

# THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

## Minutes for August 25, 2016

Members Present: EJ Zita: (Chair), Robert McIntosh (Vice-Chair), Chris Groen, Pat Labine, Mary DiMatteo, Eric Johnson, Richard Mankamyer

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

Members Excused: Kevin Jensen, Bryan Fischer, Scott Von, Jasmel Sangha, David Nygard

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The meeting was called to order at 7:04 by EJ Zita followed by round-table introductions of the members and staff attending the evening's meeting.

News sharing –Stephen gave a recap of the County fair; Fender Blender was a hit with kids and parents alike. We made over 300 smoothies. It was a great opportunity for the kids, many of whom were already advocates of the smoothies. The educational benefit was good and engaging. It was a great opportunity to show how you don't need to add additional sugar to drinks for them to taste good. A number of parents were pleased to know that it did not contain dairy. Many individuals were interested in the bicycle set up and how they could use something like that for their programs. We felt good overall about the exhibits and the interactive components that brought people in to learn more about farming and gardening, food and soil health. We were able to do something substantive. A lot of people enjoyed the microscopes and looking at the soil samples and what was in them. Master Gardeners had games to play, the Conservation District had the Salmon puzzle. Native plants had native berry jams to sample which brought people in to talk about storm water drainage and water resource, noxious weeds had a really nice exhibit. 4-H was the headquarters and they had a really nice wheel of fortune game to play to get kids engaged. Next year we hope to get more community education type organizations involved that would like to put on events for kids that are farm and agriculture oriented and rural or back to the land oriented. Will need to do more reaching out for next year. There was an educational component for the adults with the Cougar Gold cheese raffle. Adults had to answer some questions about the different programs which meant they had to go around and learn a little bit from each booth. They also loved the waste and recovery table because they got free stuff: grocery bags, magnets, clips. Overall, the fair was a success.

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Approval of previous meeting minutes: The minutes from the July 28th meeting were reviewed, corrected and approved by consensus.

Pat provided some information and clarification on what agricultural easements, restricted easements look like. A model is being developed now at Oyster Bay Farm. It is extensive and complicated but, it guarantees that the farm will stay in farming in perpetuity even though the definition of "in perpetuity" is up for grabs. There's national precedent, a museum in Philadelphia has it defined as 75 years, PCC lawyers are defining it as ten years. The easement will be restricted and it is in the deed that present owners of the farm can sell but, it has to be to someone who will maintain the land in agriculture. The Land Trust has also put in the easement many restrictions regarding what the land can be used for. The question was asked, "how will Agriculture be defined"? Pat thought they would go with the Ag open space definition. So it has to be commercial... and there are USDA restrictions. For their ranch easements only 4% of the land can be impervious surfaces. This will prevent the 40 acres from turning in to 40 acres of poultry houses. It was asked if every 3-5 years you have to generate revenue to qualify for open space? Pat thought that that was correct and that the County would police that. As far as the Land Trust can determine, these restrictive easements, even though the ownership is in private property, will guarantee that it stays in agriculture in perpetuity. Robert mentioned that this is the thing that Jim Goché keeps talking about. At some point we may need conservation easements that are less than perpetual, possibly as little as a hundred years. When you say it has to be used forever as agriculture, what happens when it is no longer viable for agriculture for whatever reason? Pat explains that: With respect to valuation of land, once agricultural use restrictions are in place, the property's real estate value is determined by the market. Also the land trust is putting in a restriction on windfall sales. The intent is that whatever it sells for, it has to be affordable for the next farmer. It needs to be priced so that it is economically viable for the new farmer but still allows a reasonable return on investment for the seller. This model is complicated but will be a national model when completed. (Community Farm Land Trust)

Approval of agenda – Approval of agenda with the removal of one item that was discussed at last meeting and the addition of two new items: a discussion on how new members are added to this committee and, a discussion on a letter of support for potential funding opportunities.

Public Comment – No public comments

Green sheets. – No Green Sheets

Letter of Support to Funding Agency – EJ Zita stated that the Economic Development Council was contracted by the Port of Olympia to find opportunities for the port to invest in meeting the needs of local agricultural and have found an opportunity. The Alpacas of America Range down in Tenino, is wanting to sell. It is in disrepair but there are a number of community partners throughout Thurston County who would like to see this resource used for a wide variety of things. A proposal has been put together to be presented to Trans Alta. As a result of Trans Alta

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Centralia Coal mine shutting down there is a lot of money available to retrain, and employ displaced workers so they are excepting grant proposals for job stimulation. The proposal is for the "Tenino Agricultural Business Park". The EDC's proposal has not been made public yet but what is known is that the proposal is asking for 3.5 million dollars. There will also be matching funds from other community partners. Phase I of the proposal is to improve the buildings that already exist. Phase II would involve more development, currently unspecified, but it is supposed to include active farming and the continuance of running animals. EJ Zita proposed that the committee consider writing a letter in support of this opportunity. The committee responded with the following concerns:

### Questions of concern:

- Who would be managing this?
- Who are we writing to?
- What happens if it doesn't work, how will that reflect on future opportunities in other parts of the county?
- Do we really have enough information?
- This project falls on a peculiar intersection between habitat conservation plan, economic development for farming and the wishes and desires of the land owner. What was the value of this land before it was determined a gopher habitat, what is the value of this land now, and what kind of legacy will the owner who has this valuable resource, but is looking to make a transition, be?
- Can Tenino support this type of project?
- Can we do a letter in support of getting the 3.5 million dollars but not committing us to the EDC's proposal?
- The committee is reminded that the committee does not have an independent voice and that our only mandate is to make a recommendation to the commissioners. Committee can't really send out a letter. We can only recommend that the commissioners send out a letter.

It was agreed by all members that this was correct.

Stephen will check with Aslan and find out if it is okay to circulate his copy of the summary of the EDC proposal to committee members. Members will then work to draft a recommendation for the Commissioners as well as a draft for the Commissioners to send along to Trans Alta. Robert and Stephen will work on draft to commissioners and then share with committee.

Approving new members to the Committee: - Previous process was that applicants applied and applications went to Commissioners who then passed them on to the committee for review. Committee would choose possible candidates and invite them to come and meet with them. Committee would make recommendation to Commissioners and Commissioner's would then offer the positions.

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Current process: committee doesn't get to see the applications or meet candidates until they have been selected to join the committee.

Members agreed that Committee wants to see applications and meet with perspectives and have input with the Commissioners. Committee will review bylaws to see what they say about this practice.

Letter to BoCC – recommendations on how to meet needs? Committee agrees that the Letter of Support for the commissioners is the priority.

Other Business – no other business

Motion to adjourn – Passed at 9pm.