

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

Minutes of December 3, 2007

9:30 – 11:30 AM

Skagit Valley College – Friday Harbor

**ARC Members Present:** Peter Corning, Christine Dahl-Sesby, Eliza Habegger, Katie Hover, Sara Jones, Dana Kinsey, Rebecca Moore, Tom Schultz, Ron Zee

**ARC Members Absent:** Jane Burton Bell, Todd Goldsmith, Bruce Gregory, Ralph Hahn, Jim Lawrence, Chris Lohman, Julie Miller, Mark Tompkins

**Friends Present:** Richard Anderson, Westcott Bay Orchards, Paul Barger, San Juan; Owen Cheevers, Orcas; Candace Jagel, WSU Extension; Bill Watson, SJC Economic Development Council

**CD/ARC Staff Present:** Eliza Buck

### **MINUTES**

The minutes of the November 13, 2007 meeting were unanimously approved with a few corrections. Sara Jones moved to approve minutes and Peter Corning seconded the motion. Tom Schultz noted two typos to be corrected.

#### *Announcements*

Ron Zee shared information about the Focus on Farming IV conference in Snohomish County, specifically the climate change presentation by Chad Kruger from WSU who said the Pacific NW will experience warmer weather, heavier rains in the winter, and longer, drier periods in the summer. There is an ag weather station online – [www.agweathernet.com](http://www.agweathernet.com)

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Ron facilitated the ARC in developing its 2008 work plan. At the last ARC meeting, the group determined that members would prioritize projects for 2008 in advance of this meeting. Two program areas will be the focus: Farmland Preservation and Farmer Enrichment. Regulations can be addressed as needed. Todd Goldsmith will continue to represent the ARC on the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) review committee.

Eliza B. sent out the following list of identified projects to members to rank them by priority. The committee reviewed the results as below (name followed by priority number) and results also included priorities of friends present:

#### *Farmland Preservation*

1. Working with the Assessor's office to create system that helps keep lands in ag deferred tax status. (Bruce-1, Danna-1, Sara-1)
2. Assist Land Bank with Land Leasing agreements. Modify extant documents for local use. (Katie-1, Jim-1 & Eliza H-1)

3. Develop templates for possible farming enterprises. (Peter-1, Bruce-3, Candace-1, Danna-3)
4. Farm worker housing
5. On-line Bulletin Board enhancement (Sara-2, Rich-2)
6. Looking forward project: gathering information on impacts on farming (i.e. climate change, new markets). (Tom-3)
7. Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) grant "Agricultural Conservation Easements Educational Campaign" (Katie-2, Danna-2, Eliza H.-2)

*Farmer Enrichment (formerly Farm Marketing)*

1. Expand Islands Certified Local (ICL) program to included producers and food processors (Rich-3, Rebecca-2, Christina-1, Tom-2)
2. Facilitate development of SJI Permanent Farmers Market (Bill-1, Tom-1, Rebecca-1, Rich-1)
3. Fall Harvest Benefit Dinner (featuring local chefs cooking local foods)

The six projects underlined above were chosen as top priorities for 2008, with the OFP grant and the permanent farmers market being the primary projects.

Christina Dahl-Sesby inquired about the educational value of the ICL program. Eliza B. spoke about the need for frequent letters in the media and how she contacted ICL participants to ask them to write articles. Gretchen Allison submitted an article to be printed in the Journal as a guest editorial. Brian Kvistad of Blossom's Grocery has also agreed to write an article. Eliza B. also talked about including producers and processors in the ICL program.

Eliza Habegger. suggested that item #3 under Farmland Preservation could be moved to Farmer Enrichment. Peter Corning made a case for keeping it under Farmland Preservation.

Members identified their priorities. See names and priority numbers above.

Paul Barger offered to make the December Ballroom Dance event at the Grange into the Harvest Feast. The group felt that a harvest feast might be possible next year.

Kevin Ranker emphasized his interest in developing Land Bank leasing options and a permanent farmers market.

Tom Schultz. suggested that we publicize our projects and invite the public to join in the process. Ron said that we would do that after we determine the priorities. Peter suggested that the *Navigating Our Future* group may be making a resurgence and might be able to get involved.

*Coordinator's Report*

GMO Forum attended by 38 people. New faces were good indicator of effective outreach. Eliza B. shared The Campaign's Take Action packets with the committee.

Attended the Focus on Farming IV Conference, a Snohomish County funded event with 600 people in attendance. Fred Kirschenmann, Distinguished Fellow of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture was the keynote speaker. Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon dedicating substantial resources to building county agriculture. Eliza B. passed around a rack card about the Snohomish Agricultural Advisory Board as an example of what the ARC might consider producing.

Eliza B. acquired a list of food processors in the County to send out a survey about the ICL program to producers and processors.

Thomas Jefferson quote read by Ron:

“Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, and most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands.” Part of the introduction of the New Jersey Smart Growth Plan for Agriculture Report, shared at workshop at the Focus of Farming IV conference. Check out the New Jersey Smart Growth website: <http://www.nj.gov/dca/osg/> to learn more about what they're doing to preserve farmland.

Ron shared an update from Todd Goldsmith about the CAO. The Ruckelshaus Center issued their first report. The State Senate Bill 5248 group has been formed with representatives from the State Grange, Nature Conservancy, State Farm Board and other agencies. A second report will be coming out soon. Todd said that there is some contention in the committee with three distinct “camps” forming: development camp, environmental camp, and everyone in the middle. He'll attend another meeting this week.

Ron revisited the question of moving from a subcommittee structure to a task group structure. In the latter, a member of the task group will need to call for meetings and report to program chairs – Eliza H. for Farmland Preservation and Tom Schultz for Farmer Enrichment. A final decision will be made at the January meeting.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Council member Kevin Ranker presented an update to the ARC.

Kevin thanked the ARC for their good work. He set out to talk out about: County Council monetary support for the ARC from 2008 budget; the green space across from the courthouse as a potential site for the farmers market; and an update on the state/local CAO processes. Katie Hover asked what other county constituents think about agriculture. Peter asked specifically about the Port commissioners. Kevin felt that Port support for ag business development was dependent on the new Port Director. Tom asked about county lodging taxes and how we might access some of those dollars for farm product guides and other promotional materials.

Kevin thanked all of the farmers who showed up at the budget hearings to support the ARC budget request for \$35,000 in 2008. The budget process has changed. The Auditor's office works the budget and gives Council nearly final draft. Pete Rose, County Administrator, asked Council members what

their priorities were and he put them in the budget as he was able. He recommended \$25,000 for the ARC. The Councilors asked Pete to find an additional \$10K to give them the full \$35K. Gene Knapp congratulated the ARC on their work. Kevin thinks the Council members are supportive of the committee, but are challenged to balance the budget. The county has low financial reserves, but he feels that there is enough to cover the 2008 budget including \$35K for the ARC.

**Critical Areas Ordinances:** Kevin stated that there's a big push at the state level to change the Growth Management Act to readdress CAOs. The CAO sets up levels of protection for wetlands and buffers around streams, which will have an impact on local farmers. The CAO update is required by state law every 7 or 8 years and we're going through that process right now. We were supposed to be finished with it last year but we're still not done with it. Some off-island interests are watching closely our CAO process and could harm our ability to work from the community perspective. Katie said she didn't understand exactly how the CAO would impact her operation. Kevin announced that the county will hire someone to do public outreach on the CAO.

Three years ago the county was non-compliant in thirteen areas; now it's down to three. For over a decade we've been non-compliant, which has meant a loss of somewhere between \$2 - \$2.9 million dollars a year through the Growth Management Act. The three areas we need to focus on becoming compliant are the CAO, the Eastsound Urban Growth Area and the Lopez Village Urban Growth Area. Kevin believes that we need to stay together as a county to work through the CAO process. The ARC is critical to this process.

**Farmer's Market:** Kevin proposed that the SJI Farmers Market use the green space across the street from the Courthouse. Two issues with using that space: set up access and the fact that it will be a temporary solution because the county will construct a new building at that site. Kevin thinks the new building is at least 10 years out. He asked the ARC to take it back to the SJI Farmers Market Association to consider as a possibility.

General community sentiment seems to be running toward the need for less (smaller) government. The idea of "subsidizing" local farmers is a difficult sell. We need to better educate our citizens about the importance of agriculture.

**Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (2% tax) LTAC – "Heads & Beds"** Money for promotion of the community. A number of organizations (museums & community centers) received a portion of the funds each year. This year the funds allocation will be reviewed so many new organizations are asking to receive a portion of the \$900K available annually.

**Port of Friday Harbor support:** We won't know which way the Port will go until a new director is on board that won't happen until the middle of 2008.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Sara Jones passed along a notice that the WSDA Small Farms Team made a video about Washington agriculture. Sara & Nick Jones of Barlow Bay Farm and Madden Surbaugh of Steps Winebar & Café were featured in the piece. It can be viewed on-line by going to <http://agr.wa.gov/> and click on *From Our Farms to Your Table* on the right side of the home page. Katie Hover requested that a press release go out about the video.

Candace announced that the Ag Plastics Recycling campaign in November collected 12 tons of plastics and delivered them to Skagit River Steel! They will be doing another collection in the spring.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Organic Seed Growers Conference will take place on February 14 & 15, 2008 in Salem, OR. Eliza B. passed around flyers.

**NEXT MEETING**

Our next meeting will be **January 22, 2008**, time and place to be announced.