1. **6:30 PM CALL TO ORDER**
   Chair Lane called the April 2, 2008 regular meeting of the Thurston County Planning Commission to order at 6:30 p.m. Commissioners provided self-introductions.

   **Attendance:** Chair Chris Lane, Commissioners Tom Cole, Liz Kohlenberg, Liz Meyers, Scott Nelson, Kathleen O’Connor, and Joyce Roper
   **Staff:** Michael Welter, Sandy Norton, and Recording Secretaries Cheri Lindgren and Danielle Gardea
   **Others:** John Halvorson and Marlene Voss

2. **6:32 PM APPROVAL OF AGENDA**
   **MOTION:** Commissioner Cole moved to approve the agenda as presented. Commissioner O’Connor seconded. Motion carried.

3. **6:32 PM PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS (Not associated with topics for which public hearings have been held.)**
   There were no public communications.

4. **6:35 PM (W): LONG TERM AGRICULTURE (LTA) – LANDS OF COMMERCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**
   (Staff: Sandy Norton)

   Ms. Norton reviewed the LTA materials. She noted that the staff analysis is not completed on the site-specific comments matrix. She referred Commissioners to a *Public Comment Summary and Potential Criteria Identification* document. It includes a staff analysis of each comment compiled and summarizes the criteria suggested by members
of the public concerning refining the proposed map amendment.

Commissioners discussed additional information needed to refine the proposed map amendment beginning with verification (field check) of on-the-ground data and a timeline. Commissioner Cole said it’s incumbent upon the County to verify claims made by property owners at the hearing. Ms. Norton reported the initial information was obtained from the County’s Geodata Center and the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). There is also a recent updated soils survey. The initial 1990 soil survey is included in the 1990 comprehensive plan. Commissioners should determine what refinements could be made without further investigation, such as soil depth, forestry, and steep slopes. Staff can obtain soil depth information from the NCRS, which is fairly accurate and current. Commissioner Roper indicated one concern is whether the science concerning soil depth is better than what the County had for wetlands.

6:45 PM Commissioners considered the Examine Critical Areas section of the staff analysis and application of the criteria. Discussion followed on the current Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) and proposed CAO and how they address LTA. Ms. Norton said the current ordinance indicates farming is allowed provided it is existing and ongoing. Commissioner Kohlenberg said most lands identified on the map are not currently farmed. Commissioner Roper countered that some of the lands might be used for farming now. Commissioner Kohlenberg said the proposed map reflects all lands that meet the criteria and are not currently in LTA. Ms. Norton said lands shown on the map include existing agriculture and lands capable of being used for agriculture. Commissioner Roper said there was testimony from property owners who have been farming for generations who were not initially included.

Commissioner Kohlenberg said when removing critical areas and associated buffers there isn’t sufficient land left for some parcels that fit LTA criteria. Those properties should be removed. Commissioner O’Connor said parcels containing Class 1 wetlands were removed. Commissioners do not have data of actual ground conditions. There is always a question on the accuracy of Geodata. One of the criterions is 51% soil. Commissioners need to look at what criteria to use before adding or eliminating lands. Commissioner Kohlenberg suggested removing critical areas from the acreage.

Commissioner Roper suggested examining the nature of the critical areas prior to removal. As an example, it’s easier to farm properties with high groundwater (Salmon Creek Basin) compared to building houses. Commissioner Nelson suggested it would be too difficult to farm in the Salmon Creek Basin because it’s too wet. Commissioner Roper said that type of information is useful for the analysis. There are good agricultural practices that are not antagonistic to critical areas.

Commissioner Kohlenberg said the current CAO does not allow farming in some areas and those areas should not be included in the LTA proposal.

7:00 PM Commissioner Roper emphasized the need to review the nature of the critical
area and data first.

Commissioner Kohlenberg suggested one task is identifying land that can be farmed. It’s not the Commission’s job to find every acre, but to be reasonable and consistent when applying LTA criteria.

Commissioner Roper said her interest is to set aside LTA lands because it’s a valuable resource that the County should have for the long term. Commissioner Kohlenberg’s suggestion makes sense if the object is to have as little land as possible set aside for LTA, which impacts property owners the least.

Commissioner Nelson said there is no way to protect farms with LTA zoning. The County continues to downzone properties to protect rural character without considering whether the land can actually be used for farming.

Commissioner Roper said parcels with streams are prime farmlands. She conveyed she wants to see additional data prior to making a first cut.

7:09 PM Discussion ensued about the need to obtain reliable soil depth information based on testimony from the public hearing and conducting additional fieldwork if warranted. It was noted that it will take staff two to three weeks to obtain supplemental information, which pushes the timeline back.

At this point in the discussion, Commissioners generally agreed they wanted additional information concerning soil depth and that it makes sense to remove lands with steep slopes and evaluate properties that are encumbered by critical areas and forestlands.

Commissioner Roper asked whether the County is using 1990 soil survey data to identify soils that could be farmland.

Commissioners agreed to use the definition for steep slopes contained in the current CAO. The issue is what’s considered too steep to farm. Ms. Norton responded the County has elevation data and has mapped slopes.

7:15 PM Commissioners referred to Attachment 6 from Port Blakely Tree Farm and a statement that agriculture is limited on one of the parcels because of the absence of any water rights. Commissioner Roper said people can purchase water rights from others. Commissioner Nelson offered that farmers often cannot afford to purchase water rights from others.

Commissioner Kohlenberg suggested investigating the water issue further.

Mr. Welter pointed out that most of the basins are closed for new water rights.

Commissioner Roper offered that a water right permit is not necessary for some types of
farming. She indicated she will research the law and provide an Attorney General opinion.

Mr. Welter suggested having the County’s Extension Agent review some of the issues involving water, steep slopes, soil type, and depth.

Discussion followed on comment #L22 concerning soil depth on page 8 as listed in the public comment summary matrix and whether the information provided by the property owner is reliable.

Commissioner Roper expressed interest in receiving a source comparison from other counties (Kitsap, Pierce, Lewis) concerning parcel size and zoning for LTA to determine if Thurston County is comparable. Ms. Norton explained she’s unsure if it’s feasible for staff to obtain all the additional information requested and still meet the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board (WWGMHB) compliance deadline. The deadline has been extended to June 2008.

Mr. Welter asked that the Commission consider the department’s limited staffing resources. The reality of conducting on-site analysis is difficult. An unsettling aspect is attempting to verify wetland pieces for each parcel. Mr. Welter suggested Commissioners should consider the task as simply applying the new criterion to new lands and to document why parcels were included or excluded.

Commissioner Roper agreed with Mr. Welter if the Commission disregards public testimony. However, property owners spoke about how the LTA designation will affect them and perhaps there are other options that should be considered.

7:30 PM Mr. Welter responded it’s not the intent to discount testimony from the public. However, the Commission must consider the scope of the task. Comparing Thurston to other counties might not be an adequate comparison. Futurewise is arguing that the percentage of agricultural lands might be less than other counties.

Commissioner Myers suggested removing properties not meeting soil depth requirements.

Discussion followed about whether the Commission could use a soil test performed by soils engineer Jim Henry.

Commissioner O’Connor said it makes sense to consider parcel size, zoning, and applying other criteria after initial cuts are made.

Chair Lane asked whether it’s feasible for County staff to conduct fieldwork for a limited number of parcels (4-5). Mr. Welter replied that staff can work with a managed approach. It’s important to document the work and keep on track. The County will be in a better position to request another extension if the work is advancing and nearly
completed.

Commissioner Kohlenberg suggested it would be useful to distinguish parcels 40 acres or less already identified on the proposed map amendment and identify parcels currently in forestry and the type of forestry use.

7:40 PM Ms. Norton reviewed the direction to identify parcels 40 acres and less in forestry and the type of forestry. Commissioners will refine a request concerning critical areas following further cuts and invite the County’s Extension Agent to attend the next meeting to discuss soil depth, slopes, and water. Staff will also provide a copy of the definition for steep slopes contained in the current CAO. Other information requested includes how soil data are determined, error for margin, and reliability and validity of soil data.

Commissioner Roper offered to compile county comparison information and forward the Attorney General’s opinion on water rights to Commissioners.

5. 7:46 PM CALENDAR (Tentative) AND ATTENDANCE
   • April 16, 2008: LTA Worksession (Commissioner Roper unable to attend)

6. 7:50 PM STAFF UPDATES
   Mr. Welter reviewed the County’s cost recovery program. The County has eight unfilled positions coming into 2008 that the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) decided not to fill. The department has 14 unfilled positions compared to last summer. The CAO and LTA projects are priority projects. The County is recruiting for another planner to replace Ms. Farrow-Swenson. When the BoCC lifted the moratorium for one day, developers/property owners submitted 96 land use applications on May 1, 2006. The BoCC implemented a 100% cost recovery program the following day. Staff is still working to process land use applications submitted two years ago.

7:56 PM Discussion ensued about which divisions are affected by staff reductions. Significant staff reductions can be expected in 2009 if current market conditions continue. Mr. Welter reported on the potential of renaming “Development Services” to “Thurston County Planning and Resource Management Department” to reflect current functions.

Commissioners and staff discussed the status of the two vacant Planning Commission positions. Chair Lane reported the BoCC wanted to implement a seven-member Commission on a trial basis for the remainder of 2008. He said he conveyed to the BoCC that the Planning Commission would like to retain a nine-member format.

Mr. Welter said the Board has confirmed a nine-member Planning Commission format. Commissioner Wolfe is searching for two members from her district. An option is to consider a change to the Commission’s operating procedures where a quorum is established based on a majority of seated Commissioners. Commissioners asked staff to
add a review of the operating procedures to the next meeting agenda.

7. **8:04 PM ADJOURNMENT**
With there being no further business, Chair Lane adjourned the meeting at 8:04 p.m.

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Chris Lane, Chair

Prepared by Cheri Lindgren, Recording Secretary
Puget Sound Meeting Services