

Thurston County Agriculture Advisory Committee

April 20, 2023

Meeting Minutes

<https://youtu.be/58HGdgHgwEQ>

ATTENDEES:

Members Present:

Joe Hanna (Chair); Jake Yancey (Vice Chair); Pat Labine; Robert McIntosh; Celeste Winther; Chris Doelman; Gary Kline; Greg Schoenbachler; Glenn Schorno; Kevin Jensen; Stella Waxwing; Ex Officio Present: Sarah Moorehead (Executive Director, TCD Staff)

Members Excused Absence:

Stephen Bramwell (WSU Extension Director, Ex Officio)

Guest Speakers:

Ashley Arai (Thurston County Agriculture Community Program Manager)

Guests Present:

Marcie Cleaver (Community Farmland Trust Co-Chair); Sam Payne (Farmer Veteran Coalition); Loretta Seppanen; Robbie (Rutledge Corn Maze); Carolina Mejia (Thurston County Commissioner, District 1); John Pett (Deschutes River Ranch); Paul Daniello (Washington State Conservation Commission, Office of Farmland Preservation)

Called to Order:

- Hybrid in-person/Zoom meeting was called to order at 7:01pm
- Joe announced that future meetings are to take place in person, with a hybrid option for guests and members as needed.
- Introductions of members and guests
- Agenda Review – Joe made changes to the order of agenda items
- Agenda Approval – Motion to approve the agenda (Chris/Gary) - passed
- Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes March 2023 (Glenn/Gary) - passed

Committee Items Discussed:

1. **Public Comment** (Joe Hanna)

-John Pett (Deschutes River Ranch) shared comments regarding Thurston County agricultural zoning, farmer definitions, and support for small farms and farmers; recommended that the Agrotourism Overlay District be designated throughout Thurston County and should be amended to include smaller farms; asked that the Committee make recommendations to expand opportunities for participation in agriculture for all in Thurston County.

-Loretta Seppanen discussed the recent decision by BoCC to approve the Scope of Work for the Comprehensive Plan, which included the goal to update, revise and/or create new agricultural conservation goals with clear measurable policies and metrics for tracking agriculture.

-Marcie Cleaver discussed the agricultural zoning that is currently under review from by the County; expressed some concern about the conservation futures funding that has been a tool for the Community Farmland Trust to purchase easements and farms to lease to younger farmers; expressed interest in working with the County as they move forward in designing new agricultural zoning.

-Sam asked the Committee to support Initiative No. 2004 called Right to Garden.

2. Selection of Scribe Volunteer, Robert McIntosh

-Robert noted that the Committee bylaws call for members to volunteer as scribes for 13 months at a time, but proposed that members volunteer to fill in the months of April 2023 – January 2024.

-The scribes for the remainder of 2023 are as follows:

-April 2023: Stella Waxwing

-May 2023: Jake Yancey

-June 2023: Robert McIntosh

-July 2023: Gary Klein

-August 2023: Joe Hanna

-September 2023: Celeste Winther

-October 2023: Glenn Schorno

-November 2023: Greg Schoenbachler

-December 2023: Chris Doelman

3. Approve Consideration of a By-Law Amendment for Youth Member, Robert/Joe

-Joe Hanna made a motion to discuss a recommendation to BoCC to increase the number of Ex-Officio positions from two to three; the new position would be filled by a representative of

youth in agriculture such as FFA, 4H, the National Young Farmers Coalition, or another similar group. Gary second, discussion ensued.

-Joe and Chris accepted a friendly amendment to specify that the appointment include applicants 20 years old or younger and limited the term to one year.

-Joe called for a vote; motion passed.

4. Approve Consideration of By-Law Amendment, Robert McIntosh

-Joe made a motion to recommend to the BoCC that they redesignate the position of non-farmer member to member at large and increase the number of members at large from the current four to five; also to increase the number of farmer members by one. Gary second, discussed ensued.

-Jake suggested that the non-farmer member position remain as-is instead of changing to member at large; noted that such a change would allow additional farmers to fill those positions and could upset the balance of the Committee.

-Commissioner Mejia clarified that proposal that the BoCC originally wanted to send forward emerged from a discussion about appointments made earlier this year. The BoCC is fine with leaving the Advisory Committee as-is but is open to discussing the addition of more member positions to the Committee in the future.

-Celeste brought up that the Committee is still seeking clarity around definitions of farmer vs. non-farmer members.

-Joe called for a vote; the motion did not carry.

5. Proposed By-Law Changes, Robert McIntosh

-Robert brought up by-law changes that were approved in concept at the previous meeting. The proposal is to add into the section of by-laws dealing with meeting conduct the following sentence: *"In accord with the Thurston County's Handbook for Advisory Boards and Commissions, the Committee shall comply with the Open Public Meetings Act RCW 42.30."* Robert made a motion to adopt the language into the Committee by-laws; Celeste second; motion passed.

-The Committee discussed drawing up language for additional changes in future meetings: authorizing the Chair to schedule August and December meetings if needed; and adding an Ex-Officio position for the County Agriculture Community Program Manager.

-Glenn moved to define the position of Farmer Member based on RCW 82.04.213. Chris second, discussion proceeded with comments and clarifying questions from members.

-Joe Hanna offered an alternate definition based on USDA. Discussion about this with several members.

-Friendly amendment to Glenn's motion for the Committee to produce specific language to discuss and vote on during the next meeting. Glenn and Chris accepted the amendment, motion carries.

6. Update on meat processing, study efforts, PSP (Sarah Moorehead and Ashley Arai)

-Commissioner Mejia commented on the ongoing situation with Puget Sound Processing and meat processing in Thurston County. BoCC has involved the Economic Development Manager, Jennica Machado, in conversations with PSP. They are working with PSP on finding an adequate location to process and are accounting for ecological considerations and environmental health moving forward.

-Ashley shared that she has been working with Jennica Machado and PSP to navigate complex permitting processes. Also discussed the unique case of mobile slaughter units which has recently approved as an allowable use in LTAs, though that use is not yet reflected in a zoning district chapter (last updated in the '90s).

-Sarah shared about the Thurston Conservation District's involvement with PSP and other properties and producers navigate their violations with multiple regulatory entities. They've helped PSP find another location more appropriate for their operation. TCD is also working to improve the permitting process to address regulatory gray areas regarding land use and environmental health in the County, and helping to coordinate different departments, external stakeholders and other organizations to support local meat processing operations while minimizing adverse environmental impacts.

-Sarah shared that USDA has a meat processing grant open, due on July 9, 2023.

7. Agriculture Zoning Code Amendment, Ashley Arai

-Ashley presented an overview of the current process of updating the Agricultural Zoning Code, the LTAs and the development code. Shared results of work with stakeholder group, who stressed the importance of financial compensation for development rights and how changes in development rights impact the borrowing power of farmers; agriculture types and sizes are diverse; more programs are needed to support farmers; explore other tools for protecting farmland; and concern about water availability for new farmers. Members added discussion regarding development rights, zoning and housing density, and water rights.

-Sarah also presented on additional work, including updates to the Agritourism Overlay District and expanding uses in agricultural zoning.

-Greg commented on the mineral lands overlay in relation to the agricultural lands overlay.

-Jake commented on the importance of rocky soils for beef producers, especially during wet springs, and noted they are not included in the definition of "prime farmland soils" despite their importance for livestock producers.

-Sarah discussed prime farmland soils, agricultural water banking and preservation of future growing grounds.

8. Setting Up Subcommittees, Robert McIntosh (10 mins)

-Joe tabled this to be included on next meeting's agenda.

9. Thurston Conservation District Update, Sarah Moorehead (10 mins)

-Southwest Washington Grazing School, WSU Extension, April 21-23

-Grazing Economics webinar, TCD, April 27 @ 6:30pm

-No-till Drill demonstration training, Nelson Ranch, May 20th from 10am-1pm

-The Freedom Farmers program at Olympia High School is seeking letters of support from the community.

-Sarah discussed the need for increased nursery production of native plant stock and seeds for restoration; the Conservation Commission has a new program to bolster nursery production, including private nurseries, and to support organizations like Conservation Districts to increase production of plant stock for restoration.

10. Good of the Order:

-Gary proposed that the tabled agenda item from this meeting (No. 8: Setting Up Subcommittees) be moved to number one next meeting.

11. Adjournment

-Celeste motioned to adjourn, Glenn second – passed. Meeting was adjourned at 9:00pm.