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CLARK COUNTY  
WASHINGTON

## COMMUNITY PLANNING SUMMARY MINUTES

### Rural Lands Task Force Meeting #6 – August 11, 2009

Members Present: Ginger Burr, Ingrid Dankmeyer, Russ Grattan, David Halme, Rocque Merritt, Monty Multanen, Danny Walsh, Byron Woltersdorf, Bill Zimmerman, and Robert Zumstein  
Staff Present: Gordy Euler, Jose Alvarez

The meeting began at 6:05 pm.

Gordy gave a brief update of the County Fair survey and asked everyone to take it on-line or stop by the booth and take the survey at the Fair.

The task force continued its discussion of the institutional barriers identified in the Agricultural Preservation Advisory Committee (APAC) report. After a general discussion the group talked about the current use program for agriculture.

#### Recommendation:

Require all current use-agriculture to submit a farm plan that shows the intent to farm. The plan has to show how a minimum of \$100/acre will be made in three of the subsequent five years. An audit of IRS Schedule F's will be made by the county every five years.

\* \* \*

Public comment was heard after a break. Lloyd Handlos asked what the goal of the ag discussion was and to not do things to discourage agriculture. Ted Labbe, WDFW, asked if there were opportunities densities in urban areas that would support a TDR program. The answer will not be known until the particulars of a TDR program are investigated.

The group continued its discussion of the APAC recommendations. Gordy suggested that at a minimum the APAC recommendations could be incorporated as strategies in the comprehensive plan, even if there weren't specific recommendations relating to changes in rural land use.

David Halme suggested allowing clusters on resource land. The idea would be to allow small lots in a cluster with remainder lots dedicated to resource uses. He and Jose are going to look at the pre-GMA language that allowed clusters on land zoned for ag/forest. The idea of establishing Agricultural Production Districts (institutional change 1(b)) was talked about, but nothing was decided.

The discussion moved on to the rest of the APAC recommendations, and the task force recommendations are below.

Recommendation:

## **2. Barrier - The high cost of land**

The dramatic rise in land value during the past two decades has caused problems for many farmers in Clark County. Today, most new farmers cannot afford to acquire good farmland. Existing farmers cannot acquire additional land to expand operations.

- a. Use existing publicly owned land, or have the county acquire farmland, to create a lease-back program for farmers.
- b. Review the cluster development ordinance to examine its potential for landowners to keep land in agricultural use.
- c. Develop a transfer of development rights program to encourage landowners to keep land in agricultural use.
- ~~d. Purchase rights to develop farmlands for nonagricultural uses. Place easements on the lands to ensure they are available for agriculture.~~
- e. Put priority on funding a purchase of development rights program for agriculturally productive land in Clark County.
- ~~f. Develop a farm-link program matching retiring farmers with current farmers or new farmers to keep land in agricultural production.~~

## **3. Barrier - High production costs and low return for farm products**

Farmers describe a variety of economic, regulatory, and social factors that have reduced the profitability of farms during the last several decades. The reasons may vary from one type of farmer to the next, but dairy, vegetable, berry, and livestock farmers agree that it has become difficult to make a living as a farmer in Clark County.

- a. Expand existing tax incentive programs to provide further benefit to farmers. *(covered in the earlier recommendation re the current use program)*
- ~~b. Assist farmers in securing health insurance through the state of Washington.~~
- ~~c. Establish a revolving loan fund, primarily financed by farmers, to finance start-up and new investments in agricultural operations.~~
- ~~d. Develop a county-sponsored cost-sharing program to help farmers meet environmental regulatory requirements. (talked about, but no recommendation made)~~
- e. Explore agricultural cooperatives to help farmers share or reduce production costs and expand markets.

## **6. Barrier - Regulatory requirements**

The combination of environmental, health, zoning and building regulations that apply to agricultural production, processing and distribution are costly and may discourage efficient farming practices.

- a. Review building and health codes for regulatory reform opportunities related to agricultural structures, food preparation and processing. *(mentioned specifically was the uneven setback requirements between Rural lands and resource lands)*
- b. Allow greater flexibility to farmers regarding development standards and commercial uses on farm land to support direct marketing of local agricultural products.
- ~~c. Actively support transfer of water rights to agricultural producers.~~
- d. Align county code with state requirements regarding housing for farm workers. *(the request was to look into the state statute with regard to farm worker housing)*

## **7. Barrier - Population growth and conflicts with farmers**

As housing and commercial development spreads into the rural areas, many homes are now close to local farms. Complaints about farm smells, noise, dust, traffic, or conflicts between domestic and farm animals are commonplace. It can also take a significant amount of time, and possibly money, to defend against the most aggressive complaints.

- ~~a. Revise the county's right-to-farm/forest ordinance to clearly designate agriculture and forest production as preferred uses in rural zones.~~ Expand existing requirements to disclose to prospective neighbors that agricultural and forestry activities will occur on adjacent properties.
- b.** Institute a buffer zoning policy to minimize land use conflicts brought about by urban uses encroaching into areas of agricultural production. *(this needs further discussion)*

It was decided there would not be a field trip to look at farm and/or forest operations.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

**NOTE: The next meeting will be Tuesday, August 25, 2009 at the Dollars Corner Fire Station, 21609 NE 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Battle Ground, beginning at 6 p.m.** Subsequent meetings are scheduled for September 8 and September 22; October 13 and October 27.

**FURTHER NOTE:** There is a **work session** scheduled with the Board on Wednesday, August 26, 10:30 p.m. to give the Board an update on what is happening with the task force.