

Agritourism

Community Advisory Group and
Agricultural Advisory Board
Background & Recommendations

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Agritourism Background

- **2021** Skagit County initiates an Agritourism Study.
- **2022** PDS provides three policy recommendations.
- **2023** PDS works through the legislative process with the Planning Commission.
- **January 2024** BoCC issues a moratorium on the acceptance of permit applications for certain and activities on Ag-NRL Lands.
 - The BoCC directed the PDS Director to develop a process that will allow landowners to document asserted existing non-conforming use through entry into a Voluntary Compliance Agreement (VCA).
- **June 2024** the BoCC passed a resolution remanding the proposed agritourism code changes to the Skagit County PDS and Planning Commission.



Resolution & Remand Criteria

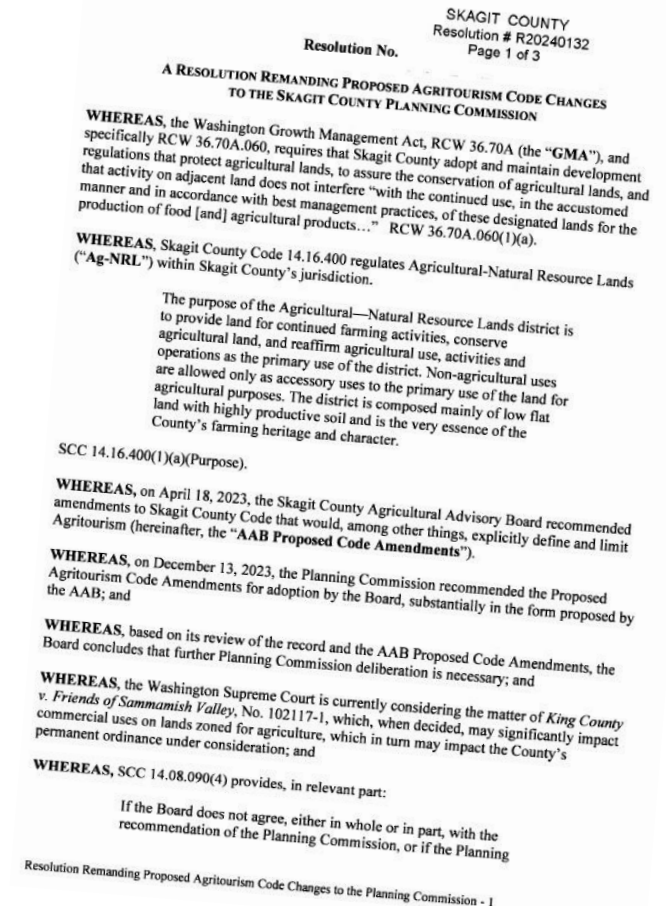
Resolution #R20240132

Remand Criteria Topics:

1. Define Agritourism & clarify activity scope
2. Criteria for Tulip Festival participation
3. Treatment of East County vs Delta areas
4. Temporary use/events in Ag-NRL zones
5. Consistency with WA Supreme Court decision



Agritourism Remand: <https://www.skagitcounty.net/Common/Documents/LFDocs/COMMISSIONERS000030/00/00/43/000043d6.pdf>



Community Advisory Group

- Planning and Development Services (PDS) convened a Community Advisory Group to provide recommendations on proposed Agritourism code changes.
- Purpose of group was to provide policy recommendations to PDS staff for drafting an Agritourism Code that addresses Board of County Commissioners' remand criteria.
 - Members also encouraged to raise additional relevant topics for discussion.



Advisory Group Composition

Members:

- Amy Frye, Boldly Grown Farms
- Audrey Matheson, Bow Hill Blueberries
- Darrin Morrison, Morrison Farms
- Jessie Anderson, Maplehurst Farms
- Kai Ottesen, Hedlin's Family Farm
- Kristen Keltz, Skagit Tourism Bureau
- Jennifer Schuh, Schuh Farms/Skagit Festival of Family Farms
- Robert Ashby/Nicole Roozen, Skagit Valley Tulip Festival
- Matt Steinman, Foothill Farms/Agricultural Advisory Board



Group Outcomes

By end of 8 meetings, the group was to:

- Provide specific, actionable, realistic, and enforceable recommendations
- Reflect group consensus where possible
- Include dissenting opinions
- Inform PDS in drafting code amendments



Process & Facilitation

- Modified Consensus decision-making
- Neutral facilitation provided by Triangle Associates
- Transparency:
 - Meetings open to observers
 - Materials posted online
 - Video recorded & transcribed



Recommendation Topics

1. Agritourism Definition
2. Criteria for Full and Lawful Participation in the Annual Skagit Valley Tulip Festival
3. Geography
4. Temporary Events
5. Consistency with Judicial and State-Level Processes



Recommendation can be found on Agritourism Community Advisory Group Website:

<https://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/PlanningAndPermit/cag-proposed-agritourism-code-changes.htm>

Recommendation #1 - Agritourism Definition

- Range of activities conducted by a farmer on an actively managed, ongoing farm operation.
- Engages the public for the purpose of agricultural education, enjoyment, or recreation that may generate income for the farm.
- Agritourism activities must preserve the area's rural character and remain incidental to the site's primary agricultural use.
- Agritourism is separate and distinct from farm-based businesses and agricultural support services.



Recommendation #2 - Criteria for Participation in the Annual Skagit Valley Tulip Festival

1. Duration Requirements - March 15th to May 15th
 - Window recognizes the farming realities of bloom time.
2. Participants.
 - All existing stakeholders are supported in maintaining their participation without hindrance, provided they meet applicable County and State Requirements.
3. Building Use Requirements – Flexibility in use.
4. Participation in Tulip Festival should not could toward Agritourism activity day limits.
5. Entire county is invited to create events and support the festival on all Skagit lands in addition to AG-NRL land.
 - Support ongoing collaboration with Skagit County planning staff and decision-makers to ensure festival participation is done responsibly



Recommendation #3 - Geography

- Does not recommend partial or differential treatment based on geography (location within Skagit County) or parcel size.
- A single, fair, and enforceable agritourism code—with tools for addressing local impacts as needed—offers the best balance of clarity, equity, economic support, and environmental responsibility.



Recommendation #4 – Temporary Events

- Recommends that "temporary events" be removed from the Ag-NRL zoning code.
- Instead, recommends three categories of agritourism are allowed in Skagit County:
 - Agritourism 1 is a Permitted Use
 - Agritourism 2 requires an Administrative Special Use Permit
 - Agritourism 3 requires a Hearing Examiner Special Use Permit
- Thresholds for each category should be defined by the County and must be clear, measurable, and enforceable.



Recommendation #5 – Consistency with Judicial and State-Level Legislative Processes

- CAG to consider judicial and state-level legislative outcomes in the process of developing recommendations.
- Reviewed the summary of King County v. Friends of Sammamish Valley.
- Presentation on State-level recommendations provided by State Department of Commerce.
- Requested that preliminary CAG recommendations be reviewed by Skagit County Prosecuting Attorney before finalizing.



Agricultural Advisory Board Recommendations

1. Agritourism Definition and Scope

- Recommend Definition - *A common, farm-based, commercial activity serving the public that promotes agriculture, is directly related to onsite agricultural production, is incidental and subordinate to the working farm operation, and is operated by the owner or operator of the farm or family members. Celebratory gatherings, weddings, parties or similar uses that cause the property to act as an event center or that take place in structures specifically designed for such events are not agritourism.*
- Agricultural Accessory Uses definition currently includes “activities associated with tourism which promote local agriculture...”. Recommend amending tourism to agritourism to refer to the agritourism definition.



Agricultural Advisory Board Recommendations

2. Tulip Festival Participation

- Agricultural Accessory Use definition subsections (3) Farm animal or horticultural viewing by the public and (4) U-pick sales to the public, protects Skagit Valley Tulip Festival activities that are agritourism while curtailing commercial activities without a tie to agriculture on agricultural lands.

3. Geography

- All Ag-NRL lands as well as lands used for agriculture in Skagit County as designated in county code and maps, be controlled under the same rules, regardless of where they fall in the county.



Agricultural Advisory Board Recommendations

4. Temporary Events

- Temporary events should require permits and standards should clearly reflect:
 - Size limitations
 - Number of people
 - Size of lot (GMA calls for less than 1 acre)
 - Number of events (the agritourism proposal limited temporary use to 12 annually)

5. Consistency with Judicial and State-Level Legislative Processes

- Any legislative decision by the County should be consistent with the King County v. Friends of Sammamish Valley State Supreme Court ruling and other GMA requirements.



Next Steps

- Rough draft being reviewed by Agricultural Advisory Board and Community Advisory Group. Both groups will be providing feedback/recommendations to staff.
- Drafts incorporate recommendations from both groups.
- Next draft will be presented to Planning Commission at September 16th meeting.
- October 14th Public Hearing.
- November 18th Deliberations.
- BoCC Meetings to be determined .



Thank You

- Thank you to the CAG members, Agricultural Advisory Board, and members of the public for their contributions.
- Questions?

