

# THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

## Meeting Minutes for April 26, 2018

**Members present:** Mary DiMatteo (Vice-Chair), Chris Groen, Joe Hanna, Eric Johnson, Pat Labine, Richard Mankamyler (Chair), Robert McIntosh (Scribe).

**Ex Officio Present:** Stephen Bramwell, WSU Extension Director.

**Absent:** Deborah Bordelon, Bryan Fisher, Mike Moore, Scott Vaughn, Nicole Warren (Thurston Conservation District).

**Guest:** Bill Zachmann (South Sound Community Farmland Trust).

-----

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 followed by the Pledge of Allegiance then round-table introductions of the members, staff, and guests attending the evening's meeting.

**Approval of previous meeting minutes:** Unanimously approved, with the following minor changes: (1) Eliminate the word "a" in the sixth bullet under "Revision of By-Laws."; (2) Under "Action needed, replace the words "create agreeable language" with "determine desired revisions"; and (3) under "Comprehensive Plan," revise the last sentence to read "The Committee agreed that the Comprehensive Plan does not contain enough specific strategies to protect Thurston County farmland."

**Approval of current agenda:** Unanimously approved with the following changes: (1) move "Comprehensive Plan" to first place under "Committee Items"; and (2) in the last line under "Comprehensive Plan", change "to speak on behalf of" to "to comment on".

### **COMMITTEE ITEMS:**

**(1) Comprehensive Plan.** Bill Zachmann of the South Sound Community Farmland Trust (SSCFLT) described SSCFLT's four main concerns with the County's draft Comprehensive Plan.

The first concern is with the proposed creation of a 2060 acre mineral lands (sand and gravel) overlay on top of the existing 15,800 acres of long term agriculture land. This overlay has the effect of reducing agriculture lands by 13% while adding only 1.5 % to existing mineral lands. Currently, Thurston County has 143,000 acres of designated mineral lands, enough to provide a 250 year supply of county needs for sand and gravel. The SSCFLT questions the need for this additional 2060 acres of mineral lands,

especially when such addition comes at the expense of already scarce long-term agriculture lands.

SSCFLT's second concern is that the Comprehensive Plan should do more to ensure that there is no net loss of county farmland to non-farming usage.

SSCFLT's third concern is that Conservation Futures tax funds should continue to be used for an annual competitive grant process instead of being diverted to implementation of the Habitat Conservation Plan.

SSCFLT's fourth concern is that the Comprehensive Plan should address the pending generational transfer crisis in farming. The average Thurston County farmer is 59 years old. The County needs to do more to incentivize young farmers to become farmers, acquire farmland, and continue local food production.

**(2) Critter Pads.** Joe Hanna described the Conservation District's interest in obtaining available funding to construct critter pads to protect livestock in flood-prone parts of the County. The problem is that current County regulations require that such pads be raised structures that water can flow through. Such structures are cost-prohibitive. The Conservation District would like Thurston County to allow simpler and much cheaper raised and armored mounds of dirt, like those that are allowed and have actually been built in Lewis County.

It was moved and seconded that the Committee ask the Conservation District to write up a proposal for changing County critter pad regulations and to present such proposal to the Committee to review and decide whether or not to support this proposal. The motion carried unanimously.

**(3) Green Sheet, Project 2018101712 (Short Plat).** This is a proposal to replace five acres of current farmland with short-platted building lots. The owner is retired and needs the money from sale of the lots to help finance his retirement. After much discussion, the Committee agreed that a situation such as this creates a difficult and painful conflict between the need to preserve farmland and the needs of older, small-acreage farmers to raise capital for retirement by selling land. The Committee decided not to oppose this application, while encouraging the County to develop solutions to this problem in the form of Transfer of Development Rights, Purchase of Development Rights, land trust assistance, and any other possible strategies.

**(4) By-Law Revisions.** The Committee began the review of its By-Law Compliance Officer's list of seven possible By-Law changes contained in an email dated April 13, 2018. The Committee rejected possible change no. 1, the reduction of officer terms from two years to one. The Committee adopted possible change nos. 2 (extension of expired term until new member appointed) and 3 (new election if Chair unable to serve for a period longer than four months). At its next meeting the Committee will review, revise, and approve language implementing these three changes, and will also consider possible changes numbered 4 through 7 in the April 13 email.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.