

King County Agriculture Commission
Minutes from April 14, 2005
Issaquah Fish Hatchery
Issaquah, WA

Commissioners Present: Dick Gradwohl, Nancy Hutto, Ben Kodama, Bob Tidball, Ewing Stringfellow, George Irwin, Grant Davidson, Roger Calhoon and Michael Blakely

Commissioners Absent: Judy Duff and Gaylia Bullock

Staff: Judy Herring, Claire Dyckman and Laurie Clinton, King County (KC) Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) Water and Land Resources Division (WLRD) Agriculture Programs; Brad Gaolach, Sylvia Kantor and Tara Zimmerman, Washington State University Extension (WSU) KC.

Guest Agency Staff: Ben Brown, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT); Doug Dobkins, KC Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES); Jeff McMorris, Aide to KC Council member Kathy Lambert; Josh Monaghan, King Conservation District (KCD)

Guests: Eldon Murray and Anne Mack

Vice-Chair George Irwin called the meeting to order at 4:11pm.

George explained the agenda would be changed due to the addition of an important issue to the agenda. George thanked everyone for coming and introductions were made around the room.

Commission Business

Commission Staff Report: Laurie reported that she had spoken with WLRD Division Manager Daryl Grigsby and he asked that she let the Commission know that his budget group is working with the Executive's budget office to continue the funding commitment through 2006 for the Farm Specialist position. He also suggested that the Commission send a letter to the Executive as the budget process begins to urge long-term commitment for that General Fund appropriation. Laurie suggested having that on the June agenda. Daryl also said he would be willing to come back to the Commission in June to discuss the long-term issues for the Agriculture programs as the Surface Water Management fee revenues continue to decline. Laurie announced that Commission meetings would be held in Issaquah until July and reminded the Commission they needed to decide whether or not to hold a July meeting. Laurie thanked Gaylia, Nancy and Bob for spending their time and enthusiastically representing the Ag Commission at the Small Farm Expo on March 19th. They all spent time in the KC Rural Programs booth talking with citizens and answering questions.

Staff Report: Claire brought up the WRIA 7 Draft Plan to let the Commission know it was ready for final approval. She mentioned the letter of support the Commission had sent earlier and asked the Commission if they wanted to consider a follow up letter reaffirming their commitment. They could also add language about the importance of having a management plan for restoration plantings, to ensure that non-profits, agencies and other groups do follow-up maintenance on a regular basis to ensure long-term success of the plantings. It was agreed to bring it up under Old Business.

Judy reported that she had submitted the annual grant application to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. She requested funds for development right acquisition of a 15-acre property in the Sammamish Agriculture Production District (APD) and as a second, 40-acres in the Enumclaw APD if extra funds are available at the end of the grant cycle. Both properties have been on her priority list for some time.

Judy explained the reason for the new item on the agenda. The item that will be discussed under new business is a proposal by WSDOT to use one and a half acres of FPP property for a road project on SR164. Both Doug Dobkins and Ben Brown were able to come even though they were just notified this morning.

New Business:

WSDOT Road Project and Mitigation Site on FPP Property:

Doug Dobkins, KC DDES and Ben Brown from WSDOT came to discuss the project with the Commission. Judy provided some background on the project, which involves the state purchasing FPP property through condemnation. She said there had been several similar actions in the past and none had come before the Ag Commission. Typically when another government agency brings condemnation proceedings before the County, it is common practice to assume the background work has been done and then it is a matter of negotiation with them to make sure proper interest is satisfied. Judy said the Ordinance going before the Council essentially asks the

County Council to release the FPP rights under condemnation. While this is very late in the process, Council staff had inquired if the Ag Commission had any reactions to the proposed Ordinance, so staff put it on the agenda for discussion.

Doug brought maps showing the parcel with the piece of property under discussion. It is located on SR164 at the intersection of 156th Avenue. The 1.57-acre piece includes road relocations and a mitigation area. Ben Brown explained the project, which has been in the works for five years. There will be a road configuration using part of the parcel and the remainder is for mitigation for two intersections on SR164, which have not been improved for many years. WSDOT has a contract with the landowner for the piece of property, so the outstanding issue is to pay the County for the development rights. The mitigation effort will be to use the ag land to restore the stream and create a wetland. Doug said they are also going to do some drainage improvements to SR164 to help minimize flooding. There was a lengthy discussion with many questions, comments and concerns expressed with most emphasis on the loss of farmland, the appearance that farmland is an easy target for road mitigation condemnation proceedings, and what criteria is used for these site selections. There was concern about the remaining acres of the farm and if it could still be farmed. Ben and Doug assured the Commission that the rest of the farm would not be impacted from this project. There will some work done on the waterway that is locally recognized as a ditch, but classified by WDFW as a Class 3 stream.

Judy responded to questions about how the FPP program feels about this by saying that she did not like it initially, and her hesitancy was part of the reason that WSDOT looked at 19 other sites before making final selection of this site. She said it is her understanding that County staff are compiling a list of county owned properties that can be used for mitigation. Judy's suggestion was to make dual recommendations on this; to comment on the use of FPP properties in mitigation projects and support the inventory. She feels it would be good to recommend the list of appropriate and available properties be done expeditiously. This list would identify properties so that when a future situation comes up, WSDOT, KC Roads or any other agency can have ready access to it. It would make the process more efficient and provide protection for ag lands because they would not be listed and therefore not considered. Ben and Doug spoke in support of having such a compilation of properties and said they are already working to coordinate better in the future.

Judy reiterated that she thought getting this list compiled is the most effective thing that can be done to make sure this doesn't happen again, or if it does, to minimize impacts on ag land. Since mitigation sites must be in the same watershed sub-basin as the mitigated project site, it is important to also identify properties in the list by their sub-basins.

Motion 01-04-05 Dick moved to support this action due to the highway safety concerns. Ben seconded. Discussion followed. No one opposed the need for making highways safer, but there was overall concern about the loss of farmland when there are other available properties. George called for a vote, Dick and Ben voted yes, rest of Commission opposed. Motion failed.

Motion 02-0405 Michele moved to send a letter to the County Council expressing the Commission's extreme disappointment on taking FPP property for mitigation and requesting that Council direct staff to begin and/or complete an inventory of county owned lands suitable for mitigation to prevent future taking of FPP properties. Nancy seconded.

Discussion followed and it was agreed to also include with this list a plan for coordination of the various organizations working together on WRIAs to help prevent FPP properties from being included in those habitat restoration plans. Nancy and Michael agreed to work with Laurie and Judy to create the letter. Motion passed unanimously.

Doug offered to come back to a Commission meeting to further discuss the county land inventory and he would invite DDES Director Stephanie Warden and WLRD Manager Daryl Grigsby. He felt that Critical Areas Ordinance mitigations could be added to the discussion. The Commission agreed that would be a good next step to continue working getting the inventory done. George thanked Ben and Doug for coming on such short notice and for opening this important line of communication with the Commission.

Watershed Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 9 Draft Salmon Habitat Plan Response

Claire led the discussion on the Commission's response to the draft plan. Using the draft letter from the Regulatory and Land Use Committee, the Commission discussed their concerns and any edits to the letter. There was concern that while the science might be good, they haven't solicited farmers to see what they would do, or think would be good thing to do. The WRIA 7 Plan, and Whatcom County restoration efforts both approached farmers and had

them talk with scientists, and as a result, farmers are coming up with ideas and ways to help the salmon restoration effort.

There was concern about losing large ag parcels in the Green APD to restoration projects and the huge impact it could have in slowing the momentum of farming. There are two key issues involved in using farmland for fish restoration: overall loss of farmland in APD's and taking preserved farmland for projects. Claire said this issue needs to come back as a sole topic at a future meeting because the issue of farmland being turned into fish restoration land is an ongoing dilemma that needs to be resolved.

There was concern raised on the estuary issue, it is not apparent that the industrial areas are being required to implement restoration efforts on an equal scale to agriculture lands. It is nonsensical to not ensure the healthy passage for salmon throughout their life cycle, which includes going in and out of Puget Sound.

Claire said the science used in WRIA 9 was admirable and they have addressed the issue of the estuary. They admit they still don't understand the capacity of the estuary or near shore. Fish need a transition zone before heading out to sea, and it is apparent they aren't able to do so in the Duwamish estuary. The scientists are checking if their hypothesis is correct.

Claire explained the reason for the priority of doing restoration in the Middle Green is because that is the only place in the river where there is a gradient for spawning; this is why they are so anxious to focus their efforts there. The issue of perceived agency pressure for land purchase for restoration projects and the line between willingness and intimidation was brought up as an item for future discussion. There was general agreement that the Commission's role is to weigh in for the farms and farmers because everyone else is weighing in for the fish. It is important to do what is possible along the streams for fish while fully supporting agriculture now and for future generations.

Motion 03-0405 Michael made the motion to approve the draft letter and add key comments from today's discussion. Dick seconded. There was discussion about which comments to add and the Commissioners agreed that Claire would work with Bob and Nancy to re-write the letter. Passed unanimously

There was a comment form from the WRIA 9 response process that did not get sent to all the Commissioners for review at this meeting. Claire will send them to everyone tomorrow and George said that the comment form would be discussed at May meeting.

WSU King County Extension – Current and New Directions for Agriculture Programs and Support

Presentation Brad Gaolach provided an overview explaining changes occurring under his leadership as the new director. The Water, Land, Forest, Farming and Food Sense (WLFFF) faculty positions have been reorganized into forestry, environmental education, horticulture & crops, water quality and food systems programs. Sylvia Kantor and Tara Zimmerman described the various programs and events such as Extension Watershed Stewards, Livestock Advisors, the Small Farm Expo, Harvest Celebration and the Farm to School Connections Team. Brad talked about his ideas for the upcoming budget cycle and he explained the WSU funding sources, which include federal, state and county funds, along with various grant-funding sources. Commissioners asked questions and discussed topics throughout the presentation.

George thanked the Extension staff for providing a comprehensive presentation.

Old Business

There was discussion on the draft TDC support letter to the City of Seattle. Laurie reported that Mark Sollitto, TDC Program Manager had provided her with an update on the status of the TDC actions. As part of Seattle Resolution Number 30759, Item 5 Region-Wide Sprawl Reduction. b. Create or maintain regulatory and inventive programs downtown that facilitate the protection of rural lands linking county and regional growth to manage to curb sprawl" has been included and is being considered for passage. The letter from the Commission would be very timely.

Motion 04-0405 Nancy made the motion to send the TDC letter as drafted and Grant seconded.

Motion passed with Ewing abstaining.

Meeting adjourned at 7:10pm.