

Agricultural Resources Committee

Minutes of April 27, 2009

12:00 – 2:00PM

Whidbey Island Bank, Friday Harbor

ARC Members Present: Jane Burton Bell, Bruce Gregory, Eliza Habegger, Sara Jones, Dana Kinsey, Kji McIntyre, Hawk Pingree, Mark Tompkins, Madden Surbaugh, Peter Corning (Todd Goldsmith available for vote on minutes).

ARC Members Absent: Tom Schultz, Ralph Hahn, Peggy Bill, Jim Sesby

Friends Present: Susan Key, Christina Sesby-Dahl, Vicki Heater, Barbara Rosenkotter, Shireene Hale

ARC Staff Present: Tim Clark

MINUTES

Todd Goldsmith moved to approve the March 23, 2009 minutes. Bruce Gregory seconded. Motion unanimously approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Christina Sesby-Dahl informed the ARC of the Small Farms Conservancy, headed by Larry Brewer, and found on the web at www.smallfarmsconservancy.org. The group is helping Christina with an audit from the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries. L&I is scrutinizing the use of interns and their compensation. Kji knew of an L&I audit in Oregon.

OLD BUSINESS

Farm Wheel ICL Promotion

Kji McIntyre reported on progress with the Farm Wheel ICL promotion. The event will be limited to San Juan and Orcas Islands. The group is talking with the magazine Edible Seattle about advertising. There was concern over how much this would help local agriculture. It was explained that this is a promotion of the ICL program, to put pressure on local businesses and farms that have not yet joined. Bicycling tourists were targeted as a group known to seek out local food, which would be a 'greener' alternative to tourists in automobiles.

Permanent Farmer's Market

Jane Burton Bell reported that the Ag Guild has committed to the Nichols Street property, and that fundraising will soon start to raise approximately \$400,000.

NASS Survey

Eliza Buck had asked that the ARC decide whether to continue with the process of sending out a survey through the NASS. The ARC would provide single page surveys and stamped return envelopes. The NASS would mail the surveys using their database of farms in San Juan County. Susan Key noted that the Conservation District had added two questions to the survey to provide information that may be helpful in writing grants. Hawk Pingree volunteered to help with the data. *Jane Burton Bell moved to approve the*

plan to work with the NASS in sending out a survey. Bruce Gregory seconded. Motion unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

Water Element of the San Juan County Comprehensive Plan

Vicki Heater explained that the Water Board had been looking at the water supply for the entire county. Last year's decision not to export water from agricultural lands in Crow Valley to a residential parcel has spurred discussion around water needs for the future. It is now possible to plan for buildout, and the committee has been looking at methods to achieve that planning. Vicki thanked the ARC for their questions, and noted that the draft water element had changed after those questions were aired. Metering is the best method available to gauge water use, and will establish documented use should there be questions about water rights in the future. Only new wells are required to meter their use, unless saltwater intrusion occurs. Agricultural users benefit from documentation and can see patterns of use. Ultimately, there would be a water budget for the entire county. Susan Key pointed out that with increased impervious surfaces and increased population, there will be less water. But without data, there is no way to know how much less water there is. Tim reported on a climate change report for Washington State that predicted the same or greater volumes of precipitation for this area, but concentrated into shorter time periods. The Yakima Valley may lose much of its irrigation water in the next sixty years, and San Juan County needs to conserve its water resources if it wants to take up the slack in fruit production. Todd expressed concern that agricultural water storage was not covered. Vicki pointed out the paragraph on agricultural ponds, but stressed that ponds needed to be carefully constructed to avoid negative impacts on wildlife, especially fish. Eliza H. pointed out a need to differentiate between ponds for agriculture, water storage, and aesthetics.

Susan had recently attended a seminar on erosion and sediment control, which was mostly attended by contractors and landscapers. Permits for new development will require calculation of impervious area and lead to vegetated drainage pathways, especially for parking areas. Madden stressed the need to reduce the amount of impervious area in the planning stage, to avoid the impacts rather than mitigate them.

Shireene posed the question of whether upstream polluters should need permission for development from the downstream population. Susan emphasized that we need to look on the watershed level as to how to get water into the ground. Shireene mentioned that there are Best Management Practices for infiltration, and that the Growth Management Act includes definitions of Best Available Science, No Net Loss of Wetlands, and other terms. The overall goal is habitat enhancement. Barbara said that local stream data (except for Lopez) should be available in May on the county web site. The state has a good brochure on water rights, which is available at the Conservation District.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00PM.