

Final Agritourism Stakeholder Group Notes

Skagit Publishing

July 26, 2023 from 7:30 – 9am

Attendees

Eddie Gordon (Gordon Skagit Farm); Mark Knutzen (on/not representing the Planning Commission); Leo Roozen (WA Bulb Co. & RoozenGaarde); Terry Sapp (Hoehn Farm); Kara Rowe and Jennifer Smith (WWAA); Morgan Elton (Country Financial Insurance / Skagit County Farm Bureau); Jesse Anderson (Maplehurst Farm & Save Skagit Farm Venues); Katie & Brock Clements (Saltbox Barn and Farm & Save Skagit Farm Venues); Terry Gifford (Willowbrook Manor); Mark Benson and Tom Shields (Eagle Haven, Perkin's Apples); Taryn Holmstrom (Skagit Valley Wedding Rentals); Amy Frye (Boldly Grown Farms); Hollie Del Vecchio, Tim Knue, and Allen Rozema (SPF); Lyn Wiltse, facilitator (PDSA Consulting)

Next Steps for this Group

There was consensus among members present to continue to meet with the intention of coming up with Agritourism Code recommendations by August 10 (assuming the two-week public comment extension is granted). There is strength in diversity. Per meeting ground rules, all voices will be heard, and interests respected. Recommendations will carry the strength of consensus among participants. SPF will continue to sponsor these meetings.

The following two meeting dates were set:

- Monday, July 31 from 9am – noon (Skagit Publishing with remote option)
 - At the end of this meeting, additional meeting dates will be set as needed.
- Wednesday, August 2 from noon – 2pm (Skagit Publishing with remote option)

Action Items

- Lyn: Send out meeting notes from this meeting along with Zoom invites for all future meetings.
- All: Look for future communications to come from lyn@pdsaconsulting.com (instead of Allen).
- All: Email suggested agritourism definitions to Lyn by 4pm Friday (July 28) so she can send out for all to review in advance of the July 31 meeting and come prepared to discuss.

Welcome / Opening Remarks

SPF Executive Director Allen Rozema welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending this initial meeting of the Agritourism Stakeholder Group. He also shared copies SPF's Policy Position on Agritourism from early 2022. Today's Skagit Valley Herald announced that the public comment period, originally set to end on July 27, will likely be extended for an additional two weeks. Allen shared the County's timeline as currently proposed and the two-week extension for additional public comment is just putting a pause on current schedule – with the Planning Commission committed to making a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners by October. Allen expressed hope that if this group can make progress, and communicate that to Skagit County, it's possible that additional time may be granted. However, we shouldn't count on that. We should instead try to come together with some additional recommendations by the new deadline. There was discussion about the County process and how little or how much we are able to propose to the Planning Commission without having to "reset" the clock. Tim Knue encouraged that we should not be limited in our thinking, and it is ultimately up to the Planning Commission, after receiving all public comments, to decide what to do with it.

Ground Rules / Decision Making Protocol

Lyn reviewed the ground rules we will use to ensure efficient and effective meetings and collaborative, consensus-based decisions. These rules were used throughout the meeting.

Work Product of this Stakeholder Group

We will prepare recommendations for the Planning Commission to review and consider in addition to all the other public comments they are receiving. Code amendments submitted through this collaborative effort of diverse stakeholders would likely carry more weight than single-interest proposals.

Timeline

- July 27: Deadline for Public Comments (likely to be extended to August 10).
- Sept. 26: Closed Record Public Hearing
 - The Planning Commission will review public comments already submitted. They can accept, modify, or create a new proposal to present to the Board of County Commissioners. Can also decide they want to start the process all over again. Right now, the process is on a path for code adoption. The public comment period has been extended to allow for more time for the public to participate.
 - The Public may attend and answer any questions about comments already submitted.
 - No new comments / testimony will be accepted.
- Oct. 10: The Planning Commission makes recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners.

Appreciation Expressed

It was broadly acknowledged that The Ag Advisory Board spent a lot of time and effort coming up with their recommendations to the Planning Commission. There were two years of community forums, public hearings and two community surveys. Two reports were prepared by a consulting group and released to the public. Terry Sapp recommended everyone read the existing code. He has studied this in depth, as well as code on other states such as North Carolina who is dealing with many agritourism challenges. Katie noted Vermont has had success result from its agritourism code.

Where to Start: Defining Agritourism

There was consensus to start by reviewing the definition of agritourism as proposed by the Ag Advisory Board. There was mixed support for the proposed definition. Jesse suggested comparing it to the US Department of Agriculture's definition. Kara projected on the screen a format we might use to generate our work product with one column showing the language from Skagit County (Ag Advisory Board) and the other showing Group Suggestions.

The new definition in SCC 14.04.020 defining "Agritourism" as:

A common, farm-based, commercial activity the public that promotes agriculture, is directly related to onsite agricultural production, is incidental and subordinate to the working farm operation, and is operated by the owner or operator of the farm or family members. Celebratory gatherings, weddings, parties or similar uses that cause the property to act as an event center or that take place in structures specifically designed for such events are not agritourism.

The USDA Definition of Agritourism:

A form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining or educating the visitors while generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owner.

Initial Discussion

- We will start with agreeing on how to define agritourism and then move on to a review of the proposed code. To that end, everyone was asked to email to Lyn examples of agritourism definitions that they think would meet the interests of this group's stakeholders so she can send them out for all to review in advance of the next meeting.
- We may also need to come to agreement on the meaning of "entertaining."
- Our success depends on unity and all agreeing how to move forward together. Keep in mind that while we put suggestions forward, the Board of County Commissioners will have the final say.

- The current proposal reads like it's trying to define farm-based business. We don't need to address farm-based business as it is already working - takes nothing away from current definitions and uses.
- It is important to get this right as it will influence future generations and the future of the Valley.
- Though the focus is Ag NRL, the proposed changes say "County" – not just Ag NRL.

August 31 Meeting Topics

- Review notes and action items.
- Come to consensus on agritourism definition.
- Do the same with review of and suggestions regarding proposed code.