

Skagit County Conservation Futures Program Advisory Board
Meeting Summary
February 9, 2021

Members in Attendance

Steve Sakuma	Scott DeGraw	Keith Morrison	Margery Hite
Jim Glackin	Andrea Xaver	Owen Peth	

Members Absent

Staff and Others in Attendance

Kara Symonds, Skagit County Public Works
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Michael See, Skagit County Public Works

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:00 AM

Members Update

Allen asked the group about the buy-hold-sell strategy on protecting pieces of property. There would be some risks competing in the open market. The group discussed the concept.

Kara shared that the Ag Lands Coordinator position is still in Human Resources and doesn't know when that job will be posted, but she's very much looking forward to that happening. Also Kara met with the regional NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) staff person for who has an office in with the Skagit Conservation District.

Jim asked about a component of the job description – how many questions come into the Program about land for sale? Kara responded that as soon as a property is listed, the Program and the Planning Department receive many inquiries on a weekly basis. Thankfully we work closely with Planning so we are giving out consistent responses. Since each easement is unique, when a question comes in, Kara reads the exact terms in order to respond.

Andrea shared that the market is pushing towards more agricultural products grown indoors. We need to look out for giant buildings with agriculture on the inside. Scott reminded the group of the valley picture with greenhouses and buildings all over the place. No views, no wildlife, just buildings. Steve said Canada buyers are interested in that when they come down to look at property. The question, do they cement everything under that cover and call it agriculture. This is not a new concept and one that has not gone away. Steve added there is another generation coming behind us, and one that has not thought this through. The challenge becomes who are we talking to and what are they trying to develop. What does the end state look like if we take that path.

Andrea suggested a subject for the next insert: how to keep Skagit County looking as it does now.

January Meeting Summary

Margery made a correction to change Personal to Real and Personal Property Tax.

Andrea made two corrections: first page, last paragraph, fourth sentence, coordinated to coordinate; and second page – fifth sentence, appraises to appraise.

Andrea made a motion to approve, Jim seconded, all were in favor.

Appraisal Review

The group reviewed appraisal values for the last three years, summarized in a spreadsheet. Scott asked about adding the score to the spreadsheet as well to assess any correlation between score and value. A correlation may indicate there is some flexibility to use scoring as a boost in the offer, given certain scoring numbers. One column for original score, and then add core and edge properties. The group could then explain why the property should be offered more, given that the group has history of the valley. The group would also like to see the addition of the number of development rights and values going back to 2016.

Allen wondered if we're seeing the 2009 administrative rule effect where agriculture is the highest and best use, not residential. This could be a function of increased value of agricultural land. Steve noted the challenge is that it is getting more difficult to get farmland setup in a profitable manner. Some people are good at this, some are not.

For large farmers that aren't using the program, the development right might not be a big factor to their calculations. Allen shared that could be another component of a public information campaign.

Marketing/Application Process

Kai presented an update on printing the brochure. He received quote from Lithex printing for 250 (0.50) and 500 (0.38). Wanted to get a sense from the group on the volume. \$143 and \$192, good for another ten days. Margery asked if it is pursuant to terms of an existing contract.

The group discussed the distribution plan and Allen asked about the strategy. The group shifted away from the tax insert, Kara could have some as handouts and include them when she sends out applications, they would be shared with the Planning Department, and Kai would have some to hand out. The group also discussed sharing these with local land use attorneys and CPAs. The group thought we might go through 250 pretty quickly and to start at 500. There will be one more proof before the full run goes out.

Property Update/Financial Summary

Kara reviewed the properties in the queue and the financial report. She reached out to the landowners in RRc-NRL on Hwy 9 near Big Lake and encouraged them to apply. The Program just received an application for land adjacent to the old poplar farm on F2M. In addition, the McRaes reached out for

another application to enroll additional properties. The group will rank the Edison Fields properties at the next meeting.

Allen shared that some of the funding for Pierson will come from the Clear Valley Mitigation Bank agreement with Skagitonians.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 AM