

THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

July 20, 2023

<https://youtu.be/9BVFlpMSD5I>

Meeting Minutes

ATTENDEES:

Members present: Robert McIntosh; Greg Schoenbachler; Nathan Heay (youth Ex/O); Stella Waxwing; Celeste Winther; Gary Kline; Stephen Bramwell (WSU Extension Ex/O)

Via Zoom: Kevin Jensen; Pat Labine; Glen Sherno; Jake Yancey (Vice Chair); Marguerite Afledtt (TCD Ex/Officio).

Members absent: Joe Hanna (Chair) (family matters); Chris Doelman (excused for both June and July meetings).

Guests present: Ashley Arai, (Thurston County Agriculture Community Program Manager), Sam Payne (observer)

PRELIMINARY:

1. Meeting called to order at 7:02 P.M. by Robert McIntosh (Acting Chair). Note: No meeting planned for August.
2. Introductions.
3. Agenda for this meeting, as modified, approved. (Motion, seconded, and passed ("M-S-P")).
4. June meeting minutes approved (M-S-P).

COMMITTEE ITEMS DISCUSSED.

1. Conservation Futures Update (Gary). Gary reported figures on the land purchase application by Nisqually Land Trust. The total estimated cost was \$600,000; amount requested \$350,000; applicant contribution, \$75,000, anticipated salmon restoration fund \$150,000. The application was approved by BoCC.

2. Timberland Zoning. Sam Payne proposes that timberland owners be permitted to include uses other than saw logs that can maximize use for purposes of zoning evaluation and seeks committee support on that proposal and on a proposed legal standing “right to garden“ bill. Robert commented on the prospect of timberland needing to be converted to cropland and to livestock growing owing to rising demand for same (and cropland disappearing) and the implications for long-term agriculture (LTA) zoning.

3. Land Use Zoning in relation to soil types, etc. Ashley gave an extensive presentation and led discussion on upcoming zoning changes in relation to long-term agriculture designations. This gets worked into the County Comprehensive Plan and decisions are expected in December. Ashley urges our committee to make input. She can put members on Planning Commission notices, if requested.

As Robert noted, this is “complicated stuff”. There are two ways of assessing and designating lands for zoning purposes (and in the interest of conserving and protecting agricultural land). One involves designating prime soils. There is a new state law which provides for “farm lands of statewide significance”, evidently to allow greater flexibility for local governments to pull in more land for agricultural designation. This involves standards of parcel size minimums and forming agricultural “blocks”. The other way is the old SCS Land Capability System (8 Classes), apparently modified such that Class 4 now has, or will have, classes 4w and 4s involving threatened species and certain newly permitted primary, secondary and restricted activity uses and structures to be decided upon. Also Classes 1 to 3 are considered prime soils and there may be exceptions involving water availability.

Jake has attended planning meetings and says there is consternation that planning decisions affecting land owners are being made without opportunity for public comment. He expressed concern about mining operations not being required to restore removed soil. Ashley stated this will be required for future mining projects.

Jake stated the Oregon Spotted Frog is not native to Washington and is not protected in this state. Jake is slated to give a talk on land loss, protecting habitats, open space, mapping, etc. in relation to grazing.

Robert wondered in relation to ag land designation and zoning changes whether there is any intent to compensate land owners for loss of development rights. Ashley noted that neither the Planning Commission nor the County Commissioners have any power to influence that.

4. Possible Establishment of Subcommittees. Robert brought up the agenda item regarding establishment of subcommittees to study new areas for the committee to examine relative to making life better for farmers, putting farmers on the land, finding them land, etc.. This applies to new as well as existing farmers. Gary suggested Robert identify some topics for subcommittees . He left that for members to ponder for our next meeting.

Pat brought up that the old agriculture strategic plan (which called for an Advisory Committee) needs revision. How do we promote agriculture in the county? A revised plan could inform comprehensive planning relative to provisions for a thriving agriculture.

[Maybe it's more a matter of improving than promoting].

Ashley suggested we provide input directly to the Planning Commission. She also suggested our committee team up with the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) group for in-depth discussions in regard to the needs of agriculture and presumably consumers of agricultural products.

Ashley would be willing to facilitate discussion sessions. Data exists on farmland loss rate and Robert thinks that when projected it will soon go to 100% (zero farmland left).

Gary inquired about the status of the committee's proposal to the BoCC that Ashley be added as an Ex Officio member of our committee. Robert said we should have that done by our September meeting. This will require a revision to the by-laws.

5. Good of the Order. Farmers win big. Pursuant to his request, Gary gave a presentation about an article he had written on the role of agriculture in climate change and the big, as well as little, constructive actions that can realistically be taken to reverse release of greenhouse gases into the environment, mainly by diverting them into the soil and into crop growth. That article is available to anyone who requests it from Gary. He also offered the idea of the Committee having a booth at the fair to engender support for the Agriculture Advisory Committee's objectives as they impact all county inhabitants. Extension has a number of booths at the fair and Stephen welcomes volunteer support.

6. WSU Extension Update (Stephen). Stephen briefed us on upcoming events that included a soil health workshop at Randle on August 11th; a farmwalk on a 600 acre farm at Elma on July 23rd put on by a farmer's food hub coop; and a new farmer training class. Stephen mentioned an ag labor cost offset program for businesses and a cooperative farmer effort to supply vegetable boxes to offices, etc. A workshop will be held on July 26th at the Mima Road Preserve to demonstrate grazing methods for protection of the Oregon Spotted Frog. Stephen has asked for our ideas on what areas need work by Extension. How can our Committee help?

7. Thurston County Update (Marguerite). Marguerite gave a run-down on recent and upcoming Conservation District activities. There have been a number of cost-share projects (85% refunded by TCD) for fenced enclosures, waterlines and troughs, etc. They had a recent demonstration of their new no-till seeder (on video) and are offering a

fall garden planting class.. Gary points out that though small, we need to appreciate that gardens can give knowledge and inspiration to get into farming. More farmers are needed ASAP. Celeste and Nathan urge us to support youth farmers by bidding on livestock at the fair auction.

ADJOURNMENT. Motion to adjourn M-S-P at 8:48 P.M.