

Public Meeting on Chimacum Agriculture Plan: March 22, 2004

Informational Handout on Proposed Regulations for Agriculture and Associated Uses and the 2004 Process for Designating Agricultural Lands on the County Map of Comprehensive Plan Land Use Designations

Background: What Happened Last Year with Stream and Wetland Buffers and the Comprehensive Plan Agricultural Lands Designations

Jefferson County adopted our Comprehensive Plan in 1998. The Comprehensive Plan established Agricultural Lands of Long-Term Commercial Significance as a land use district (or "zone") and put other policies in place, but left some tasks undone.

Early last year, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) amended the Unified Development Code (UDC), the set of development regulations that implement the Comprehensive Plan, to clarify that existing and ongoing agriculture is exempt from a retroactive application of standard stream and wetland buffers adopted with the UDC in December 2000. Existing and ongoing agriculture is considered a legal, nonconforming use with respect to the standard stream and wetland buffers. The public participation and Planning Commission review process for this amendment set in motion a program to complete the agricultural lands planning effort in Jefferson County.

Late last year, the BOCC adopted revised Comprehensive Plan policy language addressing Agricultural Lands. The map of Land Use Designations was amended so that new, simpler categories of Agricultural Lands replaced the previous ones. We now have two main types:

- Prime Agricultural Land (AP-20 or "Prime Ag")
- Agricultural Land of Local Importance (AL-20 or "Local Ag")

Each of these carries a density of one dwelling unit per twenty acres. That means that if you wanted to subdivide 60 acres of land, you could create up to three parcels. The density has no impact on parcels that are already less than 20 acres in size or if the landowner does not intend to subdivide.

One of the categories that disappeared was "Agricultural Production District" (APD). Some of the parcels in the Chimacum valley were included in an APD, but zoned Rural Residential. Those parcels have retained their Rural Residential zoning, but are no longer in an APD. Landowners of those parcels should consider this year whether they would prefer to stay Rural Residential or to petition for Agricultural Lands designation to take advantage of the buffer exemption, the associated uses that are expected to be adopted soon into code, or for any other reason. Continue reading for more information.

Another key point to remember is that the County Open Space Tax Program is unrelated to the map of Comprehensive Plan Land Use Designations, which represents the zoning of a parcel. A parcel could be enrolled in the Tax Program for agriculture, but be zoned something else, such as Rural Residential. Concerning buffer protection, existing and ongoing agriculture is for agricultural activities on Agricultural Lands or lands enrolled in the Tax Program for agriculture, so long as those activities were occurring at any given time in the five-year period leading up to April 28, 2003, the effective date of last year's UDC amendment.

UDC Amendments for Agricultural Activities and Accessory Uses

The Planning Commission is currently considering a UDC amendment package for the regulation of agriculture and accessory uses. The intention of the package is to clarify what activities are exempt from a permit review process and what are not and to provide for a range of uses on lands designated as Agricultural Lands that support agriculture, such as retail sales of agricultural products and “agritourism” on farms. Refer to the two-page “Summary of Proposed Amendments to the Unified Development Code (UDC) Regarding Agricultural and Associated Uses.” The Planning Commission will consider a staff recommendation for the proposal at their April 7 meeting (6:30 PM, WSU Extension). The BOCC will then consider the Planning Commission recommendation and make a decision about what language to adopt into the UDC.

Agricultural Lands Designation during the Comprehensive Plan amendment cycle

Once the UDC has been amended to incorporate the language related to agricultural activities and associated uses permitted on Agricultural Lands, the County will re-start its effort to assemble a list of parcels to be considered for Agricultural Lands designation (i.e., “zoning”) during the 2004 Comprehensive Plan amendment cycle. This effort will mostly happen during the late spring and summer. Property owners who are interested in having their land designated as Agricultural Lands are encouraged to contact the Long-Range Planning division of the Department of Community Development. After this year’s amendment cycle, property owners would need to apply for a zone change and pay a fee. This year’s process is a general legislative action being handled by the County and individual property owners do not need to pay the standard fee for a site-specific Comprehensive Plan amendment. The BOCC is expected to make a decision on the list of prospective parcels sometime in the fall.

For More Information

For more information, please visit our webpage on Agricultural Lands Planning:

<http://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/commdevelopment/Agriculture.htm>

You may also call the Long-Range Planning division of the Department of Community Development at 379-4450 and let the staff know that you wish to speak about Agricultural Lands policy. Your call will likely be forwarded to Josh Peters or Karen Driscoll, depending on who is available. You can also email your questions to planning@co.jefferson.wa.us.

You can check the land use designation (i.e., “zoning”) for your parcel by visiting the mapping homepage: <http://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/idms/mapserver.shtml>

Go to the Parcel Map. Use the Help button and the FAQ tool for assistance in finding out the zoning of a parcel.

The map of Comprehensive Plan Land Use Designations can be viewed here:

<http://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/commdevelopment/mapindex.htm>