



**King County**

**Minutes  
King County Rural Forest Commission  
November 9, 2006  
Mercerview Community Center**

**A joint meeting of the Rural Forest Commission and the Agriculture Commission was held from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. Break Out sessions for the respective commissions took place from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.**

*Rural Forest Commissioners present:* Alex Kamola (Chair), Jim Franzel, Doug Schindler; Leonard Guss (first half) and Lee Witter Kahn.

*Rural Forest Commissioners absent:* Julie Stangell (Vice Chair), Ole Una and Dennis Dart.

*Rural Forest Commission Ex officio member absent:* Marilyn Cope, Amy Grotta and Randy Sandin.

*Agriculture Commissioners Present:* Nancy Hutto, George Irwin, Grant Davidson, Roger Calhoon, Julie Haakenson, Bob Tidball, Larry Pickering, Judy Taylor, Robert Holland, Ben Kodama.

*Agriculture Commissioners Absent:* Bob Vos, Michael Blakely, Ewing Stringfellow

*Forestry Staff:* Kathy Creahan, Farm and Forest Programs Manager (first half); Linda Vane, Rural Forest Commission Liaison, and Bill Eckel, Section Manager of the Office of Rural and Resource Programs, and Bill Loeber, Forester.

*Guests:* Ron Baum, Hollywood Hills Association/ Sammamish Grange/ Woodinville Artists Association; Kevin Buckley, Snoqualmie Tribe Environmental Protection Manager; Duncan Greene; Matt Rourke, forester; Anne Mack, P.L.A.N; Marguerite Sutherland, P.L.A.N; Erik Steffens, Cascade Land Conservancy; Josh Monaghan, King Conservation District; and Todd Murray, Washington State University King County Extension

**Part 1. Joint Meeting**

The first half of the meeting was conducted jointly with the King County Agriculture Commission and was co-chaired by Alex Kamola, Rural Forest Commission Chair, and Nancy Hutto, Agriculture Commission Chair. The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. Welcoming statements by the co-chairs and Kathy Creahan, King County Farm and Forest Programs Manager, opened the meeting. A round of introductions by the Agriculture and Rural Forest Commissioners followed.

**Forest Commission Presentation: Function, Successes, Challenges**

Lee Kahn, RFC and Doug Schindler, RFC

Rural Forest commissioners Lee Kahn and Doug Schindler provided an overview of forestry in King County and the role of the Rural Forest Commission (RFC). Doug S. explained that the RFC advises the County on policies and programs affecting rural forestry, works to identify strategies to conserve

forestlands; and promotes the practice of forestry in rural areas of the county. Over half the county, 820,000 acres, is within the Forest Production District. About two thirds of this area is publicly-owned, the rest is large privately-owned industrial forests. Outside this district there are significant privately-owned forest lands that are mostly non-industrial. Doug S. continued that among the challenges confronting the county are: loss of the forested land base through conversion to other land uses, the need among privately-owned small acreages for maintenance and active management, and the decline in infrastructure for commercial forest operations. Doug explained that since the 1980s management of industrial forest lands has changed dramatically. For example, Weyerhaeuser used to own 11% of the county and they have now moved their tree growing operations out of the area. There are no longer any industrial lumber mills operating in the county and logs must be transported elsewhere.

Lee Kahn spoke from the perspective of forest landowners and said that tree farm model is to manage forests for multiple values and some profit. In King County the picture is changing. New landowners still need to keep regulations reasonable, costs low, contractors available, but they are not commercial operations so do not place as much emphasis on revenue as do tree farmers.

#### **Agriculture Commission Presentation: Function, Successes, Challenges**

Nancy Hutto, Agriculture Commission Chair

Nancy presented a slide show that is being developed as an outreach tool by the Agriculture Commission. She explained that the goal of the King County Agriculture Program is to conserve farmland, retain and promote agriculture in King County, and encourage good management of farms. The county's 1994 *Comprehensive Plan* recognized that in addition to such efforts by county programs, it is necessary to promote farming in order to conserve the land base. Efforts such as Puget Sound Fresh were developed as a result.

#### **Finding Common Ground – Open discussion on how to preserve and encourage the practice of Agriculture and Forestry in King County**

Facilitated by Nancy Hutto, Agriculture Commission Chair and Alex Kamola, RFC Chair

The Agriculture and Rural Forest commissioners engaged in an informal discussion of the pressures threatening the farming and forest land base in King County. Among the issues raised were these:

When asked about Puget Sound Fresh, Roger Calhoun said that the farm guide is one of the useful tools provided by the program. He said that people find his U-Pick farm on the Internet and in the farm guide in the newspaper. Puget Sound Fresh is not a certification program; it only says that the product is local. It is run by a non-profit organization and includes all Puget Sound area counties, said Roger. Alex Kamola asked if a lot of people make a living from their farms in King County. Nancy Hutto replied that a lot do. Alex asked about labor. Roger Calhoun said that the high cost of hiring help is a problem for small farms. More and more farmers are going back to the old time way of doing everything themselves. The lack of support infrastructure adds to this as there are very few repair places that really understand farm machinery, for example. Len Guss asked if immigrant labor is an issue in the county. George Irwin said immigrant labor was not really an issue in this area. Roger Calhoun said that the general agricultural labor shortage was one of the reasons that he converted his farm to a U-Pick operation.

Doug Schindler asked about horses and Josh Monaghan replied that as land becomes more expensive in King County more horses are kept in stables and fewer in fields. Josh added that as forest and farm lands

are replaced by housing developments, rural residents are losing their riding trails. Len Guss added that it is more and more difficult to find places to ride and to find support facilities like tack shops.

Doug Schindler asked about the size of farming properties. Julie Haakenson said that most farms are small; for example in the Snoqualmie Valley there are only three farms that are large, the largest being about 200 acres. The rest are much smaller, ranging down to 5 acres or less, she said. George Irwin said that the public often refers to farms as “open space.” He would argue that these are not “open spaces,” but rather are “lands developed for agriculture.”

Bob Tidball said that the rising price of land is a barrier to agriculture. The Farm Link Program has a waiting list of over 100 people who would like to farm, but do not have land. A lot has been done to improve the incomes of farmers through marketing programs, but the cost of land is so high that newcomers cannot get into the business, said Bob. Moreover, farmers cannot get loans. The development of large residential estates drives up the market value of the land around them, which compounds the problems faced by farmers, said Bob. Alex Kamola said that this is something that farmers have in common with forest owners.

Alex Kamola said that an infrastructure problem confronting owners of small forest acreages is the shortage of heavy equipment operators locally. To conduct a forest thinning a landowner may have to seek a contractor from as far away as Lewis County. At those distances contractors do not want to come and work on a job that is only 5 acres in size.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the commission chairs agreed that the discussion was a useful exchange of ideas and proposed that the dialogue be continued between the Rural Forest Commission and the Agriculture Commission.

## **Part 2. Rural Forest Commission Break Out Session**

Alex Kamola called the session to order at 5:50 p.m.

### **Meeting Summary:**

- 1) Approval of minutes from the September 13, 2006, meeting was tabled until the January meeting for lack of a quorum.
- 2) Doug Schindler and Linda Vane will list the three or four most important issues facing forests in King County with input from the RFC members and respond to the Council staff’s request for information.

### **RFC Debriefing on the Joint Session**

Alex Kamola, facilitator

Alex asked the RFC members to comment on the joint session that just took place. Lee Kahn said that it was interesting. She observed that preserving the land base is a shared interest that would be useful to communicate to the County Council. Lee said that if the commissions were to outreach to the Council then they could do back-to-back presentations to the Council’s Natural Resources and Growth Management Committee, if not a shared presentation. Jim Franzel said that it was interesting to hear that a fair amount of potentially farmable land is not being farmed. He asked if, given that the settlers in the 1800s cleared a lot of forests for farmland, if there is potential for current forest lands to be converted to agriculture and yield better income. Lee said that as far as tree farms are concerned, most of these operations are at a higher elevation and get more frost, so there is not necessarily potential there for crop

agriculture.

Alex asked Bill Eckel what struck him as particularly important. Bill said that he noted commonalities in the interest in preserving the land base and preserving infrastructure. He saw many parallels among what the RFC and the Agriculture Commission are trying to accomplish, but did not hear any common tools emerging. Alex noted some differences between the two commissions' interests. He observed that farmers know their land and work on it. Alex continued that farmers do not have to go out and find a subcontractor to harvest and they do not need permits to harvest. Alex said that small forest landowners do not make a living from the land from forestry because it takes a lot of time and a lot of land to make it work.

Ron Baum said that what was not raised in the joint session is that commercial farms in our area are small, unlike places like California, yet farmers have made it work. The question is, how does forestry make it profitable? Ron concluded that agriculture is farther ahead on that than forestry. Lee said that there have always been truck farmers, so that element has not changed, but agreed that farm product marketing has worked to bring sales back up after a period of decline. Jim Franzel said that it is the same as wild salmon marketing. Doug S. added that Puget Sound Fresh is a marketing campaign rather than a third-party certification program so it is inexpensive for the farmer. He said that in much the same way, a local wood marketing campaign would not necessarily be expensive for the producer if it were separate from forest certification.

#### **Staff Report on King County 2007 Budget: Impact on the Forestry Program**

Linda Vane, Liaison to the RFC

In response to questions from several RFC members, Linda provided information regarding an anticipated cut in staff in King County's Natural Resource Lands Program. Linda said that the impact on the Forestry Program will be that some of the resource lands management tasks will be accomplished on a longer timeline and some will be assigned to county foresters. Overall about 10% of the two County foresters time will be spent on resource lands management rather than providing technical assistance to small forest landowners. In addition, the harvest on Ring Hill Forest will be delayed and the Mitchell Hill harvest will be postponed indefinitely. Linda said that demand for the foresters' services from forest landowners is high and is increasing every year. The RFC has encouraged the Forestry Program to do more to improve infrastructure for forest management and to streamline permitting practices. These kinds of projects may take longer to accomplish. Linda concluded by saying that demand for Forestry Program services are very high and the staff will continue do the best they can to respond to requests for assistance.

Doug S. said that he is very concerned about changing the work assignments of the foresters and losing any of the of the outreach effort to small forest landowners, even 10%.

Alex said that landowners could hire consultants to do some of the work that the County can no longer accomplish. For example, the private sector could pick up some of the slack and be paid by the landowner to assist with the Forest Stewardship Plans required to enroll in the Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs). Ron Baum agreed that people would be willing to pay consultants to get into PBRs and qualify for reduced property taxes.

Alex asked why the position is being cut. Bill Eckel explained that the position is supported by the Surface Water Management fee. The fee is facing a precipitous drop over the next several years as unincorporated areas become part of cities and pay the fee to the cities rather than King County. Revenue

to the County will drop from \$17 million per year to \$12 million per year by 2010. The County must therefore prioritize its expenditures and reduce program budgets accordingly.

Lee mentioned alternative funding sources as a possible way to deal with this problem. Speaking from the small forest owner perspective, she said, she feels strongly that the services to them should not be reduced. She added that the idea of having County foresters help forest landowners get ready to apply for permits is very important. Doug S. said that more information in the coming year about how the County works and staff functions in meeting objectives for forestry would be helpful.

### **Discuss a Proposal for a Town Hall Meeting on Forestry in 2007**

Alex Kamola, RFC Chair

Doug Schindler. provided a recap, explaining that last May the RFC decided to propose a Town Hall Meeting regarding Forestry and Alex therefore submitted a proposal for such a meeting. At the time, the RFC thought to introduce the Council to the RFC, inform the Council on the state of forests and forestry infrastructure and establish a basis on which to build a program of action. Subsequently, the Council invited the RFC to give a short presentation at the September 2006 Town Hall Meeting, which Lee Kahn and Doug McClelland did. Doug said that after that meeting, the Council contacted Linda and asked for more information from the RFC about their proposed Forestry Town Hall Meeting.

In the ensuing discussion about topics and issues, Alex said it is important that a Town Hall Meeting not be redundant, that the RFC needs to have something specific to achieve. Alex said that a short presentation to Council might be more effective. Jim Franzel said he is intrigued by the idea of a town meeting and recommended that the RFC focus on three or four important topics. Doug said they assume they would have Forestry Program staff support to put a Town Meeting together.

Ron said that the infrastructure for farming and that for forestry are different and that a discussion of what are needed for both might be a good topic. Jim said that Len Guss is an expert on processing and there are now no sawmills in King County. Jim said that in some cases logs are being hauled to eastern Washington to be milled. Matt Rourke added that educating the public about forestry issues is a good thing. Jim said recreation is a big topic in King County; the RFC does not work on this issue much, but organizations such as the Mountains to Sound Greenway (where Doug Schindler works) are very active in this. Doug S. pointed out that the RFC is charged with looking at all aspects of forests, not commercial forestry alone, and that the struggle to manage unhealthy forests is very important. For example, the Forest Service has 100,000 acres of unhealthy forest and that is a big problem for the County that is not being addressed. Doug S. also said that the RFC is charged with giving input on the management and preservation of the two-thirds of the County that is forested. Bill Eckel noted that is more land area than some states.

Jim Franzel said the RFC should frame the topics in more detail. Doug S. agreed and proposed that the group frame the topics and respond to the Council's request for ideas for a Forestry Town Hall Meeting. Action: Doug Schindler and Linda Vane will develop a treatment of the three or four most important issues facing forests in King County with input from the RFC members and respond to the Council staff's request for information.

### **Suggestions for future agendas**

Next agenda:

- 1) Review the Rural Forest Commission bilaws.

Rural Forest Commission Minutes

11/09/06

Page 6

- 2) Consider establishing an annual report to Council.
- 3) Election of officers.
- 4) 2007 meeting schedule: it is proposed to meet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every other month.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

**Next meeting**

The next regularly scheduled meeting is January 17, 2007.

Staff Liaison:

Linda Vane, Forestry Program

206-296-8042 or [linda.vane@metrokc.gov](mailto:linda.vane@metrokc.gov)