

Pierce County Agriculture Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes – May 13, 2020

May 13, 2020, 2:30pm-4pm
Zoom conference call

Attendance

Committee members:

Carrie Little – Little Eorthe Farm, Becky Weed – Harlow Cattle Company, Sarah Howard (alternate for David Schactler – Eatonville Nursery), Jim Kropf – WSU-Pierce County Extension Director, Jerome O’Leary – Snowshoe Evergreen (alternate for Ken Scholz), Dan Picha – Picha Farms, Councilmember Pam Roach

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

Speaker

Betty Capestany – Director, Economic Development Department

Other attendees

Charlie Kirry – assistant to Councilmember Roach, Mike Poteet – Pierce County Ag Program,
Rob Allen – Economic Development Department, Bre Elsey – Washington Farm Bureau

Meeting Purpose

The purpose of this meeting is for the Agriculture Advisory Committee to learn details of the CARES Act funding. In addition, the Committee will communicate what impacts they have experienced with the COVID-19 epidemic and what their needs are now and into the future and how the economic stabilization funds can be utilized.

Ordinance No. 2020-60

The Pierce County Council has created the “COVID-19 Relief Act Fund” and has provided that up to \$1,000,000 of these funds shall be utilized to support COVID-19 economic recovery and stability assistance to the local agriculture community.

Overview of available economic stabilization funds - Betty Capestany, Director, Economic Development Department

CARES Act Funding. Pierce County has received \$157M which has been allocated into 5 pots:

- public health \$67M
- economic recovery and stabilization \$30M
- community resilience and recovery \$22M
- essential government services \$15M
- contingency funds \$23M

Under the \$30M for economic recovery and stabilization, \$1M is allocated for assistance to the local agriculture industry.

The Funds must be spent prior to Dec. 31, 2020. The Fund balance is in the Finance Dept and requests go to them and they control the distribution.

Ms. Capestany is the main point of contact for the ag community in requesting these funds and can receive the requests from farmers and forward the requests to the Finance Dept.

Betty Capestany contact information:

betty.apestany@piercecounywa.gov, 253-798-6926

Comments, questions and discussion with Ag Advisory Committee members

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

It is very important that the County include agriculture in supplying Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to businesses.

We need to get an ag survey out to producers as soon as possible to determine what PPE they need and the quantity of each item.

Bre Elsey reported that the Washington Farm Bureau has been working on distribution of masks and PPE. They had received 12,000 masks which were immediately distributed and now they have a back log of farmers waiting for more supply.

PCCFT is planning to provide 2,000 masks to distribution points. Carrie Little expects to get 500 to distribute at the Veterans Home in Orting, Eatonville Nursery may also be a distribution point as well.

Public /customer interaction

For business interacting with the public there is also a need to address the social distancing measures mandated by the Health Dept. This will require public sanitation stations, signage for the customers, etc. These are all added expenses. It is important to receive funding to address these expenses.

Loss of Income

Another major issue facing farm operations is the loss of customers and income. There may be a possibility for a COVID-19 grant program for ag producers that have lost business due to COVID-19. Betty Capestany will investigate this as a grant program possibility.

There are currently interest free loans available through the County. They will be interest free for one year. This is separate from the CARES Act funding but might be a way for some businesses to deal with immediate income loss.

There is also the possibility of setting up an aggregator to take in farm product for distributions to local food banks. This needs to be explored further.

3:46pm - Adjournment

Notes:

With the help of Jerome O'Leary, Mike Poteet and many others we are currently compiling a list of PPE needs and an outreach plan. This will be done as quickly as possible to meet the urgent needs of the agriculture community.