

## **Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC)**

Minutes of September 22, 2008

12:00 – 2:00 PM

Large Legislative Room, Friday Harbor

**ARC Members Present:** Jane Burton Bell, Peter Corning, Christina Dahl-Sesby, Neal Foley, Todd Goldsmith, Bruce Gregory, Eliza Habegger, Sara Jones, Dana Kinsey, Jim Lawrence, Tom Schultz, Mark Tompkins, Ron Zee

**ARC Members Absent:** Ralph Hahn, Hawk Pingree, Madden Surbaugh

**Friends Present:** Richard Anderson, Linda Degnan-Cobos, Rik Karon, Shannon FitzGerald

**CD/ARC Staff Present:** Eliza Buck, Tim Clark

### **MINUTES**

*Todd Goldsmith moved to approve the May 27, 2008 minutes. Jim Lawrence seconded. Motion unanimously approved. Corrections to be made as identified.*

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Farmland Preservation and Farmer Enrichment Programs: Project Task Force Updates

#### *Farmland Preservation*

Tim Clark has been answering questions from farmers about the Ag Open Space tax relief program audit by the County Assessor. He's responded to 15-20 calls so far.

Eliza Buck received a farmers survey summary from Lovel Pratt. She will forward to the committee.

Eliza Habegger reported that the Land Bank will send out a RFP for the King Sister's property lease in October. They will give a property tour. They will post their criteria. Jim Lawrence is stepping down from the committee. Rik Karon offered to replace Jim.

The Land Bank and the Preservation Trust just purchased the bulk of Wade Sundstrom's property.

#### *Farmer Enrichment*

Tom Schultz reported that the task force has not met over the summer. The agritourism definition was presented to the County Council in July.

Eliza B. noted that the definition will not be included in the code until 2009. The definition needs to be put into the correct format. The definition was also forwarded to the Economic Development Council.

New member Kji McIntyre is interested in joining the farmer enrichment task group.

#### *CAO Update*

Todd Goldsmith reported that they reached an impasse over the shoreline set back buffers. On July 31, a state court decision stripped CAOs in shoreline habitats leaving some of the western Washington counties including San Juan County without protections for shorelines. While this issue is being straightened out at the state level, the CAO review committee is focusing on inland issues. Todd will

forward to the ARC the first of six plans to revise the Unified Development Code (UDC). It will cover critical aquifer recharge areas.

### *Ag Guild Update*

Jane Burton Bell reported that the San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild received a \$30K grant from the state's Community Trade & Economic Development office for permanent farmers' market feasibility studies. Ag Guild project director Lovel Pratt is coordinating the studies with NABC, Vance Corum, David Waldron, and Boundary Waters Structural Engineering. The Ag Guild also received a USDA grant of \$10K for farmers' market promotion. The Ag Guild may partner with the Experience Food Project at the San Juan Island School District by providing a link between local farmers and the project. The Ag Guild also received a \$4K grant from the San Juan Island Community Foundation.

### *Coordinator's Report*

Eliza Buck announced that the County Council has accepted Kji McIntyre of Morningstar Farm on Orcas and Peggy Bill of Lopez Island as new members of the ARC.

Bruce Gregory, Tim Clark and Eliza B. met with Pete Rose about the 2009 budget and it looks like the ARC will be cut. WSU and the ARC will present to the County Council on Oct. 14, 2008 at 1:30 PM to ask for support. Funding for the ARC coordinator's position is in jeopardy, and obvious farmer support is the best way to save it. Everyone was urged to show up.

### *Crow Valley Waterline Proposal Issue*

Dana Kinsey announced that on Sept. 29<sup>th</sup> the County Council will be hearing about a waterline franchise on Orcas Island. The ARC sent a letter to the Council on May 1st expressing concern about the associated development proposal based on the diversion of well water from ag resource lands to a shoreline site 3.4 miles away. The franchise applicant has also submitted an application to the Department of Ecology to extract water from the ag resource land in question at the rate of 10 GPM or 14,440 gallons per day. Danna noted that neighboring farmers and landowners are concerned about the proposal's impact on water in their area.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### *Public Benefit Rating System – Shannon FitzGerald, Sr. Planner, Community Planning & Development*

Shannon FitzGerald from the county planning department was invited to speak to the ARC about the Open Space Program. Shannon handed out documents defining the Open Space Program (Chapter 16.50), a sample of the current public benefit rating system worksheet, and an Open Space Classification questionnaire. She walked through the documents and explained why it was difficult for farmland to qualify for the open space program based on the current public benefit rating system (PBRS). To qualify for the program, the property must receive a rating of at least 30 points and no more than 70 points. The points allotted correlates to the percentage of tax reduction. For example, if a piece of property is rated at 35 points, the tax reduction will be 35%. A team of five people evaluate and assign points to applicant properties for the open space program.

At the request of councilman Bob Myhr, a team including Bob Myhr, Tim Clark, Julie Thompson, Charles Zalmanek and Shannon FitzGerald is reviewing the PBRS criteria to see how it might be revised to make farmland eligible for the open space program. Myhr suggested that the ARC could develop a set of criteria to evaluate farmland for the open space program.

Tim led the committee in a brainstorming session to come up with possible criteria with which to evaluate farmland. Members generated with the following list. The list will be emailed to members for them to prioritize their top 10 criteria. Tim Clark will compile data and present to the PBRS review team.

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Historic use                    | Lease potential                             |
| Fencing                         | Water rights                                |
| Water                           | Fencing                                     |
| Power                           | Size  |
| Arable land                     | Sun exposure                                |
| Barns                           | Drainage                                    |
| Infrastructure                  | Access to markets                           |
| Access roads                    | Orchard                                     |
| Utility buildings               | Absence of noxious weeds                    |
| Soil                            | Wind breaks                                 |
| Exposure                        | Adjoining acreage                           |
| Maintained fields               | Gravel pit                                  |
| Wildlife                        | Wetlands                                    |
| Pond                            | Zoning                                      |
| Lack of deer & foxes            | Late season pasture                         |
| Soil type                       | Southern slope                              |
| Utilities                       | Woodlands                                   |
| Domestic animals                | Farmhouse                                   |
| Adjoining public land           | Low bank shoreline (aquaculture)            |
| Development/Conversion pressure | Ag historic character (cultural)            |
| Conservation easements          | Wildlife infrastructure (bees, birds, bats) |
| Aquifer protection              | Economic potential/ viability               |
| Educational facility            | Farm plan (resource protection)             |
| Forest plan                     | Business plan                               |

*Shared Equipment – Bruce Gregory*

Bruce asked the ARC to consider the types of farm equipment that are needed in the county that could easily be shared and managed by the San Juan Islands Conservation District. The CD has had a compost spreader, but had to retire it due to poor condition and inadequate storage facilities/maintenance.

*Future of the ARC – Eliza Buck*

Eliza B. encouraged the ARC to review their 2008 goals and prepare for 2009. She also stated that the committee could be without staff in 2009 due to county budget cuts. A further discussion on the 2009 goals will take place at the October ARC meeting.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Islands Certified Local T-shirts and bags for sale.

Dana announced that, with the help of the ARC, the San Juan Islands Conservation District sponsored a tour of local island farms for the Washington State Conservation Commission. Several commissioners commented on their changed perceptions on island agriculture and small, diverse farms after the tour.

Dana also announced that the IGFC mobile slaughter unit made the front page of the Wall Street Journal on Sept. 5, 2008. There was an article that tells how the “custom butcher gives small farms new option to sell local produce.”

## **NEXT MEETING**

Our next meeting will be **October 27, 2008, 1:15-3:30 PM** at the Lopez Island Library.