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Planning & Development Services
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Mark Personius, AICP
Director

Agricultural Advisory Committee **Regular Meeting**

LOCATION

**Hybrid Meeting: Zoom (details below) and
Northwest Annex Conference Room
Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA 98226**

Date: January 14, 2026

Time: 2:00-4:00 P.M. Pacific Time PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Whatcom County PDS is inviting you to a scheduled in person or Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86432152429?pwd=matGxIV4BjnL6vS8DMoQDxVMShkReJ.1>

Meeting ID: 864 3215 2429
Passcode: 000000

One tap mobile
+12532158782,,86432152429#,,,,*000000# US (Tacoma)

Dial by your location
• +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)



Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting Agenda

for
January 14, 2026
2:00 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.

1. Roll Call & Introductions (5 min)
 - Determination of Quorum
2. Agenda Review & Adjustments (5 min)
3. Open Public Session (5 min)
4. Review & Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (5 min)
 - December 10, 2025
5. Special Topics (50 min)
 - Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) - Mike Poteet, SCC
 - December Flood Impacts
6. Subcommittee Updates (20 min)
 - Agricultural Staff
 - Meat Processing
7. Staff & Member Updates (20 min)
8. New Business (5 min)
9. Action Items & Next Agenda (5 min)
10. Adjournment

Attachments:

- Draft minutes for AAC Meeting 12/10/25

Individuals who require special assistance to participate in the meetings are asked to contact AAC staff at least 72 hours in advance at: dstranik@whatcomcounty.us, 360-778-5911.

**Agricultural Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
December 10, 2025**

Start Time:	2:00 p.m.
Location:	Hybrid Meeting – Zoom & at Whatcom County Planning & Development

Meeting Highlights
There were 17 people in attendance (Voting members: 9 of 10, Staff members: 4, Ex-Officio: 1, Others: 3).

Attendees – Members	Affiliation	Present
Kubalek, Roger (chair)	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Steele, Eliza (vice chair)	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Chapman, Alan	Whatcom Conservation District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Likkel, Fred	Whatcom Family Farmers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pehl, Clay	Consumer of Ag Products	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hawley, Roger	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Del Giorgio, Isaiah	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Lenssen, Austin	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Richner, Brandon	Ag Producer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Byers, Michael	Ag Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
VACANT	Ag Producer	<input type="checkbox"/>
VACANT	Ag Processing	<input type="checkbox"/>
VACANT	Ag Programs	<input type="checkbox"/>

Quorum Present	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
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Attendees – Ex-Official/Contributing	Affiliation	Present
Corina Cheever	Whatcom Conservation District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Chris Benedict	WSU Extension	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alex Hall	NRCS	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emma Karber	FFA Youth	<input type="checkbox"/>

Attendees - Staff
Dakota Stranik, Planner PDS Lauren Templeton, PDS Alex Harris, PDS Bill Angel, WCHCS

Others Present
Ben Elenbaas, Whatcom County Council Chris Elder, King County Margaret (via Zoom - last name unknown)

Recording:
<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/AgendaCenter>

1- Roll call and introductions – starting at 00:01:07 in recording
WCC 2.3.100(2) establishes that “a quorum for the purpose of holding a meeting and taking action will be more than one-half of the total number of filled voting committee positions.” A quorum was established with 9 of 10 appointed voting members present.

The committee made more in-depth introductions for the benefit of new attendees.

2- Agenda Review & Adjustments – starting at 00:15:29 in recording
No adjustments were made to the agenda.

3- Open Public Session – starting at 00:15:38 in recording
Allex Harris, County staff with the Conservation Easement Program introduced himself. Alan suggested defining agricultural viability as part of the discussion on priorities for agriculture.

4- Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – starting at 00:17:15 in recording
Minutes were reviewed for the previous meeting on November 12, 2025. Alan motioned to approve and Isaiah seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved with one edit to add the recording link.

5- Discussion on Priorities for Agriculture – starting at 00:19:18 in recording
Roger began the discussion with an acknowledgement of proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments and acknowledged the emphasis on agricultural viability and water availability (especially in regards to adjudication). The AAC had previously provided [suggested amendments on the Agriculture section of Chapter 8](#), and Councilmember Ben Elenbaas provided his [suggested amendments for Chapter 7 \(Economics\)](#) focusing on agricultural viability.

Councilmember Elenbaas shared concerns about preserving agricultural land but not ensuring the preservation of a viable agricultural economy. He also expressed concerns about current land use policy resulting in farm consolidation, bigger and fewer farms and questioned if those policies were helping or hurting in the effort to maintain 100,000 acres of agricultural land in Whatcom County. He defined agricultural viability as stable farms that can continue to afford farming without requiring off-farm income or selling off their land.

Alan corroborated that there seems to be very few people that can make a living off of the land due to needs like medical care, labor costs, lack of processing, markets, etc. He emphasized that good land stewardship requires increasing the ability of farmers to stay on the land and generate revenue to at least cover their costs.

Councilmember Elenbaas acknowledged the need to allow the establishment of infrastructure in the ag zone to ensure ag viability, but the permitting process is

extremely burdensome and there are some code limitations that are overly burdensome, especially for landowners that can't afford a land use consultant or attorney.

Roger acknowledged that a lot of limitations seem to be in regards to environmental protections, but that there are ways to support agriculture in a way that is balancing environmental needs.

Fred acknowledged that cheap food is a policy that has been embraced by the consumer. He advocated for putting in place protections for farmers especially in the place of population growth and increasing tension with surrounding residential densities. He also suggested that farmers should be compensated for integrating buffers and other environmental protections that cut into farm profits but offer a benefit to the greater community.

Eliza, having experience in permitting, expressed that comprehensive plan revisions are a huge opportunity to think about how codes and regulations are both protecting land and making it easier for farmers to stay on their land. She acknowledged that many county regulations are passed down from the state level.

Dakota shared that dedicated agricultural county staff to assist with permitting is something that is in place in other Puget Sound counties but not in Whatcom, and that it is difficult to track common bottlenecks for ag infrastructure permitting or quantify agricultural land loss without dedicated staff to do so.

Alan and Eliza both acknowledged the need for effective zoning to limit urban sprawl and agricultural land loss.

Dakota suggested looking at Ongoing Agriculture and how that policy could be improved to ensure it does not hinder farm succession and conservation efforts. This could be reviewed during the upcoming Critical Areas Ordinance update in 2026.

Councilmember Elenbaas emphasized that the AAC should come to council meetings more regularly and speak on these issues, because the rest of the council is interested in hearing about the challenges within the agricultural community. It is important to have the agricultural perspective represented. He also acknowledged that "size, scale, and intensity" is a key consideration.

Michael mentioned the need for planning for the long term vision of what agriculture looks like in Whatcom County, for example ensuring a local food supply in the face of climate change.

Councilmember Elenbaas acknowledged the AAC's critical role in planning for the future of agriculture and again encouraged the committee to engage more with Council. Receiving a report of the AAC's official stance on a given issue (including a minority report if needed) would be a helpful way to engage. He mentioned he is chair of the Planning and Development Committee and could easily add an AAC discussion to the agenda.

6- Subcommittee Updates – starting at 01:08:15 in recording

Ag Staffing Subcommittee - this subcommittee has not been able to meet yet.

Councilmember Elenbaas mentioned that a good opportunity to fund such a position would be to consider enrollment in the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP).

Dakota shared some information about the VSP program based on recent conversations with Mike Poteet, the new program coordinator at the State level. She suggested inviting Mike to speak on the program at a future AAC meeting.

Meat Processing Subcommittee - this subcommittee met twice in the last month

The subcommittee was prompted by permitting frustrations brought to the AAC by a local company that has been unable to find a path forward for establishing a facility to service local farmers raising livestock for meat. The subcommittee is drafting some possible code revisions that could help facilitate a clearer path forward for permitting while also maintaining environmental protections. There is also discussion on whether the land use code pathway should be specified as an accessory use, permitted use, or otherwise, acknowledging the difficulties in managing a meat processing facility simultaneously with a working livestock farm (if accessory use is the requirement). Eliza recommended possibly seeking letters of support from the Food System Committee and/or the Climate Impact Advisory Committee. Some discussion was had around how to best anticipate and alleviate any concerns that may come up from the non-agricultural community. Eliza also expressed interest in joining the subcommittee.

7- Staff & Member Updates – starting at 01:46:13 in recording

Eliza shared the recent acquisition of Cloud Mountain Farm Center by the Whatcom Land Trust. They will be holding the property in the short term while working to transfer it to a private farm operator/s for the long term, likely after placing an easement on the property for farmland preservation.

Michael shared an update on a recent community meeting regarding the Ranch Quarry project.

8- New Business – starting at 01:50:57 in recording

There was no new business.

9- Action Items & Next Agenda – starting at 01:51:12 in recording

There is a potential agritourism discussion being explored for the January meeting, depending on the availability of Jenn Tate who attended last in November.

Dakota suggested inviting the Food System Committee to a future meeting to share information on their Food System Plan and how it overlaps with agriculture. There was interest in having this discussion scheduled for the February meeting or a subcommittee discussion.

Interest was also expressed in inviting Mike Poteet with the State Conservation Commission to a future meeting to present on the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) and how it might be a funding pathway for more agricultural support staff.

10- Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:01 p.m. The next regular meeting will be scheduled on Wednesday, January 14th from 2pm to 4pm. The meeting will be held as a hybrid via Zoom and in person at Whatcom County Planning & Development Services (5280 Northwest Drive).

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