

THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

Minutes for July 28, 2016

Members Present: EJ Zita: (Chair), Robert McIntosh (Vice-Chair), Mary DiMatteo, Eric Johnson, Richard Mankamy, Kevin Jensen, David Nygard, Scott Von

Staff Present: Stephen Bramwell and Deborah Bordelon (WSU ext.), Charissa Waters (Thurston County)

Members Excused: Pat Labine, Chris Groen, and Bryan Fischer

Guest: Doug Rushton

Introduction: Scott Von, new non-farmer member. Army vet, finishing up his degree at American Military University. Bachelors in transportation and logistics.

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 by EJ Zita:

News sharing – Thurston County Fair is coming up, Aug 3-7. Fourth annual Savor South Sound cider and beer event is also happening on the Friday and Saturday night at the Fair. This is also the same night as the Oly Brewfest, which is an unfortunate conflict of timing. The WSU extension office is buying produce from local farmers and bringing a tasting menu to Savor South Sound, and the Nisqually tribe is contributing salmon and tuna. WSU is also putting on an event at the Fair with a bicycle blender for making smoothies from fruits and vegetables from local farms. WSU nutrition program is doing a pre-diabetes prevention program by showing the support of the local farmers, promoting exercise with the bicycle, and making these healthy smoothies. It is a bicycle on a stand with a blender that fits on the back of the bike and runs off the rear wheel. **Question:** who owns it? The WSU Thurston County Ext. owns it, contributed some of their general funds, as well as donations by sponsors, and are still soliciting sponsors at the \$50 or \$75 level. They will put the contributor's logos on a laminated board and show their support. Only need a few more (it cost about \$400). Old Town Bicycle donated the bike, Deb donated the trainer that the bike sits on. **Question:** are these both new ag events? Yes, Lucas had done a piece complimenting the cider and beer but in the last two years there hasn't been a food component. So WSU is trying to reconstitute that as well as do something that is ag related. **Question:** do you need us to be there to help you with any of this? WSU has it covered, but anyone is welcome to participate. It was pointed out that the conservation district has plant sales, workshops, and demonstrations in the spring, and that the bicycle blender would be great for these. Stephen agreed. The main message and the reason to do it is that a small

THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

percent of the food dollar goes to the farmers if you buy food from the store. WSU is trying to create more of a “support your farmers” theme; buy direct where/when possible. The concern is with stagnating CSA memberships. The NY Times just ran piece on how CSA sales across the country have stagnated and gone down since 2012. Marketing and events could help keep direct sales growing.

Richard Mankameyer’s news: his aquaponics operation harvested some tilapia fish fillets. He shared some pictures to pass around. Are you selling them? No, we are eating them. They have been growing these fish for a year and will sell them eventually. The fish tank is built underneath the growing trays, doing both horizontal grow trays and experimenting with some verticals. The fish poop is the fertilizer.

Mary DiMatteo: shared an update on Conservation Futures. They had the ranking committee roundtable. The top two ranked programs were the Harmony Stillman property and the Nisqually Whitewater. The Urban Futures Farm request was ranked low. The owner was looking basically just to have the easement purchased. The property would still be in his name and he could sell the property virtually at any time. Even though the easement would keep the land in Ag in perpetuity. **Question:** We’ve done that before, what was the problem? MD: Some committee members didn’t want to go down that road again. Perhaps it was avoided this year because it was contested or it caused waves for enough of the previous committee members that they wanted to exercise a little bit of caution. It’s not a hard and fast rule, it was just something for this year. In discussion, the committee decided to give Urban Futures a lower rank for several reasons. SB: did Urban Futures rank lower due to lack of public access? MD: Yes, even though he does a lot of great programming with a lot of different organizations like WSU, TSC, it just didn’t rank as high on all the criteria as others.

Approval of previous meeting minutes -The minutes from the June 30th meeting were reviewed, corrected and approved, along with the changes that Robert sent to Charissa.

Approval of agenda – Approved with the addition of Stephen’s data on the Ag listening sessions.

Ag Listening Sessions Data- Stephen reminded everyone that the structure was: “what is” and “what should be.” The “what is” column directly correlates to the “what should be” column. The numbers correspond to the dots that participants placed next to the comments at the listening sessions. In addition, Stephen is going to try to get more email respondents. He is also interested in going out into the community and doing some targeted follow up with different groups. The Farm Bureau, Stockmans Assoc./Cattlemans Assoc., etc. are groups that he may be able to utilize. Stephen asked for recommendations of professional associations he could visit, make a short pitch, and gather a little bit more data. He aims for better representation, reaching a wider population. He asked for help with verifying

THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

information, and with recommendations for groups and contact information. Members of the committee can help with staffing a table at the Fair to get more information from farmers and people there. Washington Tree Farmers, WFFA meets almost every month and may be open to a presentation. The committee discussed how best to support this survey—as individuals whose needs and priorities may be different or as a whole. Stephen mentioned a Needs Assessment Committee that could prioritize needs, based on what's in the survey, and determine what solutions are feasible. Stephen's plan is to create an informal report with this information. He would like to share a summary with the Ag Committee by the end of the year. He would also like this document to reference other studies that have been done and show what we know about needs-oriented information in the county. The Committee would like to communicate to the BoCC their recommendations on which issues identified and prioritized in this process should be pursued. Stephen mentioned that it's important to reach out to the big farmers as well as the smaller farmers.

The *overall goal* is to identify the needs, determine common themes, and prioritize the top 12 or so to start with. Water rights, labor issues, and land access are some of the primary classes of issues. The three steps to this process are to find out 1) who do you talk to and how? 2) What do individuals need and how do you synthesize those needs to articulate the different classes of needs, and 3) what do you do about it? How do you strategize meeting those needs? There are groups in this community who are able to fund addressing those needs and funding those needs can be economic opportunities. There are also groups outside of Thurston County who have infrastructures already established for meeting needs, and if we can plug into that they can help us in our county.

South Puget Sound Farms to Market Assessment discussion and EDC Scope of Work.-

Zita: The port had commissioned the Economic Development Council to determine what needs are in the agricultural community that the port could help meet that could be economic opportunities for the port. The port has been trying to do this for a while. Aslan Meade gave his six month report that he's been making a lot of connections, he's learned a lot about the Ag community and he's put together a list of stakeholders from the Ag community. What are the opportunities for the Port to help meet those needs? The EDC has another six months on this contract. There are some opportunities for grants that have been identified by the EDC that could be good things for the Ag community. The other job of the EDC is to develop some guidelines for how to make decisions once we have all of this information about what are the needs, what are the opportunities, what are the resources, how do we make decisions about how to act. These guidelines have yet to be developed. MD: Is that report public? There is a report on the Port website that kind of summarizes what Zita just said. Zita has invited Stephen to come and speak and be a part of the EDC work.

THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Charissa was asked to give a quick update on the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP): still working on a definition of agricultural viability in the agriculture subcommittee. The subcommittee is making a lot of progress and are now developing criteria for measuring agricultural viability. A lot of it is economic criteria so they brought in an economist, Dr. Riley Moore from St. Martin's University—who has been involved in some agricultural viability efforts in the county. They are also looking at bringing in some other Ag economists to get their ideas on how to best measure agriculture viability. For critical areas, the technical subcommittee is also trying to figure out ways to measure progress towards the goals. They have to show how critical areas are being protected without regulation. The stewardship plan is where the rubber meets the road with the conservation district helping the farmer to develop the plan, similar to farm plans. Tested the Stewardship Plan on a farm and are revising that to bring it back to the VSP workgroup at the September meeting. By the end early 2017 they hope to have a full work plan to submit for review. The VSP workgroup has until July 2017 to have an approved work plan. The statewide technical panel has 45 days to review it and approve it, but they want to give time for an informal review and iterative process to allow for revisions as needed before formal submittal. Question on the 2011 baseline requirement. Charissa: baseline data is going to be an ongoing issue; there's always data limitations and data gaps. Some baseline data will need to be collected as we go, we're not going to have it all now. We don't know everything that was happening in 2011. The stewardship plan can also be a way of collecting baseline data of when they started implementing the plan.

Other business – No other business.

The Committee watched the first half of the Reagrarians video

Green sheets.– No loss of Ag land with this. No comments.

Motion to adjourn – Passed at 9pm.