

# **THURSTON COUNTY AGRICULTURE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**September 21, 2023**

<https://youtu.be/R0SF76k8CEQ>

## **Meeting Minutes**

### **ATTENDEES:**

**Members present:** Joe Hanna (Chair); Greg Schoenbachler; Robert McIntosh; Gary Kline; Stephen Bramwell (WSU Extension Ex/O); Ashley Arai, (Thurston County Community Program Manager)

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

**Members absent:** Chris Doelman; Glenn Schorno; Nathan Heay (youth Ex/O); Stella Waxwing;

**Guests present:** Loretta Seppanen; Dana Bowers (Thurston County); Marcie Cleaver; Pat Oelschlager (TCD)

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

Meeting called to order at 7:00 P.M. by Joe Hanna (Chair)

Introductions

Approval of Current Agenda – *Robert moved to approve, Jake seconded, committee approved with no changes.*

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes from July 2023 – *Robert moved to approve with a proposed change to correct the spelling of his last name, Gary seconded, committee approved with proposed change.*

### **COMMITTEE ITEMS DISCUSSED**

#### **1. Public Comment, Joe Hanna**

Joe welcomed any guests to provide any public comment – none heard.

#### **2. Ag Projects Update & Transition Plan, Ashley Arai**

Ashley updated the committee on her new position as Community Planning Manager which oversees her former position as Agriculture Program Manager (recruitment ongoing for former position which closes

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October 5th). Introduced Dana Bowers as someone helping her out in the interim.

Ag zoning project is now before the board of county commissioners (BOCC), has had two briefings, next step is setting up a public hearing (not date set yet.) A lot of information for them to consider in making a decision. Proposal includes a lot of code amendments and updates to the ag tourism overlay to make improvements, as well as a lot of changes to the long-term ag zone. Hopefully the ag zoning effort doesn't hold up the code amendments. Commissioners are accepting public comments ahead of the hearing. Robert asked if the area that the ag tourism covers will remain the same in the south half of the county, Ashley said the boundary is currently proposed to remain, but that they didn't have time to really work on it so to please forward your comments or suggestions to the commissioners.

Long Term Ag (LTA) zoning has had a lot of outreach, fairly restricted due to state standards and have heard that it doesn't really fit. 'Thurston 2045' project will be kicking off soon and will include more work on ag zoning. Joe asked if the county had the funding to compensate landowners for the zoning changes, and if not – why are we in such a rush and not waiting for the USDA census? Pressure from ongoing lawsuit makes it hard to coordinate anything like a TDR program. Greg asked if any kind of risk analysis has been done on the legal ramifications if something like this goes through. Ashley said that kind of direction needs to come from the BOCC. Robert asked about notices of public hearings to the committee, Ashley said there's a link on the county website to sign up for notices. Kevin asked about how the timeline works and why this feels so rushed to push through without any kind of compensation. Ashley explained that some parts of this effort fall under the lawsuit appeal, and some aren't. She's happy to meet with anyone to better understand.

### **3. Skookumchuck Water Rights, Ashley Arai**

Centralia steam plant closing down and water rights are available. Kevin attended the briefing. The county has put some proposals together and

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got them before the BOCC. BOCC going through the steps to determine the permit needs to purchase and develop this water bank. Second piece of this will be applying to get grant dollars to comply with Hirst decision. The third part is thinking about longer term water allocation and how to support agriculture in Thurston County. Stephen asked if any neighboring counties have come up with anything yet – Ashley said they are in the same place we are but would be partners in applying for grants. Lots of public support to the county to purchase as many water rights as they can. Kevin has been in the dam discussions. He said there are three options – the least favorable seems to removal. More interest in modifying and managing the dam for fish and water. Study being done right now on the dam, river, and options. Kevin will send it out when he sees it completed.

### **4. Pasture Fertilization Discussion, Gary Kline**

Gary presented a paper on the cost/benefit of pasture fertilization. He will forward a copy to Ashly Downs to send to committee. Suggested a book if anyone is interested in learning more.

### **5. Mapping Technology Presentation, Jake Yancey**

Jake went to a conference with Working Lands for Wildlife and wanted to share a mapping tool they have called the Landscape Explorer (<https://www.landscapeexplorer.org/>). Could be a useful tool for the committee to use in discussions to see how our county has changed and how it can go forward. Lots of observations and comments.

### **6. Livestock Study, Mike Poteet**

No discussion

### **7. Election Reminder, Joe Hanna**

Reminder that committee elections are coming up (January of each even numbered year.)

Joe also said that the committee still needed to make a recommendation to the BOCC to add the agricultural community program manager as an

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ex-officio position to the committee. *Robert made the motion, Pat seconded, committee approved.*

Joe also asked if the committee would be interested in requesting that someone from the ag committee be on the interview panel for the agricultural community program manager. Consensus of the committee was that this would be good. Joe will send a request that Robert will be our representative with Joe as secondary if schedules conflict.

### **8. Thurston Conservation District Update, Marguerite Afledtt**

Marguerite reminded everyone about the Harvest Festival on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October. Introduced Pat Oelschlager as new farm planner. Also have the no-till drill available for rent now.

### **9. WSU Extension Update, Stephen Bramwell**

SWW Growers Cooperative harvested approximately 20 rail cars worth of grain. Food hub program has grown. Farm to school program continuing and growing. Farm walks are still happening. Working on marketing for buckwheat to demonstrate potential marketing opportunities for products. SW WA Grazing Association will have two events coming up this fall – dates TBD.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned by Joe.