

**Agricultural Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
May 8, 2024**

Start Time:	3:00 p.m.
Location:	Hybrid Meeting – Zoom & at Whatcom County Planning & Development

Meeting Highlights
There were 13 people in attendance (Voting members: 9 of 10, Staff members: 2, Ex-Officio: 2 Members of the public: 0).

Attendees – Members	Affiliation	Present
Chapman, Alan (chair)	Whatcom Conservation District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Kubalek, Roger (vice chair)	Ag Producer	<input type="checkbox"/>
McDermott, Matthew	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Harron, Elli	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Welch, Chantel	Ag Programs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Likkel, Fred	Whatcom Family Farmers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pehl, Clay	Consumer of Ag Products	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hawley, Roger	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Steele, Eliza	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Del Giorgio, Isaiah	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
VACANT	Ag Producer	
VACANT	Ag Producer	
VACANT	Ag Processing	

Quorum Present	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
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Attendees – Ex-Official/Contributing	Affiliation	Present
Corina Cheever	Whatcom Conservation District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Benedict, Chris	WSU Extension	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hall, Alex	NRCS	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hallberg, Brooklyn	FFA Youth	<input type="checkbox"/>

Attendees - Staff	Present
Dakota Stranik	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Lauren Templeton	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Others Present
none

Zoom Recording:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/play/fzVsJOo0gNvhET3zq6CpA0NNxwbhdgolEvSIIdZcd91ob6GuSueA_0CEadZmQwYwT03Uo_CRdLa1CpzP.6EWWr7B5wDvV9Eb6?canPlayFromShare=true&from=my_recording&continueMode=true&componentName=rec-play&originRequestUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fus02web.zoom.us%2Frec%2Fshare%2FOz0wK-u2ohvIWDsdhT3S_aEAXhOqMyW1VYZo8I6NPXonT5NB-PFbnFyDnYR-Q.nYxAdjpUO0z0VEgH

1- Roll call and introductions - starting at 00:02:17

WCC 2.34.040 establishes that “a quorum shall consist of at least half of the appointed voting members.” A quorum was established with 9 of 10 appointed voting members present.

2- Agenda Review & Adjustments - starting at 00:04:54

No alterations were made to the current agenda.

3- Open Public Session - starting at 00:05:03

There was no public comment.

4- Review & Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes - starting at 00:05:24

Motion to approve by Roger Hawley, seconded by Fred. With no objections, the April minutes were unanimously approved.

5- Further Discussion on Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) - starting at 00:07:55

Dakota gave a brief review of her presentation in tandem with Whatcom CD to County Council’s Planning & Development Committee on May 7th. The presentation reviewed the Conservation Program on Agricultural Lands (CPAL) and how it provides landowners with a pathway for agricultural use of Critical Areas and buffers if a Farm Plan is submitted and approved by Whatcom County Planning & Development Services (PDS). Landowners may choose to develop a farm plan and enroll in CPAL, or adhere to the standard protective buffers described in the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) defined in WCC 16.16. Dakota compared the current regulatory approach of CPAL & the CAO to a possible alternative that Whatcom County Council could choose to adopt – the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP). VSP is a state program facilitated by the State Conservation Commission (SCC) in partnership with a variety of other agencies. VSP is a fully voluntary program that addresses protection of Critical Areas functions and values through voluntary cooperation from landowners. A comparison chart showing the differences between VSP & CPAL/CAO was reviewed and discussed by the group. Areas of particular interest were economic viability for agriculture & watershed monitoring.

The definition of Ongoing Agriculture was also briefly discussed, and how that concept interfaces differently with both VSP and CPAL/CAO.

Chantel clarified that American Farmland Trust is working in partnership with Puget Sound Partnership to create an Ag Viability analysis looking at various areas including how VSP is working, comparing Comprehensive Plan approaches, etc. That project should be wrapped up in about a year and should provide some insights on these considerations.

The AAC may choose to clarify its stance on whether or not adoption of VSP would be beneficial and provide an advisory to County Council for consideration. It is possible that there could also be modifications made to CPAL to incorporate some aspects of VSP such as monitoring, a work group, etc. A mocked up VSP work plan could possibly help inform these decisions as well. Fred & Chantel formed a

subcommittee to look more closely at VSP and develop a preferred approach by early 2025.

6- Update on Whatcom County Agricultural Statistics - starting at 00:53:24

Chris Benedict gave a brief presentation on the most recent Ag Census (2022) and how it pertains to Whatcom County agriculture. He clarified that while this data has some issues due to its reliance on landowner reporting, it does a good job at demonstrating long term trends. Key points included:

- Decreasing mid-size farms and increasing small & large sized farms. Small farms are defined as those having less than \$250,000 in gross annual sales.
- Total number of farms is decreasing both at the State level and in Western WA.
- The agricultural economy as a whole has essentially doubled in value since 1997 (not accounting for inflation).
- Dairy sales are declining and berry sales are increasing. Similarly, livestock sales are declining and crop sales are increasing.
- For dairy industry, number of cows is decreasing but value of milk product is increasing. Some concern on accuracy of the numbers here.
- Direct Sales (between farmer and consumer) have decreased at the State level but increased in Western WA & Whatcom County. Direct Sales account for 2% or less of Total Sales.
- Organic production is growing overall but has decreased in Western WA over the last 5 years.
- Raspberry production is fairly steady while blueberry production is growing. This is a long term landscape change as raspberries are commonly rotated amongst other crops (potatoes, corn, silage grass) but blueberry plantings are essentially permanent in many cases.

CropScope is a satellite mapping project for annual tracking of different crop acreage. In addition, WSDA produces annual data derived from windshield surveys.

A brief update on the Whatcom County Rural Land Study was given starting at 1:11:24 in the recording. Chris Elder at Whatcom County Public Works is working on an update to the Rural Land Study to reflect what land in Whatcom County is available for agriculture, what areas are most at risk for development and what areas should be prioritized for protection of ag lands. Chris was looking for AAC volunteers to help interface with the update. Eliza volunteered to help.

7- Report of Subcommittee Activities – starting at 01:26:00

Alan, Roger, and Elli have distributed an invite to collaborate with other committees to find aligned interests in relationship to the Comp Plan update. The following committees have been contacted:

- Climate Impact Advisory Committee (enthusiastic response)
- Food System Committee (interested)
- Shellfish Advisory Committee (Fred can represent)
- Surface Mining Advisory Committee
- Staff teams involved in salmon recovery & water

- Housing Committee at Health Dept
- Forestry Advisory Committee
- Flood Control District Board Advisory Committee
- Marine Resources Committee
- CEP Advisory Committee has not been approached yet formally

Idea is to start off with what each committee wants, what are the barriers, and where is there room for alignment & common ground. Work will continue on this effort during the summer.

8- Review of Current Year's Work - starting at 01:33:25

Overall positive feedback, still working on getting new members up to speed and building up to a clear vision of where to focus in the future. Mixed reviews on the value of the Rural Study Areas and the Ag Strategic Plan and if they are things we should continue to focus on. While committee members didn't feel that the AAC had moved much forward in the last year, there was interest in engaging more in areas such as VSP considerations, ag land preservation, economic viability, etc. as well as supporting the creation of an Agricultural Planner to support county ag programs & efforts. A work plan is needed for future organization.

It was decided to circulate a Doodle Poll to schedule a special June meeting before the summer hiatus in order to clarify subcommittee work.

9- Staff & Member Updates

This item was not discussed

10- New business

There was no new business

11- Action items and next agenda

This item was not discussed

12- Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:02 p.m. A special meeting will be scheduled in June or July before the normal summer hiatus begins.