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**COMMUNITY PLANNING &
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

Joshua Cummings, Director

Creating Solutions for Our Future

MEMORANDUM

TO: Thurston County Planning Commission

FROM: Ashley Arai, Natural Resources Planner

DATE: July 20, 2022

SUBJECT: Concept Discussion on Development Code Docket Item A-18, Agricultural Activities Critical Areas

Purpose

The purpose of this discussion will be to introduce the project, share research findings, and explore concepts for moving forward with a code update to the County's critical areas provisions for *new* agricultural activities and facilities.

Background

Officially docketed by the Board in 2020, this project considers updates to Chapter 17.15, *Agricultural Activities Critical Areas* and Title 24, *Critical Areas Ordinance* to integrate with the County's approved Voluntary Stewardship Program Work Plan.

The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) was enacted by the Washington State Legislature in 2011 to create a voluntary process to achieve Growth Management Act critical area protection and agricultural viability goals (RCW 36.70A.700-760). In enacting the Voluntary Stewardship Program, the state legislature allowed counties to "opt into" a voluntary, non-regulatory and collaborative process to maintain and enhance agricultural viability while also protecting and enhancing the functions and values of critical areas, which are evaluated on a watershed basis.

The Thurston Board of County Commissioners opted into the Voluntary Stewardship Program on January 12, 2012 and on April 20, 2017, the Washington State Conservation Commission

formally approved the county’s [VSP Work Plan](#). As approved, this plan covers all *existing and ongoing agricultural activities*, defined in RCW 90.58.065 as:

“(A)gricultural uses and practices including, but not limited to:
Producing, breeding, or increasing agricultural products; rotating and changing agricultural crops; allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie fallow in which it is plowed and tilled but left unseeded; allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie dormant as a result of adverse agricultural market conditions; allowing land used for agricultural activities to lie dormant because the land is enrolled in a local, state, or federal conservation program, or the land is subject to a conservation easement; conducting agricultural operations; maintaining, repairing, and replacing agricultural equipment; maintaining, repairing, and replacing agricultural facilities, provided that the replacement facility is no closer to the shoreline than the original facility; and maintaining agricultural lands under production or cultivation.”

Following approval of the VSP Work Plan, the Department of Commerce recommends a code update to clarify development regulations for any *new agricultural activities and facilities* not covered by the plan.

Who has been engaged on this project?

Staff has engaged Thurston Conservation District and the Agricultural Advisory Committee on the concepts being shared at the July 20th Planning Commission meeting.

Upcoming Work Sessions

- **August 3** – Review proposed code amendments to 17.15 TCC and Title 24