

THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Thursday, September 17, 2020

7:00 - 9:16 pm

Virtual Zoom Meeting

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE

Members: Richard Mankamyer (Chair), Joe Hanna (Vice-Chair), Pat Labine, Robert McIntosh, Kevin Jensen, Tom Watson, Jed Haney

Absent Members: GiGi McClure (not excused)

Ex-Officio: Stephen Bramwell WSU,

Staff: Nicole Ross WSU

Guests: Commissioner Gary Edwards, Commissioner Tye Menser, Jennifer Davis, Loretta Seppanen, Addie Candib, Jeff Swotek, Betsie De Wreede, Christina Chaput, Patrick Rofe, Linda Powell, Marcie Cleaver, George Brown, TJ Johnson, Carolina Mejia, Betsie De Wreede, Charlene Andrade, Daylnn (?), Greg Schoenbachler, Linda Powell, Mary Root, Patrick Rofe, Sarah Hamman, Sarah Moorehead, Phyllis Farrell, Marilyn Sitaker,

CALL TO ORDER

Introductions

Previous meeting minutes: Tom moved, Joe seconded - Approved by acclamation

Current agenda: Motion to add attendance on the agenda by Joe Hanna, Robert moved, Tom Seconded - Approved by acclamation

COMMITTEE ITEMS

The Thurston County Agriculture Advisory Committee is continuing our support of local agriculture, farmers, tree farmers, ranchers and landowners/operators by bringing in experts to help us learn about and better understand our local resources.

7:10 pm - 1. Jennifer Davis - Thurston County Community Planning Manager. Introduction of the Thurston County Comprehensive Plan Project: Community Driven Review of Agriculture Policies and Programs.

- High priority project to take a fresh look at our zoning, and planning, which highlights the importance of agriculture.
- Community concern is driving this project
 - Sent out survey is still open for the committee to respond and the concept is to open it up to the public

- <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SHQQ5HD>
- Project focus is not directed on
 - *HCP, *VSP, Sentinel Landscapes, Technical Assistance, Economic Development
 - But recommendations will be produced out of this project
- Survey responses are limited but represent the concerns for more agricultural support
 - Top 3 responses are **Long TCS**, strengthen *PDR Program, produce more economic development of local ag industry
 - Expand tax reduction program was also added, and a point person at the county to help navigate the zoning and regulation (the idea of the point person was for farmers and new farmers to have a resource at the county to learn what is available to them).
- Theme of the survey was that we need more info and support programs
- Stakeholder list was generated by the survey to more stakeholders including WSU, and Oly Farmers Market
- Focus on the project are in three buckets - land use, regs and permitting, and incentive programs
- Next steps include a project page with presentations, and further committee outreach with subcommittee development in mind
- Contact Jennifer Davis, Community Planning Manager at jennifer.davis@co.thurston.wa.us

Conversation ensues to send the link to out to the Ag Committee members for better feedback

- Joe Hanna - Wants to keep the survey internal for now
 - Jennifer will send out draft to the committee

Notes from Stephen on Jennifer Davis

- Take another stab at ag zoning, policy, etc
- Farming is of interest in the county for jobs, sustainability, economic activity, rural character, open space aesthetics and others
- Comprehensive Plan, 2019 update. Not much ag policy update, and no zoning touched. Public, Ag committee, identified this is something we want the Commissioners to look at in 2020 docket.
- Futurewise, looks at sprawl, etc. They appealed Comp Plan adoption on basis of looking at long term land protection
- BoCC has ongoing interest in agriculture
- “Community driven” because it is that. Intended as collaborative
- Define priorities
- Survey to ag committee

7:34 pm - 2. Addie Candib from the American Farmland Trust. 11 million acres converted to other uses, in the last 15 years, and counting. <https://farmland.org/>

- Addie is going to present a report about the Farms Under Threat - State of the States with a focus on Thurston County
- Multi-year initiative to identify the threats and create solutions
- Identify, policy reports, legislative solutions
- Mapped land use nationwide segmented into the various uses
- Mapped ag productivity
- Identified Nationally Significant Lands
- Mapped threats on best ag land
 - 11m acres converted from 2001 to 2016
- WA has a low overall threat on farmland
 - .6% of the compromised in comparison
- Development is disproportionately affecting WA's best ag land
 - 31% of best farmland converted
- Types of conversion are Urban and Highly Developed Land (UHD), and Low-Density Residential (LDR)
 - Tracking closely with population growth
 - 8 out of 12 states recorded correlate with population growth
 - Nationally 7m converted was LDR
- LDR happens on a spectrum from developed to compromised
 - 48% of WA land was converted to LDR
 - Land in LDR was 70x as likely to be converted to urban development
 - National multiplier is only 23
 - LDR paves the way to urban dev
- Thurston County comparison is meant to be informative but not definitive
 - During the study we lost 6% ag land to development
 - LDR is happening much quicker than other parts of the state
- Microsite tour located on their homepage and will allow you to take a tour of our ag land in TC
 - We have some of the most significant ag land in the nation
 - Different filters allow the user to understand the spectrum of the development in our county
 - Yelm is converting quickly in comparison to the other rural cities in the county
- What's driving conversion?
 - Three primary drivers
 - Development pressure based on population density

- Decline of family farms to prefer larger corporate farms
 - Aging out farmers w/ 5x over 65 yrs.
- What are we doing well in TC?
 - Ex, Ag advisory committee
 - Dev rights transfer program
 - Conservation futures program
- Recommendations include
 - Long-term ag zoning
 - Expand and include Nationally significant farmland
 - Invest in economic dev
 - Increase funding for Conservation Futures and PDR programs
 - Support South Sound Farmlink
- Resources
 - Found on their website Farmland Information Site
 - <https://farmlandinfo.org/>
- First step to use the checklist found on their website
 - http://bap-home.net/gfc/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2013/06/FarmChecklist_AFT_GFC_Community-Guide_lo_res_11-2017.pdf
 - Recommends that the committee fill it out to identify priorities for our county
- Questions about economic development trends across the nation, property value correlation in protecting farmland, funding sources for the study, increasing minimum parcel size for development,

Notes from Stephen on the Survey Review

- Land use policy and zoning
- Regulations and permitting
- Incentive programs
- Potential to expand survey to gather more input
- Good leads so far on survey results
- Project page for website
- Mailing list to keep connected
- Agenda for Ag Committee (for next few meetings; to discuss aspects of the project)
- Continue data gathering on farmlands
- Priority list of actions and get input on the actions

8:17 - 3. Loretta Seppanen from the South of the Sound Community Farmland Trust.

- AFT research for TC
- Plan for Ag, Not Around It
 - Nationally Significant Ag Land (NSAL)
 - Any land that is being actively farmed
- **TC lost the most farmland than the county's around us.** – It was in the surrounding counties only on the chart.
 - Other counties may have other policies to look into to insulate the farmland loss
- NSAL in TC
 - ~20,000 acres
 - ~1/3 of our farmland
 - Widely dispersed
- No zoning protection for the NSAL in TC
 - How can we protect our farmland from dev?
- LDR some are near farms
 - Need new policies to protect our NSAL
 - Rochester/Grand Mound, Lake Lawrence, Kelly's Korner, NE Olympia (Fishtrap), East Olympia, (Yelm?)
- County (*GIS) and AFT map comparison
 - Fix our NSAL acres w/o zoning
 - Don't forget the rest of the land that isn't NSAL
 - Develop specialized policies for zoning and long term planning
 - Rural Agricultural Protection Area (APA)
 - Plan for ag in comparison to transportation
- What happens when we don't plan for Ag?
 - Currently, we don't talk about ag in our planning
 - LDR
- Ask County Staff to add AFT zoning to the County development maps
 - Include NSAL
 - LDR
 - Create new policies for the county to protect our farmland
 - ex: Rural APA
 - Check into the farmland development in our own County
- Patrick Rofe ED of CFT
 - Community Farmland Trust presentation
 - Announcing 29 acre preservation in Rochester
- Questions include - Have you done anything to update the information since the AFT

study?, what type of future planning could be used to help our county, suggestion to use the GIS maps to compare to the Green Sheets that we review for dev (focus on NSAL), farmland preservation common denominators

Notes from Stephen on American Farmland Trust

- Nationally Significant (best agricultural lands)
- 11 million acres lost between 2001 and 2016, about _____ (half?) was Nationally Significant
- Two threats:
- high density urban; tied closely to population growth
- low density residential (a spectrum); fragmentation, encroachment, not tied to population growth, gradually compromises farmland integrity
- land in LDR 70x more likely to be converted to urban in WA. 48% of WA land that was converted was converted to LDR
- Three primary drivers of farmland loss:
- Thurston
- 6%; half was to LDR; losing farmland faster than other parts of state
- Robust discussion including attendees concerning the triggers for farmland preservation and the economic barriers that farmers face

Guest Comments

- Profitability = Sustainability.

Motion

- Joe Hanna
Move discussion on meeting attendance to the agenda for next month's meeting.
Approved by acclamation.

Robert suggested trying to have some of this discussion by email before the October meeting and then maybe have a quick motion adoption at the beginning of the next meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

WSU Update: Did not get an update tonight due to lack of time.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:16 pm

Submitted by Jedidiah Haney
Supplemented by Stephen Bramwell

*Glossary:

PDR = Purchase of Development Rights
HCP = Habitat Conservation Plan
VSP = Voluntary Stewardship Plan
WSU = Washington State University
BoCC = Board of County Commissioners
TC = Thurston County
GIS = Geographic Information System