

For Immediate Release – May 10, 2004

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Jefferson County Commissioners Adopt New Agricultural Code

Port Townsend, WA -- The Board of County Commissioners for Jefferson County amended the Unified Development Code on Monday, May 10, 2004, to establish provisions for agricultural activities and accessory uses. The code amendments provide for additional uses on agricultural lands that will now either be exempt from a land use permit or carry varying permit requirements. Among the accessory uses allowed on designated Agricultural Lands under this code amendment are small-scale agricultural processing, farm equipment repair, agritourism, farmworker housing, veterinary clinics, agricultural schools, rural restaurants, campgrounds, and guide services.

Jefferson County is one of the first jurisdictions in Washington State to address “accessory uses” to agriculture in development regulations. Recent state legislation passed in March of this year allows accessory uses on agricultural lands specifically designated under the Growth Management Act that support, promote, or sustain agricultural operations and production.

“Jefferson County is probably ahead of the curve on this issue because we already had a preliminary proposal in the works when this bill passed the Legislature,” said Josh Peters, long-range planner with the County. “We believe that these code amendments will provide the agricultural community in Jefferson County with a full range of opportunities to maintain and improve the operation of their farms, while at the same time protecting the functions and values of fish and wildlife habitat on and adjacent to lands used for agriculture.”

County Long-Range Planning staff and the Agricultural Lands Committee of the Planning Commission developed a preliminary proposal with input from local farmers. The amendments passed by the Commissioners are the result of months of research and discussion.

The amendments describe the opportunities, limitations and ground rules for agricultural activities and accessory uses, while clarifying which ones are exempt from a County land use permit. Also included are voluntary agricultural best management practices (BMPs) for the protection of water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. The County and the Conservation District will monitor the situation over time to make sure the program is working.

The next step in this planning effort is the consideration of a set of parcels for Agricultural Lands designation during the 2004 Comprehensive Plan amendment cycle. Farmers whose land is not currently designated Agricultural Lands in the County Comprehensive Plan are encouraged to contact Long-Range Planning for more information on how to “opt in” to the program. For more information, contact Josh Peters or Karen Driscoll, Long-Range Planning, at (360) 379-4450 or via email to planning@co.jefferson.wa.us. Interested persons are invited to visit the County website at <http://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/commdevelopment>. Click “Issue Links” and “Agricultural Lands Planning.”

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