

Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC)

Minutes of March 23, 2009

12:00 – 2:00 PM

Whidbey Island Bank, Friday Harbor

ARC Members Present: Peggy Bill, Jane Burton Bell, Todd Goldsmith, Bruce Gregory, Eliza Habegger, Sara Jones, Danna Kinsey, Jim Lawrence, Kji McIntyre, Hawk Pingree, Tom Schultz, Jim Sesby, Mark Tompkins

ARC Members Absent: Peter Corning, Ralph Hahn, Madden Surbaugh

Friends Present: Richard Anderson, Tim Clark, Bill Watson

ARC Staff Present: Eliza Buck

MINUTES

Todd Goldsmith moved to approve the January 27, 2008 minutes with noted corrections. Jim Sesby seconded. Motion unanimously approved.

Todd Goldsmith moved to approve the February 23, 2008 minutes. Sara Jones seconded. Motion unanimously approved.

Eliza Buck read a resignation letter from Neal Foley. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Neal can no longer serve on the ARC.

OLD BUSINESS

Update on farmland mapping project – Tim Clark gave an update on the project and shared preliminary maps. Soil surveys have changed soil classifications in the last several years from some 20 to 52 soil types. Initially, the soil classifications of earlier soil surveys matched up with agricultural resources lands (ARL), however, the current classifications do not. Tim chose to combine various data (new soil survey prime agricultural soils plus existing active farms) to come up with what he thinks is a more accurate picture of agricultural land in the county. He also is considering production amounts such as how much hay is being produced. His system is much more inclusive than earlier county maps of farmland. Tim is looking at 2 acres parcels with at least an acre of agricultural production. There are 4,700 qualifying parcels. He chose this process after speaking to several growers who were making a living on farming less than an acre. Tim will also try to identify what is being grown on each of the parcels. He will need help from islanders on San Juan and Orcas who are knowledgeable about island farms. The final products of this process will be two sets of maps: 1) all agricultural parcels that could be farmed and 2) crops and products of each parcel. He will use a similar color-coding system that was developed by Snohomish County.

The committee recommended that we contact NASS to see about getting information to the 291 SJC farms of the 2007 AG Census. We will ask them if they can send a mailing to them on our behalf in order to collect more information about what they are growing as well as water usage.

Report on SJI food critical needs meeting – Eliza B. reported that some 25+ community leaders from social services, food establishments, WSU Extension, the San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild and the ARC shared their perspectives on key San Juan Island (and county-wide) food issues and what they are currently doing to assist people in need. The San Juan Island Community Foundation is interested in prioritizing actions that will be of most benefit to the community. Tom Schultz noted that the food work group identified two immediate projects to consider: the need to locate a place for the Friday Harbor

High School greenhouse and finding a way for food establishments to be able to donate excess prepared foods to groups that can distribute them. The work group will meet again on April 3, 2009. Eliza B. will present ARC priorities and recommendations at that time.

Report on Farm Wheel ICL promotional events – Kji McIntyre gave an overview of the event. The goal will be to sign up 40 people daily for self-guided bicycle tours of the islands with stops at farms and a farm lunch. Tours will be on Sept. 29, 30 & Oct. 1 and on Oct. 6, 7, & 8. Each day will feature a different island, for example, Sept. 29 may be on Lopez, Sept. 30 on Orcas and Oct. 1 on San Juan. Riders will receive a map with a suggested route, designated stops with possible farm presentation, a lunch on a farm prepared by an ICL food establishment, and courtesy support (a rover to assist with flat tires or emergencies, refreshments, etc.) Kji, Madden Surbaugh, and Eliza Buck are currently heading up this effort. Volunteers are needed. Some questions about liability insurance and logistics will determine the feasibility of the project. Members expressed concern about the level of commitment such as project entails. There was a suggestion that we get some outside assistance with projecting numbers and project feasibility.

Update on reserving water for AG Resource Lands – Danna Kinsey provided an update on attending the March 9 meeting of the Water Resource Management Committee. They had not received the letter from the ARC about the new water element proposal due to staff illness. They discussed water desalinization and the rewrite of the water element of the comprehensive plan.

NEW BUSINESS

Water Element of the San Juan County Comprehensive Plan – Danna Kinsey reviewed the Feb. 18, 2009 draft of the county water element. This document does not contain the water element proposal from the WRMC that the ARC has been reviewing.

Below are some sections that the ARC will carefully consider:

Under “General Goals and Policies”

4.2.A.2 – Preserve and restore predevelopment infiltration and runoff patterns, particularly in watersheds that support anadromous (migratory) fish. *This will be something that could significantly impact farmland management practices and could impose restrictions on some farm operations. How are “predevelopment” states determined? Is this “pre-human”, “pre-settler”, or based on a specified date?*

4.2.A.3 – Support environmentally responsible, sustainable agriculture that protects water quality, promotes infiltration of runoff, and integrates agricultural activities with wildlife habitat and the natural environment.

4.2.A.4 – Promote the retention of native soils, vegetation and forest cover, and discourage the conversion of land to lawn, structures, roads, and other impervious areas that contribute to the volume, rate and pollution of runoff.

4.2.A.5 – Encourage reuse of greywater as a water conservation practice. *Could this impact organic certification?*

4.2.A.6 – Improper use and disposal of chemicals and pharmaceuticals can harm people, animals, and the environment. To improve the management of these substances, develop and fund programs designed to raise public awareness of the hazards associated with chemicals; b) reduce the use of pesticides, fertilizer, and other chemicals that can contaminate ground and surface water; and c) enhance hazardous waste disposal opportunities on all populated islands.

Under “Stormwater Goals and Policies”

4.2.C.4 – Continue to prohibit the unauthorized discharge of runoff or diverted groundwater into County ditches. *The issue here is that water goes from County ditches into farmland as well as the other way around.*

Under “Fish, Wildlife and Native Habitat – Goals and Policies”

4.2.D.1 – Protect stream, shoreline and wetland buffers which are necessary to help remove contaminants and ensure good water quality and habitat. *Wetland buffers will be a major issue for livestock operations.*

4.2.D.2 – Man-made ponds can disrupt natural drainage patterns, increase water temperatures, result in increased evaporation of water, and negatively impact downstream wetlands, habitat and the fish and wildlife that depend on them. The construction of ponds within drainage ways is prohibited by WAC 222-110-180. For ponds in other areas, ensure that State and local regulations are adequate to prevent negative impacts to fish, wildlife and native habitat. *Ponds have traditionally been important and valuable assets to farming operations. Agricultural ponds may be grandfathered in.*

The ARC requested that key people in the water discussion, specifically Shireene Hale, Barbara Rosenkotter, Mary Knackstedt, and Vicki Heater, be invited to the next ARC meeting to further the discussion about the water element.

Discussion:

Should the ARC move to the Economic Development Council (EDC)? – Bill Watson, EDC Program Coordinator, gave an overview of the option and answered questions.

The EDC receives county funds through the .09 Funds, which is a state sales tax pool for economic development capital projects and county economic development agencies. The EDC could apply for additional .09 Funds to support another staff position at the EDC. The ARC coordinator could be funded through that scenario. The EDC is an independent non-profit, which enables them to fundraise through a wide variety of avenues.

No decision was taken.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

AG Plastics Recycling will take place again this fall. Sign up to help out. Contact Danna Kinsey at the Conservation District or Kris Bayas at WSU Extension.

Do you have compost materials to share? Old hay, manure, etc. The ARC will help compile a list.

NEXT MEETING

The next ARC meeting will be Monday, April 27, 2009 from 12 – 2 PM at the Whidbey Island Bank Community Room. The May meeting will be at Whidbey Island Bank in Friday Harbor from 12 – 2 PM on May 18th.