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Paradise Lost? Neighbors want to keep area rural. SV Herald article July 7, 1995.
Focus on the Future - Envision 2060 A Modeling Exercise for the next 50 years.

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Transition Chuckanut

June Kite and Ellen Bynum presented details, answered questions and led a discussion on the Blanchard Knob development, proposed first as a 9 home development in former forest, but projected to be a much larger development in future. About 30 people attended the meeting at the Alger Community Hall on June 16th and added more discussion about the stressed Samish River basin, the Department of Ecology allowing additional wells in the already stressed Samish River basin, when there is a moratorium on new wells in the Skagit basin, the proposed additional coal trains through Skagit County, the proposed setbacks for pipeline safety and the process for development permits and SEPA compliance. Transition Chuckanut promotes local self-reliance and works on sustainable community programs in the Alger area. See more at: <http://chuckanuttransition.wordpress.com/>.

Skagit County Shorelines Master Program Update Workshops

Next workshop: Wednesday, July 13, 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Anacortes City Hall, Council Chambers, 6th and Q Avenue, Anacortes. Skagit County will continue public input to the Shoreline Master Program (SMP) Update with a workshop to discuss the public's vision for Skagit County shorelines scheduled in the Anacortes area on July 13, 2011. The SMP guides the development of stream, lake, and marine shorelines in accordance with the State Shoreline Management Act. This includes lakes greater than 20 acres, streams with a mean annual flow greater than 20 cubic feet per second, lands within 200 feet of the ordinary high water mark, floodways, some floodplains, and associated wetlands. When updated, the SMP will include policies and regulations that provide environmental protection and restoration for shorelines; preserve and enhance public access; and encourage development that supports water-oriented uses such as docks, marinas, ports, aquaculture, and other uses that are dependent on, related to, or encourage enjoyment of the shoreline

To learn more, visit www.skagitcounty.net/SMP or contact Betsy Stevenson, Skagit County Planning and Development Services, at (360) 336-9410 ext. 5879 or at betsyds@co.skagit.wa.us.

Focus on the Future – Envision 2060 – A Modeling exercise for the next 50 years –
by June Kite, Vice-President, FOOSC.

Envision 2060 is an ambitious 50-year look into the future and is viewed as similar to the visioning of 1990's. After 2 years into the program the Advisory Committee has brought their recommendations to the government officials for their perusal as reported in the Skagit Valley Herald – Friday, June 10, 2011.

Skagit County is partnering with cities to select a model to direct/guide planning in the future. Grant money was provided for Consultants to lead, to set up committees from various groups and to present a 4-stage work program, (2008 thru 2012) for how to manage the population growth that is predicted by 2060.

The Four Modeling Program Stages

2008 – 2009 - Hire a consultant, solicit stakeholder committee. County and cities partnering with other governmental agencies.

2009 – 2010 – reports, maps and graphics analysis – Advisory committee formation. Community information forums.

2010 – 2011 – Study results, lay foundation for changes to policies and regulations and recommendations of Army Corps of Engineers for flood control.

2011 – 2012 – County modify Comprehensive Plan, preferred alternative, UGA boundaries, rural and resource land uses, Critical areas, Shoreline Master Program update and Surface Water Management plan.

Two major goals of the GMA (adopted in **1990**); [a]. Build livable communities and [b]. Preserve and Protect Resource lands (farms, forests, and fish). In the 1990's **the visioning process** led to formation of Citizens Advisory Committees.

Skagit County citizens received an invitation to comment on what they vision for Skagit County in 20 years. Plans and Policies were adopted. Urban Growth Boundaries were adopted with a population growth split of 80% urban and 20% rural.

After 20 years of working with the Comprehensive Plan it is time to see how we are doing. How many acres of prime agricultural lands have been converted to non-agricultural uses? How many urban sized lots have been permitted in rural and resource lands? What was the population growth in urban and rural areas?

“So, How are we doing?” The County failed to adopt regulations that provided a process to monitor and achieve the 80/20 split. In the next 2 years the recommendations of the Envision committees will be used to alter and update the Comprehensive Plan and Policies.

2013 is the end of the modeling program. The real work begins. Will the recommended population split of 90% urban – 10% rural be put into practice? Will we see rural and resource lands protected with strict zoning and code enforcement? Or will the County fail again to adopt an effective monitoring process to achieve the 90/10 split.

If you want to see the final report of the Citizen Advisory Committee, go to www.accessskagitcounty.net and click on the Envision Skagit headline.

If you did not comment on the Envision Skagit project, please send your comments to emmaw@co.skagit.wa.us. Or by mail to 1800 Continental Place, Mount Venron, WA 98273. Or fax to: 360-336-9416. If you have questions contact Kirk Johnson, 360-336-9410.

CORRECTION – Please note: In our May 1, 2011 letter to members we incorrectly stated that the Skagit Land Trust owned Sanfi Acres. They do not. We apologize for any inconvenience caused by the error.

Paradise Lost? Neighbors want to keep area rural

Excerpts from Skagit Valley Herald article from July 7, 1995 by Mike Nemeth, Staff Writer.

BAKER HEIGHTS – Drive over the hill on Gunderson Road and the bustle of civilization is replaced by fields, farmhouses and Holsteins.

This peace and quiet in the shadow of Mount Baker is the only neighborhood John Johnson has known in his 68 years. He and his wife, Dorothy, live in the house his father, Otto, purchased in 1923.

“It’s like paradise,” Dorothy Johnson said yesterday as she and John walked their heifer farm.

However, change looms.

Not only has a 255-home subdivision been approved to the south of their spread, but a proposed zoning change would allow many more houses to be built in the pastoral neighborhood the Johnsons and their neighbors have grown to love.

Current restrictions limit one house to 20 acres. Proposed changes would classify the 2,200 acres in Baker Heights “rural” and allow one house per 10 acres and more if a developer clusters houses in subdivisions.

The region – bounded by Highway 9 and Nookachamps Creek – is listed as “agriculture reserve,” a designation that has been eliminated in Skagit County’s proposed Comprehensive Plan.

.....The Skagit County Planning Commission takes up the issue July 17 when it plans to wade through the proposed comprehensive plan and 1,800 pages of comments. Some of those pages involve Baker Heights. At least 37 families sent letters of protest.

The comprehensive plan was slow in coming partly because of its huge scope. The document is intended to be a blueprint of future population and development growth as prescribed under the 1990 Growth Management Act.

(Then) Planning Director Dave Hough explained that agriculture reserve in the new comprehensive plan is replaced with “rural conservation”. Land zoned agriculture limits one house to every 40 acres.

.....John Martin,.....a relative newcomer to a neighborhood that boats four generations still living on family-owned land. He has lived on his 5 acres for 11 years. He is wistful of their chances at keeping development at bay.

“We kind of want to be left along,” he said. “I don’t know if we have a chance.”.

Thanks to Andrea Xaver for sending a copy of this article to us. Several thousand acres of agricultural land in the county, besides Gunderson Road area, were re-zoned to higher density (for potential housing). Many of these acres were in agricultural production until the “rural” rezone made more houses possible.

The County policy of “no net loss” of agricultural land is impossible to implement without replacing farmland converted to other uses with other farmland. Some, but not all of rural zoned lands, have soils comparable to Ag-NRL zoned land. Perhaps the replacement land would be double or triple the ag acres converted to achieve the goal.

The County’s Farmland Legacy Program is funded by a small tax on all properties in the county and federal grants. But the FLP cannot protect the land quickly enough to prevent conversion to other uses. Since the program began around 7,000 acres are protect out of 90,000 acres zoned Ag-NRL. In 2008, 3,000 acres of land used for farming was converted to other uses.

The FLP has targeted the Ag-NRL zoned lands to purchase development rights. Expanding the FLP to include rural zoned land used for agricultural production would take away money from preserving prime ag soils and also be very expensive because of the added value of the additional development rights put on the land during the 1995 re-zone. So a voluntary program to encourage landowners to donate development rights to the County’s Farmland Legacy Program (FLP) is needed.

The FLP can also receive your tax-deductible donation for purchasing development rights. If you would like to contribute, please send your donation in any amount to Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program, 1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon, WA 98273 and mark it for Purchase of Development Rights.