

Pierce County Agriculture Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes – March 27, 2019

Wednesday, March 27, 2019, 6:30pm-8pm

Allmendinger Center, WSU Puyallup Extension and Research Center
2606 W Pioneer Ave, Puyallup, WA 98371

Attendance

Committee members:

Carrie Little – Little Eorthe Farm, Becky Weed – Harlow Cattle Company, David Schactler – Eatonville Nursery, Paul Mosby – Mosby Brothers, Ben DeGoede - Windmill Gardens and DeGoede Farms, Jim Kropf – WSU-Pierce County Extension Director, Jerome O’Leary – Snowshoe Evergreen (alternate for Ken Scholz), Dan Hulse – Tahoma Farms, Dan Picha – Picha Farms, Tim Curtis (alternate for Jake Sterino) – Sterino Farms, Councilmember Pam Roach – Pierce County Council.

Dan Muir – Coordinator, Pierce County Agriculture Advisory Committee
Hugh Taylor - Office of Pierce County Council

Members of the public:

John Stuhlmiller – Washington Farm Bureau, Helmut Schmidt – Pierce County Planning and Public Works, Jordan Jobe – WSU, Council Member Dave Morell – Pierce County Council, Judy Hurley – Assistant to Council Member Morell and a Drainage District Commissioner, Amy Cruver - Drainage District 13 Commissioner, Ryan Walker – Conservation Futures Program Coordinator – Pierce County Parks, John Seidl – Conservation Futures Citizens Advisory Board, Russ Picha – Picha Farms, Rosella Mosby – President of the King-Pierce Farm Bureau.

Meeting

Carrie Little, Committee Chair, welcomed all to the meeting.

Motion: Mr. Schactler made a motion to accept the February meeting minutes. Mr. DeGoede seconded. All voted yes, none opposed. Motion passes to approve February minutes.

Motion: Ms. Weed made a motion to approve the March agenda. Mr. Schactler seconded. All voted yes, none opposed. Motion passes to approve the March agenda.

Public Comment

John Siedl reminded the Committee that there are positions open on the Conservation Futures Citizens Advisory Board. General discussion ensued on getting more farmer representation on the Citizen Advisory Board.

Ryan Walker stated for the record that there are 3 members of the Conservation Futures Citizens Advisory Board that are farmers or have farming interests.

Chair's Report

Pierce County has finalized their decision on hiring the new Agriculture support staff position and made an offer. They are waiting for the reply so no official announcement can be made at this time.

Coordinator's Report

King County updated their definitions for agriculture and agriculture activities. The Ag Advisory Committee may want to look at these changes and see if any of it is appropriate for Pierce County.

The USDA ag census data release will be April 11th. The last census was 2012 so this will give the Committee new information to work with.

Voluntary Stewardship Program – John Stuhlmiller – CEO, Washington Farm Bureau

Mr. Stuhlmiller has been involved in the VSP process from the beginning. In 2006 The William D. Ruckelshaus Center at Washington State University brought together the environmental community, tribes, county governments and the agriculture community to address issues related to the Growth Management Act. In 2011, the state legislature created the Voluntary Stewardship Program and gave the Counties the opportunity to opt in. Currently there are 27 Counties that have opted in and have approved working plans from the state Conservation Commission. Pierce County is not one of those Counties.

VSP is a compromise that is meant to protect both agriculture interests and the environment. It is a voluntary program, not regulatory. The idea is to protect critical habitat areas while maintaining and enhancing the viability of agriculture. Plans are made on a site by site basis. Critical areas must still be protected but more flexibility is given to how it is protected as opposed to arbitrary 100-foot buffers (for example) that do not match on ground realities and may not be effective.

In order to open up VSP to counties that did not originally opt in a bill would have to be passed at the state legislature.

Drainage Network analysis – Helmut Schmidt – Pierce County Planning and Public Works

The County will conduct a systematic drainage network analysis for lands used for agricultural production in Pierce County to identify high-priority local drainage issues that are an impediment to agricultural production. The County will gather information from the Drainage Task Force, Floodplains for the Future, landowner surveys and ground surveys. Currently in scoping phase. Hope to have most data collection done in 2019 and perform modeling in 2020. Clear Creek and Clarks Creeks will be initial focus as there are already multiple projects occurring there. An important part will be to better understand how agriculture drainage and roadside drainage interact and impact effective drainage.

Mr. Schmidt is looking for local landowners to highlight specific problem areas and is willing to hear from any farmer on the topic.

Drainage subcommittee report

A Council Resolution is drafted to create a Drainage Task Force. Members of the Ag Advisory Committee will have the opportunity to serve on this Task Force and this may be an effective replacement for the Ag Committee's drainage subcommittee.

Policy subcommittee report

It was decided that the Policy subcommittee does not need to meet as a separate subcommittee and instead agriculture policy can be a standing item for the full Ag Advisory Committee to discuss at each meeting. The committee coordinator will present the status of key issues at each meeting.

Old Business

Mr. O'Leary proposed to the group for consideration that the ag committee works with the County on the possibility of re-classifying some Level 1 crop production areas to Level 2 which allows for some processing on site.

New Business

Mr. DeGoede stated that WSU Extension has provided a valuable service to farmers in the past and asked what kind of monetary support WSU extension receives from the County. Mr. Kropf stated that Pierce County provides some funding, but it was reduced around 10 years ago when the recession occurred.

Ms. Jobe suggested that we reach out to Chad Kruger at WSU to discuss how WSU can continue to support farmers.

Meeting adjourned