

## **Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC)**

Minutes of November 24, 2008

12:00 – 2:00 PM

Large Legislative Room, Friday Harbor

**ARC Members Present:** Peter Corning, Todd Goldsmith, Bruce Gregory, Sara Jones, Dana Kinsey, Jim Lawrence, Tom Schultz, Jim Sesby, Madden Surbaugh,

**ARC Members Absent:** Jane Burton Bell, Neal Foley, Eliza Habegger, Ralph Hahn, Hawk Pingree, Mark Tompkins

**Friends Present:** Richard Anderson, Christina Dahl-Sesby, Lovel Pratt, Layne Sundberg

**CD/ARC Staff Present:** Eliza Buck, Tim Clark

### **MINUTES**

*Todd Goldsmith moved to approve the September 22, 2008 minutes. Madden Surbaugh seconded. Motion unanimously approved.*

*Todd Goldsmith moved to approve the October 27, 2008 minutes. Jim Lawrence seconded. Motion unanimously approved. Corrections to be made as identified.*

Welcome new ARC member **Jim Sesby**, co-owner of Heritage Farm on San Juan Island.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Christina Dahl-Sesby, co-owner of a small raw milk dairy, addressed the ARC about her struggle with ever stiffening regulations. She recently attended the Tilth Producers conference and asked WSDA Food Safety Manager Claudia Coles if the WSDA program represented the interests of the consumer or the farmer. Coles responded that they represent the consumer. Christina proposed that there be a farmer advocate or liaison to help farmers with regulatory issues.

Layne Sundberg, owner of Quail Croft, also spoke to the ARC about regulatory issues being strictly interpreted by the WSDA inspectors. She reported that in the past the State had formed an advisory board to deal with inspector/farmer conflicts, however, the committee was inactive and ultimately dissolved.

It was pointed out that in the San Juan County food handlers license classes the instructor warns participants not to drink raw milk and says that people get sick every year from the milk sold by the monastery dairy on Shaw Island. This negative portrayal of raw milk is detrimental to our licensed and legal dairies.

This issue will be brought up again when our County liaison, Mark Tompkins, is present at the next ARC meeting. Eliza will make sure that Tompkins can be in attendance.

Todd Goldsmith recommended that the ARC write a letter to the WSDA Food Safety Program, WSDA Director, and to the Governor about the heavy handedness of the inspectors and request that the State hire an impartial “ombudsman” to mediate between farmers and regulators.

Peter Corning recommended that we work through our newly elected State Senator, Kevin Ranker, to help establish an initiative in the legislature to create an advocacy person or an appeals board.

Jim Sesby requested that the small dairy farmer have access to the lab results of state inspectors. These test results would enable the small farmers to track changes and adjust accordingly.

Christina and Layne were asked to come to the December meeting where a discussion of regulatory issue will continue.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Farmland Preservation and Farmer Enrichment Programs: Project Task Force Updates**

#### *Farmland Preservation*

Eliza Buck read a report submitted by Eliza Habegger on the King Sister's property lease RFP. The Land Bank has sent out 16 application packets. Applications due Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>. Eight people attended the first property tour. She's heard rumblings that some farmers feel that the low lease price will give the lessee an unfair advantage. There has also been some concern about dogs being allowed on the proposed trail that will run along the property boundary.

Tim Clark reported on the Public Benefit Rating System rework for the farm and agricultural conservation lands section of the Open Open Space program. The Department of Revenue recently froze any action by Assessors on the Open Open Space program due to a conflict on the definition of "commercial agriculture."

Tim handed out a draft list of the criteria. There will be points for the size of the parcel: more points for larger parcels. Water, soil types and conservation easements also gain points. Soil ratings that are being proposed are based on the NRCS based classifications – prime, prime if irrigated or drained. not agricultural. Questions were raised about soil rating and water criteria. Soil classification could focus on fertility. Water availability and quantity warrants more points. Todd recommended a threshold. Peter suggested that water should receive more points.

Hawk Pingree sent a message to the ARC that he would like to see parcel size criteria consideration, i.e. give more points for successfully managed small parcels.

Lovel Pratt, guest speaker, recommended that there should be points for Ag Resource Land designation. She also hoped that there was language that would incorporate the conversion from DFL to Timber Open Space to move into Open Open Space program. Tim said that the Open Space Program will be revised at a future date, however, the farm and agricultural conservation lands section was on a fast track in response to the AOS audit. So far there have been 7 or 10 applications for this new program.

#### *Farmer Enrichment*

Tom Schultz reported that the task force met and talked about promoting the ICL program, finalizing the definition of agritourism, new members for the Farmer Enrichment groups as well as new ARC members, and the possible changes of the task group structure back to the sub-committee structure.

*Sara Jones motioned to accept the agritourism definition as written and have it forwarded to Community Development and Planning Department and to the Economic Development Council. Jim Sesby seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.*

The ICL task group would like to purchase an ad in a Seattle metro publication to promote the program. The Experience Food Program will also be invited to join the ICL program. Purchasing a button on sanjuanislander.com and publishing a rack card to be placed in vacation rentals were also considered. The task group is exploring a farm tour in May of the participating ICL farms followed by a farm dinner.

#### *CAO Update*

Todd Goldsmith reported that last week the County Council passed the resolution for the Critical Aquifer Recharge Area (CARA) portion of the CAO. They modified the document sent from the committee to not designate the entire county as a CARA, but rather use the maps for the next two years. The Water Resources Committee generated the maps through a consultant who was informed by the Department of Ecology. The next section the review committee will work on will be the fish and wildlife section.

[Amended: Goldsmith later corrected the update to report that the County Council voted 5 to 1 to accept the CAO Review Committee's and Planning Commission's recommendations on CARA. The entire county will be classified as a CARA. The Council will review the mapping approach in two years.]

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

Lovel Pratt, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild Project Director, reported on the progress of the permanent farmers market (PFM) feasibility study. The Ag Guild has raised \$44,000 for the permanent farmers market project since they formed in February 2008. They received a \$30,000 grant from the Community Trade & Economic Development office to do a feasibility study of two possible sites for the PFM. She brought architectural renderings and site plans of the two sites under consideration – the Nichol Street property (aka Boede) and the old Brownes lumber yard on Spring Street. The Nichol Street property is the Guild's primary choice. It is the only remaining historic industrial building in the downtown core.

The Town of Friday Harbor and the San Juan County Land Bank are interested in the preservation of this building. The SJC Land Bank has allocated \$600,000 of their budget to purchase the property and the historic easement is worth \$400,000. They would like to be reimbursed \$200,000. There is a purchase and sale agreement at that value effective until December 1, 2008. After that the person holding the contract has the choice to purchase the property.

The feasibility study needs further work for completion. Vance Corum was hired to advise. The NABC is providing technical assistance on the budgets for the feasibility study. The Ag Guild will need to begin raising funds for the remodel and reimbursement to the SJC Land Bank.

The County Fairgrounds was originally considered, however, the San Juan Island Farmers Market Association surveyed members and decided that they prefer to be in the downtown core.

The Ag Guild is taking a conservative approach to the projected operating budget and using current revenue numbers generated by the Saturday Farmers Market; they will add on (projected) numbers for a Wednesday market.

The Nichol Street property has only 16 parking spaces. There has been some talk about running a shuttle from the Courthouse parking lot. This would be based on “veggie valets” used by some farmers markets. Vendors could use flatbed carts (a la Costco) to move their produce into the market.

Cool and cold storage are also planned for the site based on the numbers gathered from the food producers survey. Commercial kitchen facilities at the school districts are being considered for food processing. Survey responses did not indicate that a new processing facility was warranted.

Eliza B. reported that Pete Rose, County Administrator, contacted the ARC about the letter that the ARC sent to the Department of Revenue about the definition of “commercial agriculture.” He noted that it was important for the ARC to get letters approved by the County Council before sending them out. The ARC would like to ask the County Council for guidance on how to expedite the process when there is little response time.

Tom Schultz forwarded three names as possible new ARC members: Bruce Dunlop, Owen Cheevers, and Greg Black. Jim Lawrence suggested the Guard family on San Juan Island, specifically Lisa Guard. Guard Sundstrom, Becky Sundstrom, Steve Bensel, Rich Anderson, and Margaret or Joel Thorsen were also recommended.

Eliza B. will verify with County Administrators if the ARC must chose members based on specific islands.

Eliza B. brought up the issue of dogs of public trails near ag lands. A Trails Committee member asked for the ARC’s position.

*Bruce G. forwarded a motion to write a letter and send to the Trail Committee, the SJC Land Bank and to the County Council to request signage stating “Dogs shall be leashed on public land trails,” be posted at trail heads. Peter Corning seconded. Motioned adopted by majority.*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Candace Jagel is organizing a ChefsCollaborative type event in January 2009 to pair food producers with food purveyors.

Madden Surbaugh announced that Friday Harbor High School is the first to have a Slow Food youth group. Jim Lawrence asked ARC member to recognize the good work of Linda Degnan-Cobos and Matt & Maureen Marinkovitch in promoting the Slow Food groups, and other farm friendly projects.

## **NEXT MEETING**

The December meeting TBA.