

THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

McLane Building Conference Room
5033 Harrison Ave NW, Olympia, WA 98502

Minutes for April 28, 2016

Members Present: EJ Zita (Chair), Robert McIntosh (Vice-Chair), Mary DiMatteo, Pat Labine, Kevin Jensen, Eric Johnson, Chris Groen, Richard Mankamyer, and Bryan Fisher.

Staff Present: Dave Nygard, Charissa Waters, and Stephen Bramwell

Members Excused: None

Guest Speakers: Shauna Stewart, Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater Visitor and Convention Bureau. Andrew Deffobis and Jeremy Davis, Thurston County

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 by EJ Zita followed by round-table introductions of the members, staff and the public attending the evening's meeting.

Approval of previous meeting minutes -The minutes from the February 25th meeting were reviewed, corrected and approved by consensus with amendments.

News sharing - Slaughter Unit: Heritage meats is still running it at the Nisqually Springs Farm temporarily and the Co-Op may be running it in the future.

Bryan Fisher is the new farmer member, his family has a cattle farm in South Thurston County, near CNLM property.

There are two non-farmer member vacancies. The County Commissioners approve applications, the committee needs to check and make sure if there are any new applications. If not, then the Committee can advertise and recruit new applicants.

Approval of agenda – The agenda was discussed, and it was approved.

Presentation Overview – Shauna Stewart on the Bountiful Byways. OLTVCB is primarily a destination marketing non-profit organization, funded through government (Chambers of Commerce-lodging tax/sales tax). Last destination rebranding process happened over a decade ago and the Byway wasn't even on the radar at that time. Now going through another rebranding process for greater success in marketing this destination. Currently in phase one with focus groups, online surveys, phone interviews, and a destination assessment analysis to identify strengths and weaknesses. Combining the WA Bikes Trail

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with the Bountiful Byway and partnering with Mason County on the Pacific Coast Scenic Byway. In October signed an agreement with Thurston County to do the marketing and advertising for the Byway. Key target customers are the ag related businesses in the County, visitors, and residents.

The criteria have changed for the byway; it is now a 5 mile radius as the crow flies. Members must be a part of the OLTVCB (\$200 for businesses and \$100 for non-profits) in order to be featured on the map (voluntary opt-in). They will also take trade for membership. Question if they are tracking the outreach and marketing. They are using social media and website analytics, number of maps, and asking businesses to help track. They are in the very early phases, focusing on a good compelling map and website that is user friendly and interactive. May 15th deadline to get on the map, coming out in June. May be some late adopters later in the summer and they will be given the opportunity to be on the map.

As for publicity, there will be advertising in WA scenic maps; contacts with travel and lifestyle media writers (“influencing the influencers”); “Foodie Field Trip” bringing writers from Seattle, Portland and Vancouver; and including a Farm to Table dinner (Nelson Ranch); a South Sound Barbecue Fest; yoga in a lavender farm, and tours. They have a Story App., but there’s a problem with a lack of cell access in some areas of the Byway.

Question from Robert on Marijuana Tourism, are they thinking of including it on the Byway? For example, Seattle has a “weed bus”. Shauna has been keeping an eye on the industry in Colorado as well from a marketing perspective.

Mary had a comment on infrastructure issues, lack of place to prepare food for farmers, cold storage, etc. Need to make sure that the visitors are actually buying food from the farmers. OLTVCB is working on the demand part, providing the means for investing in more infrastructure and building the ag economy. Pat suggested focusing on the residents. Shauna acknowledged that they are one of the biggest contributors and that having this be a community initiative will help protect the environment and agriculture from some of the negative impacts that can occur from tourism. This can also be an educational opportunity to teach people about agriculture and the realities of smell, noise, etc., the passion of farmers, and the history of original pioneers and homestead farms. Could do historic harvest tour farms, someone else would need to plan and implement it, OLTCVB would advertise it.

Presentation Overview—Jeremy Davis with Thurston County talked about the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). With an HCP the building permitting process is much quicker for landowners. Without it could take over 36 months, with an HCP it could be about 4-6 weeks. A lot of Ag activities are compatible with the gopher habitat and covered under the 4-D rule. The VSP and HCP have symmetries for maintaining and improving Ag viability.

The HCP only includes areas in the County outside of incorporated cities where people are getting permits. The Pocket Gopher is the most often encountered listed species that will be

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covered in the HCP. The gopher does not hibernate and is more active certain times of the year and mounds cannot be reliably detected in the winter with the screening process, so field review for development in these areas can only be done in the summer.

HCP covers 30 years of development for 5 habitat features for 12 species. During that time, there is a predicted 17,000 acres of development expected to impact largely low quality habitat. It is expected to need 9,200 acres of conservation: 2400 acres of working lands conserved for Ag and habitat, 4,800 acres of land already in hand or secured by partners, and 2,000 acres of new conservation that will need to be secured. The cost is ~\$4.8-\$5.3 million per year. Will be similar to wetland mitigation. It may be funded with countywide measures, potentially Conservation Futures mainly for the 2400 acres of working lands, and mitigation fees.

Question on federal funding. No federal funding, all county funds. Mitigation money will go to the habitat conservation banks and landowners who have essentially transferred their development rights (similar to TDR). Projected 30 year impact by covered activity, primarily residential impact (>12,000 acres total and >5,000 of high quality habitat acres).

Conservation strategies will include the following: Avoidance, Working Lands (could work with VSP for Stewardship Agreements with Neighboring Landowner Assurances) and Outreach, Legacy Land Support (Habitat Enhancement on areas already preserved), New Conservation Lands (where mitigation fees primarily go to acquire land—could be used for agriculture with Land Trust or Conservation District partnership for a Conservation Easement). Conservation Futures reserve money was used to purchase Mazama Meadows (first conservation bank—will be maintained by CNLM) and will be paid back with conservation bank credits.

Stephen mentioned that there is a study going on now to see if grazing can improve habitat, but this study will have to use the Best Available Science now and follow the Federal rules. Looking at having 1800 acres of new permanent working lands easements and 650 temporary working lands agreements. Working lands conservation agreements on 15-year leases.

Questions for the Committee: What Ag uses are consistent with habitat stewardship? What are farmers with gophers seeing out there? Comments from group: Tilling at 12-16 inches and mounds are still there later. Compaction seems to keep them from mounding. Earthquakes collapse tunnels, but they come back.

Questions: When will the HCP be done? About 2 more years (~2018), the draft plan is mostly done and now need to do an Environmental Impact Statement (the Federal permitting process takes about 18 months). Many HCPs take over 5 years to develop. Having been doing stakeholder meetings and focus groups with interested parties (realtors,

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working lands, etc.). Options for funding: REET and property tax levy require public votes, mitigation fees fall on developers.

Suggestion from Loretta, if there is a property tax levy increase package put forward by the Commissioners, it should include multiple benefits that appeal to the public and that many groups can get behind and support. (10 cent increase per thousand would raise about \$2.8 million/year).

Notes and presentations from stakeholder meetings and focus groups are on the HCP webpage. This presentation will also be on the Ag Committee webpage for this meeting date. WSU is doing listening sessions for projects they could potentially get involved in. Stephen passed around a sign-in sheet.

Public Comment – There were no additional public comments on the meeting.

Other business – No additional business was discussed.

Next Meeting (May 26) Agenda Items: VSP presentation and Farms to Market Assessment discussion.

Motion to adjourn - Adopted at 9:15pm.

Respectfully submitted by *Charissa Waters*