

**Clark County
Agricultural Preservation Advisory Committee
(APAC) Meeting #3**

Sixth Floor Training Room of the Clark County Public Services Center
1300 Franklin St., Vancouver, WA. May 20, 2008, 6 to 8 p.m.

Meeting Summary

In attendance:

Committee members: Doug Stienbarger, Lorrie Conway, Ann Lawrence, Bill Zimmerman, Joe Beaudoin, Sunrise O'Mahoney, Mike Posey, Helen Nowlin, Dan Roix, Tom Van Laeken, and Rhidian Morgan

Staff: Patrick Lee

Facilitator: Doug Zenn & Adrienne DeDona, JLA

Introductions, Agenda Overview & Review Meeting Summary #2:

Facilitator Doug Zenn kicked off the meeting with a review of the agenda and introductions. Helen Nowlin, Joe Beaudoin and Mike Posey were attending their first meeting.

Meeting Materials & Handouts:

Doug asked if everyone had reviewed the meeting summary from the second meeting and inquired whether there were any questions, comments or changes. The group agreed that no changes needed to be made.

A member of the APAC requested that the several documents be provided to the group for discussion at Meeting #3. The items were distributed via e-mail with the meeting packet. Doug asked what questions or comments the group had related to the requested items along with the King County Farm & Forest preservation strategy. A discussion related to the handouts followed. The discussion items listed below are organized by topic area, and not necessarily in order of discussion

General Comment:

- A strategy needs to be developed to make all applicable county codes and ordinances small-farm friendly. The codes also need to be consistent, and consistently interpreted, across the whole array of regulations.

Right to Farm Ordinance:

- The Clark County Right to Farm ordinance is fragmented across a variety of ordinances. The one distributed in the agenda packet is not complete. It was recommended by the group to develop a free standing ordinance for Clark County similar to the City of Vancouver's with a strong disclosure requirement to notify adjacent uses to expect ongoing farming operations on agricultural properties. A copy of Vancouver's ordinance was provided to staff for reference.
- The group also expressed concern that the current ordinance only applies to designated farm resource land or land with a history of active agricultural use. It doesn't address possible agricultural expansion. It was suggested to change or add language to address

land that may become available for farming that isn't already available as agricultural land.

Building and Health Codes:

- Building and Health codes provisions related to processing facilities need to be reviewed. A concern was expressed that a simple seasonal hand sorting and boxing shed is required to be constructed to high structural standards and connected to sewer and water utilities.
- Similarly, produce stands open only in the summer are required to be built to carry winter snow and ice loads
- The requirement that produce stands/markets with kitchen facilities be required to hook up to public water and sewer utilities need to be reviewed.
- Greenhouses need to be considered an agricultural use and reasonable structural standards developed.

Zoning Code:

- Produce stands greater than 250 sq. ft. need to be allowed.
- More liberal sign provisions need to be allowed for seasonal direct marketing activities.

Current Use Ordinance:

- The minimum acreage requirements to qualify for current use taxation need to be reviewed. Many operations are smaller than 10 or 5 acres. The automatic exclusion of 1 acre for a residence from this qualifying threshold also needs to be reviewed.
- The Assessor's rating system from different types of farm land need to be reviewed. Concern was expressed that "bottomland" is considered the most valuable agricultural land, yet most existing farms are located on other, less productive soil types.
- The provision requiring payment of back taxes should a parcel be withdrawn from a current use-eligible activity and converted to a non-eligible use needs to be reviewed.

Listing of Farms in Clark County:

- The group inquired as to how accurate this listing was. It was confirmed that they were not accurate, but based on readily available information. Pat requested that members send him updates in order to improve the data available. The list was compiled to notify people about the proposed habitat ordinance, so it may be inclusive in terms of names, but not in terms of acreage.
- Pat explained that the accompanying map for the listing of farms in Clark County was accurate related to the current uses and zoning.

Maps:

- Pat provided a map that identifies the specific areas where the Growth Management Hearings Board ruled that agricultural land was inappropriately included in urban growth boundaries in the 2007 Comprehensive Growth Management Plan update.
- Pat also provided the map of farm lands identified for preservation through the Conservation Futures process that was reviewed at meeting #2 of the committee.

King County Farm & Forest Preservation Strategy:

The King County Farm & Forest Preservation Strategy was provided to the APAC to serve as a sample for identifying possible issues and tools to be addressed throughout this process. It may provide a framework for developing a similar document as an end-product.

Doug requested that APAC members begin to think about what an end product might look like and what possible potential strategies might be included. The group discussed some possibilities and obstacles that needed to be addressed related to using the King County Farm & Forest Preservation strategy as a guideline:

- King County tried to establish large parcels of contiguous property for agricultural use. There are not many similar available parcels like that in Clark County. Therefore, it would be very difficult to do that here because of level of development and lack of available, contiguous large pieces of land.
- That said, the group agreed that they could potentially identify some large parcels and recommend to Clark County that it be targeted for agricultural preservation through this process. It was suggested that a parcel in the order of 100-150 contiguous acres may be a reasonable threshold to be self-supporting.
- Another practical approach for Clark County would be to develop a plan in which people with 5 to 10 acres or less can farm productively. There needs to be a favorable policy towards farming that works for both large and small pieces.
- The overall sentiment from the group was that the King County Farm & Forest preservation strategy would provide a good format/framework. There are also good ideas for discussing goals, strategies and tools. The group agreed to do some brainstorming electronically in between meetings in order to establish possible strategies using the King County document as a starting point.
- Marketing is critical to the viability of any farm. Marketing resources need to be identified for farmers in Clark County. Some ideas include regional branding, more space and practical rules for produce stands, and reduced fees for signage.
- Item 10, strategy 18 of the King County Farm & Forest preservation strategy is applicable to Clark County. It would benefit farms to create an identity for local food products. Local food products could be promoted through events.

Additional Issues Identification:

The group added some items that didn't fall within the categories that have already been established. Doug expressed the need for the group to categorize issues so that we can begin identifying tools to address the issues:

- The newly proposed Stormwater Ordinance will impact farms based on the amount of impervious surface needed for production and storage facilities.
- Small Farms that use the Farmer's Market don't get agricultural tax relief. In order to promote local farming, the tax issue should be addressed. Land is taxed on highest and best use. Small farms in residential areas are taxed the same as nearby high-end housing developments. It was suggested that the tax policy be added as a subcategory of the farm economics issue.
- Health department codes are not available for activities on some of the farm sites.
- The Weed Control Board needs to be taken more seriously by Clark County as a resource for farmers.

Potential Tools:

The group began to identify some potential tools that could be implemented in order to address some of the issues that have been raised by the APAC throughout the past two meetings.

- It was suggested that a community-based commercial processing facility owned by the County, possibly with a retail kitchen/market would benefit local farmers by providing a place to process and sell value-added products. It could possibly be located at the 78th Street/WSU site. There is a similar program in Florida for strawberry processing. The Florida program is maintained at the cost of the County but local farmers buy into it.

- It was noted that the 78th Street property development could provide a way for the farming community and Clark County elected officials to move away from their past contentious relationship
- A possible tool is to develop a farm business incubation center.
- Establishing a farm capital investment revolving fund was also suggested.
- The group also suggested that the County explore the possibility of a purchase of development rights program, which would provide the ability to purchase property for farming rather than paying the price that it's valued at for development. (Relevant article in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer recently).
- Another idea was suggested to focus a transfer of development rights program allowing increased density in rural centers and preserving open space and farmland surrounding them.
- It was suggested that stormwater could be retained for reuse on farmland rather than pumped to stormwater facilities elsewhere. Farmers and other landowners could receive a credit for retaining stormwater and recharging ground water.
- It was suggested to provide more support for farming in subprime farmland. Subprime land can be farmed with raised beds and soil amendments.
- It was suggested that the County develop farm incentives similar to those employed in Canada.
- An idea was raised that a possible tool could be to develop a community collaborative that is focused on smaller, interconnected farming plots that are part of a larger farming effort.
- The group mentioned that Water Rights and Regulation is currently a major obstacle to preserving viable farmlands. It was suggested that a discounted water rate be provided for farming or the ability to use water more efficiently (many farms are retaining stormwater and recharging ground water).
- Investigating the potential for irrigating farmland with reclaimed water was also suggested.

Ideas for Accomplishing Goals within the assigned timeline:

The group discussed concerns about not being able to accomplish the very large task within the short timeline they were assigned by the County. Some ideas that surfaced are as follows:

- The group needs to focus on general issues.
- Revisit charge/priorities. Doug will include the APAC's charge/purpose on a flipchart for each upcoming meeting.
- Provide Pat and the consultant team with direction on tasks to begin drafting for the committee's review and input over the course of the project.
- Develop a list of top three issues with subcategories.
- Visit the idea of a half-day session to get more work accomplished

Next Steps & Final Notes:

The committee reviewed assignments to undertake before the next meeting.

- 15 minutes discussing parameters for goals.
- A special presentation from Jim Johnson from the Oregon Dept of Agriculture.
- Continue to review the King County Farm & Forest preservation strategy and come up with suggestions for what is applicable to Clark County and this process. Doug will try and send APAC members an online survey related to identifying priority strategies within this document.
- Begin to think about a tour for July and what it might involve.

The group agreed to e-mail information between meetings in order to exchange information about:

- Sharing relevant information about other communities.
- Additional ideas for issues and tools.
- Information to provide at upcoming meetings.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 17. The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.