

**Clark County
Agricultural Preservation Advisory Committee
(APAC) Meeting #2**

Sixth Floor Training Room of the Clark County Public Services Center
1300 Franklin St., Vancouver, WA. April 15, 2008, 6 to 8 p.m.

Meeting Summary

In attendance:

Committee members: Sunrise O'Mahoney, Denise Smee, Bill Zimmerman, Bruce Wiseman, Lorrie Conway, Doug Stienbarger, Dan Roix, Ann Lawrence, Tom Van Laeken, Ingrid Dankmeyer, Rich Bachert, and Sue Svendsen.

Staff: Patrick Lee

Facilitator: Doug Zenn & Adrienne DeDona, JLA

Guests: Bill Dygert & George Simpson

Introductions, Agenda Overview & Review Meeting Summary #1:

Facilitator Doug Zenn kicked off the meeting with introductions and a review of the agenda. Tom Van Laeken introduced himself (he was unavailable for the last meeting) to the committee. He has a berry farm west of the fairgrounds. One of the most daunting obstacles to continued farming in Clark County is acquiring land, he said.

Group members announced an upcoming Slow Food Event at the EcoTrust Building in Portland – April 23rd, 5 to 7:30 p.m. (Additional information is available on the website: <http://slowfoodportland.com/meeting/>).

Conservation Futures Presentation

Bill Dygert, conservation consultant, provided an overview of farmland preservation efforts over the last 25 years. The presentation (PowerPoint text included with Attachment A) noted a number of highlights and milestones:

- In 1985 the County adopted the Conservation Futures levy that provides funds to acquire and protect lands highly valued for habitat, scenic corridors, low-impact recreation or other qualities that enhance the local environment. Farmland is explicitly listed as one such use under state enabling legislation, but the county's focus has not been farmland.
- In 1990 the State Growth Management Act (GMA) was adopted. Clark County had to identify and classify farm resource lands. During the 1994-95 comprehensive plan process, the first GMA-compliant plan developed by the County, the methodology used to classify farmland included.

- Used the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) and United State Department of Agriculture to establish guidelines for determining farmlands (prime and unique soils, proximity to population indicators).
- Identified core agricultural areas as starting point (one 40 acre or two contiguous 20 acre parcels with unique soils). Eventually brought in smaller undeveloped areas.
- Used roadways and other significant physical features to establish candidate area boundaries.
- In 2004 the Conservation Areas Acquisition program was adopted by the county.
 - Focus areas were greenways, habitat and farmland.
 - Identified 42 discreet farm areas using evaluation matrix based on soil, parcel size, proximity to habitat and greenway resources.
 - Proposed to acquire approximately 1700 to 2400 acres.
 - Approximate cost would be \$12.5 million.
 - Program budget – total program approximately \$45 million. Brought to Clark County Commissioners who adopted the plan, but not the funding component. (a Real Estate Excise tax was recommended)
- Past public opinion polls have indicated that preserving farmland is generally supported (along with preservation of greenways and habitat). Approximately 61% supported property tax as well as the Real Estate Excise Tax (REET).

The committee provided comments and asked for clarification on a number of issues. With regard to this project, the group discussed how this project is less of a land use exercise compared with past efforts. This project is focused on how to enhance the agricultural function of the community. Land use recommendations could be made as a result of this effort.

The purpose for designating larger parcels through the previous planning effort was because it helped achieve a critical mass, keeping areas viable for longer periods of time as Clark County grows.

The committee also discussed how agricultural lands are being rezoned or used for residential purposes and that current land use laws seem to favor development. Some farms are having difficulty staying viable because they cannot afford to purchase land. While some farmers are able to be successful with smaller parcels, they would be interested in more property if it was affordable.

Other comments and suggestions included:

- Designating farmlands to be purchased for preservation is just one tool to consider; other tools should be considered as well. For instance, identifying public money to make farmland more affordable would be useful. The group suggested exploring Oregon's laws protecting farmland. Nothing similar has been done in Washington to make land use laws predictable or to protect farmland. Tools not related to the GMA are needed as well.
- There should be agency consistency (County vs. State) at a policy level with regard to farmland. The county should have the lead position for this area in terms of the GMA,

Timeline/Work plan schedule:

Doug outlined a project timeline and possible milestones for the committee to explore over the next several meetings. The committee discussed agenda topic areas for upcoming meetings including:

May

- Share Zoning and Comprehensive Plan information.
- Brainstorm a list all tools that we are aware of.
- Share information about what other communities are doing.
- Discuss what we can do at the County level vs. what needs to be done at the state level.
- Review the Right to Farm ordinance.

June

- Identify areas (tour) – where should we actively support agriculture?

June/July

- Compile preferred list of possible tools.

July/August

- Engage community with committee progress

November

- Seek additional input on findings to date from constituent groups.

December

- Complete draft plan.
- Schedule opportunities for community input

The committee suggested possible venues for opportunities for community outreach including:

- the Clark County Farm Forest picnic August 2nd
- Online surveys
- A booth at the Clark County Fair.
- Sending information to Committee constituents

The group also discussed the need for a project fact sheet that outlines opportunities for input. This could be distributed by the County at public meetings, events, and existing distribution mechanisms.

Next Steps & Final Notes

The committee reviewed assignments to undertake before the next meeting. The group agreed to e-mail information between meetings in order to exchange information about:

- Ideas for possible tools that would be needed to address each issue area.
- Additional potential issues
- Any thoughts/ideas to discuss at next meeting.

For further discussion next meeting, the group will review the sample plan (from King County) that Doug Stienbarger sent. Staff will bring land use maps that show existing farmlands

The next meeting is scheduled for May 20th. The meeting was adjourned at 8 p.m.