation
- Forward the Meeting Minutes after being signed by the Chair of the Planning Commission

Committee Reports

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

- Terry Sapp- correction on what previously reported, but as of now the Supreme Court did accept the case of Friends of Sammamish Valley and Futurewise against King County regarding the use of Ag lands. Terry will keep updated on how the case progresses.

Economic Development- Don McMoran

- Skagit Malting moving forward with bankruptcy and will be having someone take over. Applying for WSDA Grants to help.
- Island Grown Cooperative kill plant almost completed
- No movement with Amazon
- Ag Park is moving forward with sewer

Critical Areas – Nels Lagerlund

Nothing at this time.

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

- Nothing at this time.

Old Business

- Still have a District 3 position available

New Business

Chair & Vice Chair Nominations & Voting:

- Chair Nominations: Michael Hughes
- Vice Chair Nominations: Kraig Knutzen
- No contested positions- Michael Hughes continue with Chair, Kraig Knutzen continues with Vice Chair

Don McMoran WSU Update

- 10% Budget cut from the County- cutting two positions from the top, also eliminating printing- need to pay for their copies (75,000 copies a month in the office) looking to go more electronic with emails
- Now being asked to justify any funds that will roll over to the 2024 year
- Going to be okay, working on getting grants
- Looking for a new Spanish Coordinator to fill the vacancy
- Largest County Extension in the State
- Ag Summit February 9, 2024
- Workshops:
 - Western Washington Seed Workshop January 12, 2024
 - Potato Workshop February 23, 2024
 - Berry Workshop March 8, 2024

Next Meeting: January 10, 2023, at 6 pm

- AAB Vision with the Comp Plan & Agricultural Future in Skagit.

Adjourn

Steve Wright moved to adjourn; John Morrison seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:09 pm.