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An update on the recent SMP Open Houses held in Jefferson County

Port Townsend, WA—Through the month of October, a series of Open Houses were held across Jefferson County about the Shoreline Master Program (SMP) Update project. The drop-in events provided an opportunity for the public to ask questions of Jefferson County staff and SMP volunteers, and featured informational poster displays, a repeating slide show and interactive digital mapping.

“People really liked being able to take a closer look at the many digital maps we had available at each of the SMP Open Houses,” said Michelle McConnell, Associate Planner for the SMP Update. “The primary message they took home was that any new ‘rules’ will only apply to new activities and that they won’t be retroactive.”

She went on to say that maintenance and repair of legal existing “grandfathered” permitted structures will be allowed, but most new shoreline uses or development will require a permit or exemption approval. This includes expanding an existing structure, building a new structure, clearing and grading, vegetation management and more.

Questions were asked about the connections between the SMP, Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) and the recently proposed water quality protection district. People were also interested in the project’s process and timeline and what might be different in the future, especially as those questions applied to their own properties. Most attendees seemed interested to have the new SMP better protect natural resources but still allow reasonable shoreline uses and development.

Answers to many of those questions are in progress. An early draft version of the proposed language for the updated SMP was distributed to the Shoreline Policy Advisory Committee (SPAC) in mid-September for their review and comment. They have met seven times since then with three more meetings scheduled by year-end to go through the entire document. A listing of future meeting times, along with the draft SMP and additional information, can be found on the County’s Web site at www.co.jefferson.wa.us/commdevelopment/ShorelinePlanning/htm.

Technical advisors have met recently to receive, review and begin commenting on a draft Shoreline Restoration Plan, which is also posted on-line. They’ll also be providing input on the Shoreline Environmental Designations (SEDs) menu and location assignments. SEDs are applied to all reaches of shoreline based on existing natural conditions, zoning and land use patterns and serve as a zoning overlay to help determine what uses are allowed, conditional and prohibited. These designations also help determine what permitting process will be followed for proposed activities. The current “allowed uses” classification table is found in JCC 18.25.240.

Jefferson County received a grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology to update its Shoreline Master Program in compliance with the State’s 1971 Shoreline Management Act and the 2003 SMP Guidelines. All jurisdictions in the State must update their SMPs by 2014. Jefferson County is due to submit a locally-approved SMP to the Department of Ecology by June 2009.

More information is available by contacting Michelle McConnell at 379.4484 or via e-mail at mmcconnell@co.jefferson.wa.us.

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