

Thurston County Agriculture Advisory Committee

October 19, 2023

<https://youtu.be/ASDmvUXJw7I>

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Members Present: Joe Hannah(chair); Glenn Schorno; Greg Schoenbachler; Gary Kline; Stella Waxwing; Stephen Bramwell (WSU Ext. Ex/o); Nathen Heay (Youth Ex./o) Ashley Arai (Thurston Co. Community Program Manager) Marguerite Afledtt (TCD Ex/o)

Via Zoom: Robert McIntosh; Pat Labine; Jake Yancy; Kevin Jensen

Absent: Chris Doelman; Celeste Winther

Guests: Mike Poteet Pierce Co. Ag. Planner; Warren Neff; Marcie Cleaver; Loretta Seppanen

Call to Order:

Meeting called to order at 7:06 by Joe Hannah

Introductions

Approval of Current Agenda- With changed order of events, Glenn moved to approve, Greg seconded.

Approval of the previous meeting minutes from September 2023- Robert moved to approve. Stella seconded. Committee Approved.

Committee Items Discussed

1. Public Comment, Joe Hanna- None Heard

2. Livestock processing study presentation, Mike Poteet

Mike summarized the 230 page report, stressing page 25 that includes recommendations. The study was funded by Pierce and Thurston Counties.

Farmers are willing to drive up to 50 miles. Facilities must be flexible. No state inspection program due to costs. A local food infrastructure grant is now open. He encouraged the use of the resource on the review panel. Mike will be on the meat category panel and is willing to consult regarding grant proposals. Waste disposal is an issue for mobile slaughtering along with efficiency.

Kevin Jensen explained the difficult costs of rendering offal as well as composting. Gary Kline mentioned adding fines from mining or biochar to waste is very beneficial.

Greg Schoenbachler explained that WSU composting training for commercial producers is a model for the country.

Jake Yancey explained a state inspection program in Montana lowers producer costs. This wasn't looked at in the processing study.

Mike Poteet recommended looking at Oregon for a future cost benefit analysis as it is the most recent adopter of a state inspection program.

Ashley Aria mentioned Thurston County currently doesn't have provisions for a processing facility but Tenino is committed to trying to make it work.

Mike Poteet mentioned that Walts Meats captures and monetizes revenue from waste due to their volume efficiencies.

3. Possible Incentives to Expand Available Farmland at Affordable Prices

Robert McIntosh brainstormed ideas to increase new farmland and help aspiring farmers find land. This included setting aside land for farming purposes versus open space, the county government guaranteeing loans for farm purchases, a bond for grants for farmers seeking to buy unfarmed land, property tax relief for land owners who rent or donate land for farming, and incentives for timberland owners to convert their land to farmland. Gary stressed the importance of quality farmland rather than quantity. Ashley recommended considering water rights. Robert asked for participation in a subcommittee.

4. Bylaw Changes

Robert discussed and summarized bylaw changes the county recently imposed. These included the role of our committee and how we are to advise the county on issues that significantly affect agriculture or other issues requested by the county, member terms extending from two to four years, provisions removed regarding expired membership, how to correct and change bylaws to recommend to BOCC, now states we are subject to OPMA, quorum requirements increased to 50%, amending bylaws now require 60% or greater of appointed committee members, bylaw change recommendations in January versus February, amended bylaws must be forwarded to the BOCC for further approval. Robert noticed the county was working with an outdated set of bylaws. The youth position is not reflected in the county bylaws along with Ashley Arai's position.

5. Long Term Agricultural Zoning Proposal

Robert asked the committee if it should address the failure of the zoning proposal to say anything about compensation for downzoning farmers. Ashley asked for the committee's recommendation and stated it directly falls within the purview of the agricultural committee. Greg stated it is totally appropriate to address downzoning and that farmers should be

compensated. The problem is how it is to be funded. LTA land options and acreages were discussed along with different soil maps. Ashley explained how the LTA tool is difficult to use. Mike opined regarding this issue in Pierce Co. Jake discussed a redfin listing.

Greg made a motion to recommend the BOCC pause downzoning until compensation is addressed. Kevin seconded the motion. Stephen always assumed compensation would be there and would like to see an increased effort regarding the TDR method. Glenn stressed not killing the farmer in order to “save” farmland and an ag. committee should support compensating farmers for down zoning. Ashley explained the importance of compensation to stakeholders during the stakeholders work group. The group wanted to disband if compensation was not going to be on the table. There was discussion regarding the future wise appeal. Ashley explained the TDR collaboration with cities will start next year. There are many different permutations of TDR's including exploring where the county is the driver. It is important to find a multitude of solutions. Jake was concerned about conservation groups not paying taxes. Marcie explained that conservation land is still taxed. Marcie worried Greg’s motion may pause important code amendments. The motion was amended to pause the LTA rezone until the compensation side of the question is addressed. Allow an independent code amendment package to proceed. Motion passed.

Glenn moved to recommend the BOCC refrain from down zoning or adopting devaluating land policies unless land owners are fully compensated. Greg seconded the motion. Jake wanted the county to have the tools to downzone property without compensation. There was discussion of being more specific to agriculture and agricultural land. The motion failed.

6. Joe will reach out to the Ag Tourism committee to come speak.

7. WSU Extension Update

Stephen spoke about the Ag Labor Recovery program. Encouraged meat processors to apply for grants for labor and training. Pac Mountain is where to apply. Funding is extended to find the needs of agricultural employers and employees. There is a grazing association workshop Monday. A meeting was held a couple weeks ago with Land trusts, farmers, and landowners. Rezoning was seen as punitive while conservation easements were seen as more proactive. Multiple funding tools needed. Ashley sent out model conservation easement from the HCP. Needs feedback. A link will be provided.

8. Thurston County District Update

TCD wrapped up legislative update and Orca recovery day. Looking to expand rental opportunities including a new poultry processing unit, PTO manure spreader, and a smaller no-till drill. Rental rates discussed along with future cover crop seed needs.

Jake spoke about Partnerscapes. He explained conservation success stories in Montana.

Robert made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Greg seconded.

