

Agricultural Resources Committee

Minutes of April 24, 2007

2:00 – 4:00 PM

San Juan Island Grange, Friday Harbor

ARC Members Present: Jane Burton Bell, Christine Dahl-Sesby, Eliza Habegger, Todd Goldsmith (via phone), Bruce Gregory, Sara Jones, Danna Kinsey, Jim Lawrence, Julie Miller, Rebecca Moore, Tom Schultz, Madden Surbaugh, Ron Zee

ARC Members Absent: Ken Akopiantz, Peter Corning, Ralph Hahn, Mark Tompkins

ARC Friends Present: Richard Anderson, Westcott Bay Cider; Elaine Kendall, San Juan Island; Suze Kellogg, San Juan Island; Holly Kent, Lopez; Cloud McCauley, San Juan Island; Jim Sesby, Heritage Farm; Bill Watson, EDC staff; Peggy Weir, San Juan Island; Charles Zalmanek, County Assessor

CD/ARC Staff Present: Eliza Buck

MINUTES

The minutes of the March 27, 2007 meeting were approved as written. Sara Jones moved acceptance, and Julie Miller seconded the motion. Minutes were unanimously approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Holly Kent is starting a farm on Lopez Island on pastureland designated as ag resource. Because they will be disturbing over 2,000 sq. ft. of area they will need to create a storm water management plan with a licensed engineer in order to get a building permit. According to the State, if you have over 5% impervious area (roofs, driveways and sacrifice areas) you have to have mitigation. Driveways are calculated as 12 ft. wide whether the actual drive is “two ruts in the road.” Kent’s impervious area added up to 9.4%. Their options are to install a \$30K pond with special filtration or they could set aside 65% of their land for native vegetation. The problem is that the property has been pastureland for over 90 years, and if they let 65% of the 7.6 acres go back to native vegetation there would be only be 25% of the property left for the farm. As farms get smaller in the islands, the existing regulations about impervious surface will become a big obstacle.

Kent said that public officials are trying to be helpful but this is a state law and it will take legislative changes to remedy the situation. A farm plan should be a tool to help alleviate this sort of regulatory restriction. Kent asked for suggestions on how to work with the Council and other legislators on this issue. Please contact her at 468-3195 or email kent402@rockisland.com.

Ron Zee recommended that the Farm Regulation Subcommittee stay on top of this issue. Todd Goldsmith reported that there has been new legislation sitting on the Governor’s desk to sign, which will put CAOs in relation to farmlands on hold until 2010. [For more information see <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?year=2007&bill=5248>]

Ron Zee welcomed Danna Kinsey of Orcas Island as a new committee member of the ARC.

OLD BUSINESS

Presentations were made by each of the subcommittees.

Marketing

Tom Schultz presented for the Marketing Subcommittee.

- Permanent farmers market: subcommittee taking a “wait and watch” stance because of the current efforts of the SJI Grange and the SJI Natural Food Coop group. The Grange is working with the state Grange to clear up issues. The Coop group is conducting a feasibility study.
- Farm and product signage: subcommittee decided to table this project until further notice.
- Local products certificate program: subcommittee asked Eliza B. to follow up with contacting the survey recipients to determine support. Subcommittee discussed idea of calling it a “recognition” rather than a “certification” because we have no way to enforce it. Madden made a case for continuing to use the certification concept. He also stated that he wanted the Granges and the Farmer’s Markets to endorse the program. After much discussion, Ron recommended that the committee take action on giving the ARC Coordinator and a three-island representative volunteer action team the responsibility of getting the certification/recognition program underway. Julie moved to approve an action team to develop a certification program for local food establishments, which recognizes their use of local food products. Sara Jones seconded. Members approved unanimously. Todd Goldsmith recommended that food establishments that use QuickBooks could create a graph of local food used as a way of verifying percentages.
- Food system assessment: WSU Small Farms Team is currently looking at doing food assessments. The kinds of data coming out of such studies would help with grant writing and leveraging other resources for the county. The subcommittee decided that the assessment be headed up by the WSU Extension Friday Harbor Office. Tom asked for ARC assistance in determining the indicators chosen for the study.

Julie Miller reported on the Orcas Farmer’s Market rent issue.

- Julie met with Council Member Alan Lichter, Parks Director Donna Withnow, and County Administrator Pete Rose. No decisions or actions have been taken, but there was an agreement that options should be explored.

Preservation

Eliza Habegger and Sara Jones presented for the Preservation Subcommittee.

- Sara and Eliza Buck are still working on a bulletin board prototype. Eliza handed out a sample of the instructions text and a snapshot of the home page. Eliza asked committee members to go to working webpage and enter items on bulletin board (forum) as well as come up with issues or questions. Rex Doane continues to assist with website and forum. Members recommended two new topics to be

added to the forum: Opportunities & Internships and Questions & Comments for the ARC.

- Eliza proposed that the ARC sponsor a workshop about land leasing to farmers. Mary Embleton of the Cascade Harvest Coalition would come to speak about the Washington FarmLink program and the ARC could talk about opportunities in the County. This would be an informal event where landowners could meet potential lessees. Todd Goldsmith mentioned that American Farmland Trust has a program to place a covenant on farmland.
Ask Mary Embleton to come to an ARC meeting.
- Danna Kinsey was invited to join the Farmland Preservation Subcommittee, and accepted.
- Jim Lawrence announced that the next farm worker housing meeting with the Home Trust will take place on May 3 at 4:00 pm at the Conservation District office, 540 Guard Street, 1st floor.

Regulation

Todd Goldsmith presented for the Regulation Subcommittee.

- Todd reported that the subcommittee recommendations were sent to the County Council and the respective agencies – Board of Health, Community Development & Planning, and the Fire Marshall. As of this meeting no action taken on any of the recommendations by these agencies or the County Council.
- Todd met with Steve Hussey of the Stormwater Advisory Committee to learn more about the new Stormwater Utility Tax.

Elaine Kendall presented on the GMO moratorium.

- Handed out a flyer on the Precautionary Principle.
- Major honeybee die off in eastern US. Not sure what's killing them. GM products not effectively regulated. Could there be a correlation? She gave an example of DDT and it's health consequences.
- Asked to post a list of links exploring the GM issues. Members approved.
- Tom Schultz will look into having speakers for an educational forum on GMOs and coordinate with Elaine and Eliza B.

Coordinator's Report

- Ron presented the issue of funds for the ARC Coordinator position and how they might best be allocated, noting that Eliza B is working more than 50% time at present. Ron presented a rough draft budget to the County Council on 4/17 at their request. There has been no County funding for the ARC position so far. The Conservation District is the sole funder currently and that money will run out this summer. The Conservation District is not inclined to provide additional support without support from the County. Madden put forward a motion to increase the ARC Coordinator's position to .6 FTE beginning on May 1. Bruce seconded the motion. Members approved.

NEW BUSINESS

Presentation by Charles Zalmanek, San Juan County Assessor

- Considers himself an agricultural person. He worked in soil conservation at the Soil and Water Conservation District in Lincoln County, Oregon.
- There are three designations:
- Open Open Space (no minimum size) – to protect native species administered by the County Council based on a point rating system (scenic, cultural);
- Open Space Timber and Designated Forest Land. The Open Space Timber program (under 20 acres) is administered by the County Council. The Designated Forest Land (20 acres and over) is administered by the Assessor. Both programs are for commercial production. Trees must have a Forest Management Plan, which is compiled by a certified forester.
- Open Space Farm and Agriculture (no minimum size) was created by the Open Space Act in 1968 and the idea is to preserve farmland for future generations by giving substantial tax breaks. Boarding horses does not qualify. There are minimum income requirements: \$1,500 for up to 5 acres; \$200 p/acre for farms 5-20 acres; and required but no standard for farms over 20 acres. Farm plans are required. Assessor likes to see plans created by the Conservation District. This is a tax deferral program if you should move it from the program, there will be penalties. When land comes out of the program, the difference between taxes at the current market value and the current use value (\$290 – \$580 p/acre) and the mill rate is applied (x 1,000), plus an interest rate of 1% per month (12% compounded) for up to 7 years up to 84% for the 7th year, plus a penalty of 20%. The penalty only goes back 7 years. Income is required for 3 of the last 5 years to qualify for the program. Thirty-three percent of the County is in an open space designation. Law requires that the home site be integral to the farm or it must be taxed at market value. There is no relationship between zoning and the open space act. There is an open space designation from the planning department, which has a 9 point criteria for agricultural open space. The Open Space Program is a public benefit. The tax break is passed on to the rest of the community. A new landowner can apply for a continuance on a property that is already designated as Open Space Farm and Agriculture. San Juan County is a budget-based system and it has the lowest mille rate (tax rate per \$1000) in the state.

Recommendation to the San Juan County Council on Climate Change

Ron presented a draft recommendation to the committee. There was not enough time for members to act on the draft. It will be reviewed at the May meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ron suggested the election of subcommittee chairs at the May meeting to coincide with the election of officers.

NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be **Tuesday, May 22** at the Steps Wine Bar and Café in Friday Harbor from **2:00 pm to 4:00 pm**.