

## THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### Meeting Minutes for September 27, 2018

**Members Present:** Richard Mankamyer (Chair); Joe Hanna; Eric Johnson; Pat Labine; Robert McIntosh (Scribe).

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

**Absent:** Mary DiMatteo (Vice Chair); Bryan Fisher; Chris Groen; Mike Moore; Scott Von; Deborah Bordelon (Administrative Assistant); Nicole Warren (Thurston Conservation District).

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**Preliminary Actions:** The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and self-introduction of attendees. The July minutes were unanimously approved as presented. The meeting agenda was approved, with the addition of a discussion of County Comprehensive Plan availability and comment timeline.

**November/December combined meeting date:** The By-Laws provide that this date is to be chosen at the September meeting. The Committee selected December 6 as the tentative meeting date subject to confirmation at our October meeting that (1) Mike Moore, the November/December Scribe, can attend, and (2) at least a quorum of other members can attend.

**Comprehensive Plan status:** Stephen explained that a new draft of this plan will be released in a couple of weeks. He will forward it to Committee members when it is available, and members will review the plan and our draft comments on it before our October meeting, so we can revise and add to our comments as needed. The Committee asked Stephen to request Allison Osterberg's attendance at our October meeting to describe the new draft and describe the current status of the possible mineral lands overlay on top of the existing long term agricultural land. (see our April meeting minutes).

**Actions needed to support county farmers:** The Committee developed a list of actions needed to support Thurston County farmers and ensure the continued viability of local agriculture. The Committee selected the following items to serve as the basis for future discussion and later development and implementation of a detailed Committee action plan:

- 1. Rising land taxes.** At our June meeting, Fred Colvin reported a large increase in land value assessments on his farm. Eric noted a similar increase on at least part of his farm. The Committee decided to discuss this issue at

its October meeting with Fred, Eric, and a county representative if Stephen can find one.

- 2. Cost of farm labor.** Falling unemployment and rising wages are making hired labor too expensive for many farmers.
- 3. Availability of farm labor.** In many cases the problem is even worse. Labor is simply unavailable at almost any price.
- 4. Cost of farmland.** In Thurston County farmland is too expensive. At market prices, no farmer can earn enough from farming to pay off a loan taken out to buy the land. To solve this problem, we need a viable PDR/TDR program. We should begin by finding out how successful PDR/TDR programs are working in Pierce and other counties.
- 5. Loss of farmland.** We need a good estimate of how much farmland is left in Thurston County, and then need a strong program to prevent the loss of our remaining farmland.
- 6. Lack of infrastructure.** Thurston County farmers need more storage and processing facilities. We need creative ways to fund such facilities, such as partnerships with port districts and other counties and cities, U.S. visa programs that encourage foreigners to invest, etc. To this end, Stephen is working on a Regional Letter of Intent to address infrastructure needs.
- 7. Low crop, milk, and livestock prices.** This is not an easy problem to solve at the county level. At a minimum more could be done to encourage local residents to buy locally even if the cost is somewhat higher.

**WSU Update:** Stephen described his recent tour of agriculture infrastructure projects in the north Puget Sound area, together with representatives of the EDC, the Port of Olympia, and the Port of Chehalis. As described in sub-paragraph 6, above, the participants are working on a Regional Letter of Intent to address these issues.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:57 p.m.