

Farm Steering Committee April 18, 2024 Minutes

The Farm Steering Committee met at the WSU Extension Office Kivley Center, 97 Oak Bay Road, Port Hadlock. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

Members present: Janet Aubin, Martin Frederickson, Keith Kisler, Laura Llewellyn, Martin Mills, David Seabrook, Kellie Henwood, Al Latham, Rebecca Benjamin

Other Attendees: Heidi Eisenhour, Jefferson County Drainage District and Erik Kingfisher of the Jefferson Land Trust

Staff: Port Executive Director Eron Berg, Deputy Director Eric Toews, Administrative Assistant Joanna Sanders, and

Commissioners: None

University of Washington Team: Katie Cotie, Malia Wing, Abby Newbold, Will Palmer, Justin Patterson, Will McPherson, Greg Suskin

Meeting Introduction and Purpose: Farm Steering Committee met to review ideas from the April 17 Community Meeting. Eric Toews noted an additional meeting may be necessary to narrow alternatives before the May 15 public meeting.

Observations from April 17 Open House and Discussion of Questions/Ideas/Options:

1) Initial Conditions Report: How to present edits/comments? Staff would address inaccuracies and would welcome those via email.

2) Operational Structure of Farm: Will there be one (1) or 17 individuals leasing the farm? There was a request for clarification of the Port's expectations for the Committee. The majority felt it critical to develop an operational manual to stabilize the property and document how the farm works. Contents should include diagrams of operations, water shutoff, electricity lines, plumbing system, electrical systems, how to winterize pump and sprinkler, water location, septic lines, refrigeration, breaker panels/locations, existing problems, what freezes in winter, maps, surveys, consider hiring an operations manager. Santos has been helping on the farm for 25 years, so it is time sensitive to address operations before September 1.

Eron Berg clarified the Port would welcome short-term and long-term information to ensure operational knowledge is captured and covered. FSC might also recommend an advisory committee to continue working to create a standard operating plan. He recognized an immediate need for a plan and a lease of the property for a 15-month period or other short-term lease and not any infrastructure until there is a plan.

3) Reed Canary Grass. The Port should mow now and obtain permits to be in the creek possibly with the help of Jefferson Land Trust. The Conservation District has been most involved in permitting with current permit covering July 15 to July 18, 2024, but able to be extended from three days to five (5) years.

4) When does the FSC start to strategize the needs? There was discussion of what items should be the focus aside from the present needs mentioned. Should a subcommittee be developed? The committee felt there is a definite need for an operations/transition committee. NOSC might help figure out what should occur to restore habitat.

5) Port Collaborating with Conservation District on a topo elevation survey. A lidar survey is critical for baseline data and should be completed right after mowing, although some of the ground is hard to mow until August. A question was whether there is a way to integrate lidar along with a traditional survey.

6) Discussion/Questions for Livestock and Vegetable Farmers: Continue meat production/livestock farm as much of the land is not suitable for vegetables based on soil type, maintain environmental quality and water access, little land is available in the area with water, so there is value in the water for vegetable farming. Much of the land is still too wet well into the season and a lot would be determined by how much land is available for different types of vegetables. A question whether the agricultural conservation easement is meant to protect agricultural values (no net loss of ag values), so a conversion to habitat on a broad scale would require much coordination to amend the conservation easement.

How much of the land is not flooded right now? Drone pictures would be helpful to find out what is leasable – and update them every couple of weeks as conditions change: condition of drain tiles (they are not working optimally according to Roger). What is sloped, what is flat, what is farmable?

7) Agriculture Additional Questions Before Recommendations: What are the mechanisms the committee could recommend to stimulate the ag sector. Could the Port collaborate/activate Jefferson Landworks collaborative to play a transition role (lessons learned), to keep ag lands viable, engage and assist farmers, and help to identify initial conditions? Could the Collaborative be resource support for the transition plan?

How much tillable land is there? What are the farmer's needs in this community? Is farm drainable? Get updated metrics from the Jefferson Landworks Collaborative and needs assessment of ag community. Also need to know what the farm is best suited for to make a long-term plan. Eric Toews summarized the goal to develop a work plan, transition plan, and prioritize issues that would lead to future decisions and farm plan. What types of lease opportunities are possible to generate 9.5% financial return. Port staff mentioned it could seek funding for the transition phase. Multi-tracks might be needed for operations in the meantime such as USDA meat processing, but no net loss of farming acreage.

8) Creek/Ecosystem Management: NOSC, Land Trust and Jefferson Landworks Collaborative need to meet and consider a survey and what ability there is to drain the property and the broader conversation about habitat and agriculture.

9) Next Meeting/Survey Group: 6pm on Thursday, April 25 p.m. The Committee agreed to meet on the farm property to walk, discuss, make comments, and brainstorm. It might be helpful to develop an interactive map showing pasture, former pasture and begin to overlay some uses as well as existing limitations. It was noted Eron Berg and Erik Kingfisher would not be able to attend. Also

consider forming subcommittees for infrastructure, facility, and land and consult a wetlands expert.

There was also a suggestion for an extra full Farm Steering Committee meeting before May 15 with facilitation (to keep Committee on task), so a report could be prepared on what the survey group found. The intent of the May open house may need to be restructured.

Meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.