

MINUTES OF THE SOLANO COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Meeting of March 18, 2010

The regular meeting of the Solano County Planning Commission was called to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Chambers, Fairfield, California.

PRESENT: Commissioners Barnes, Boschee, Rhoads-Poston and Chairman Mahoney

EXCUSED: _____

STAFF PRESENT: Mike Yankovich, Planning Program Manager; Matt Walsh, Principal Planner; Jim Louie, Principal Planner; Jim Laughlin, Deputy County Counsel; Kristine Letterman, Planning Commission Clerk

Items from the floor – none

THE MINUTES of the meetings of January 28, 2009, and February 18, 2010 were approved as prepared.

1. **PUBLIC HEARING** and workshop to receive a report on the **Climate Action Plan** development process, and to solicit community input concerning greenhouse gas emission reduction efforts in unincorporated Solano County. (Project Planner: Matt Walsh)

Matt Walsh explained that this Plan is a follow-up to the 2008 General Plan. It is also in response to state legislation from 2006 which required that local cities and counties implement strategies and policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, both in the community sector as well as from county facilities. Mr. Walsh noted that a focus group was put together consisting of various stakeholders which included representatives of the business industry, the Chamber of Commerce, the agricultural industry, the Land Trust, and others. He said that there have been two focus group meetings to date.

Jeff Henderson, project consultant, AECOM, provided a PowerPoint presentation detailing the Plan. The presentation included a 2005 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and 2020 Projections, comments from focus groups, a preliminary list of reduction measures, and the next steps in the process.

Commissioner Mahoney inquired about the fossil fuel emitters for the industrial sector. Mr. Henderson explained that there is a facility located in Rio Vista and one near Suisun City. He stated that collectively those two facilities account for approximately 80% of the industrial sector in terms of their emissions. Mr. Mahoney wanted to know if the Anheuser Busch plant and the industrial activity occurring around the City of Benicia were taken into

account. Mr. Henderson stated that facilities located inside city limits are not factored in. He said the data for those large point source emitters originate from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the Yolo-Solano Air Quality District.

Commissioner Mahoney inquired about the ag processing complexes that were referenced and the required improvements in efficiency. Yanna Badet, consultant, AECOM, explained that staff were looking at the possibilities for agricultural processing complexes to incorporate industrial ecology principles and renewable energy generation, and to look at biomass and biogas and the use of by-products that are produced to generate energy and create those efficiencies.

Commissioner Mahoney want to know what ideas are being considered with regard to the control of livestock emissions. Ms. Badet stated that the plan looks mostly at confined livestock rather than grazing livestock because they produce more emissions.

Commissioner Mahoney commented strongly on how important agriculture is to Solano County and that it must be protected.

Mr. Henderson commented that the focus toward agriculture is to start with the incentives, to start with the things that make good business sense for agriculture and to work outward from there, and to look at all the other sectors and what is going on in those areas first before starting in on agriculture. He said that it is intended to give the county credit where credit is due, such as with renewable energy and the land in the county that is being devoted to renewable energy. Mr. Henderson noted that the plan will have a section that describes those things that the county is already participating in.

Commissioner Boschee stated that the area the county has influence over is very small. He said the county can spend a lot of time and energy and money trying to make very small impacts on the overall numbers. With regard to transportation, he believed that there is not much that can be done except maybe internally within the county, such as using more efficient vehicles, reduction in travel time, etc. Mr. Boschee stated that he felt the same with regard to industrial parks and how the county has very little influence on power generation. He commented that the county should definitely get credit for wind turbines. He said the focus is going to be on the large projects and those projects will be the first to be looked at. He said that hopefully if the proposed sequestration project is built in Solano County the county will get credit because the facility it is going to have a huge impact on the Bay Area if it does come to fruition. Mr. Boschee stated that the county should try to encourage more efficient energy use. He believed that green building practices should be incorporated into the building codes for new buildings to make those new homes as efficient as possible.

Commissioner Boschee stated that farmers are growing crops that absorb c02 and this is something that should be examined. He stated that an area that could also be better examined is the management of the county's waste facilities. He said there are ways of looking at converting waste into energy through certain types of digestion processes that

are currently being developed.

Since there were no further comments, Chairman Barnes opened the public hearing.

Jim Dunbar, manager, Potrero Hills Landfill, P. O. Box 68, Fairfield, provided some background information on the measures that the landfill is taking to promote their efforts in green house gas reduction. He explained that they have started a landfill gas-to-energy project. He said they have also looked at increasing their C&D processing which was one of the recommendations in the plan. Mr. Dunbar stated that they are a beneficial re-user of green waste. He stated that they are currently preparing a green house gas inventory as an ongoing effort and are one of the early participants in the California Registry. Mr. Dunbar stated that their commitment is to work with the county to accurately record emissions inventory.

Since there were no further speakers, Chairman Barnes closed the public hearing.

2. **PUBLIC HEARING** to review and receive public comments for the proposed **Suisun Valley Strategic Plan**. The Strategic Plan is for the 9,000+ acres in the Suisun Valley Agricultural Region as identified in the Solano County General Plan. The Strategic Plan provides planning guidance for maintaining the agricultural viability of the Suisun Valley. The Plan recognizes the valley's unique agricultural environments and provides marketing and economic opportunities to enhance the agricultural future of the agricultural region. (Project Planner: Jim Louie)

Jim Louie gave a brief introduction to the Plan. He explained that this planning process started over a decade ago with the Suisun Valley Fund envisioning a new vision for the Suisun Valley. This vision was continued as part of the planning process with the county's General Plan update in which the Suisun Valley Strategic Plan was initiated as a part of the implementation program. He stated that the plan provides guidance for retaining the agricultural viability of the Suisun Valley. It recognizes the unique agricultural environments and provides marketing and economic opportunities to further the agricultural future of the Suisun Valley. Mr. Louie stated that the strategic plan is going to provide the road map on how to achieve the viability of future agriculture in the Suisun Valley through agritourism activities.

Jeff Henderson, project consultant, AECOM, provided a PowerPoint presentation detailing the plan. The presentation included an overview of the structure of the plan, design guidelines and zoning regulations, land use circulation and infrastructure concepts, identifying key implementation and first steps, and the CEQA process.

Chairman Barnes inquired as to why an environmental impact report (EIR) was not required for this plan. Mr. Henderson explained that when an EIR is prepared for a large project such as a general plan update, it is comprehensive in scope and character. When a project that implements that general plan is brought forward, and the project simply carries forward the

policies of the general plan and implementing those policies, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) allows the plan to tier off of that analysis. It acknowledges that the project was analyzed, addressed, and potentially mitigated in the general plan EIR. Mr. Henderson stated that since this project implements that general plan EIR the analysis that was conducted and the findings made by the Board of Supervisors with regard to that analysis apply here as well, and that is how this project can move forward with a negative declaration.

Chairman Barnes wanted to know which public entity will act as the design review committee. Mr. Louie explained that review would depend on the requirements for a particular project; if it were a building permit it would be a staff level approval, if the project required planning commission approval it would come before the commission.

Chairman Barnes referred to the subject of grants and noticed that reference is made only to the Mankas Corner area. Mr. Henderson stated that the emphasis on Mankas Corner comes from short term improvements. He explained that a lot of that comes from discussions that were held with stakeholders and the community which is that Mankas Corner is an area that is already functioning in many ways as an agricultural tourist center, and it is a place where if the resources are directed there and it works, it improves the potential for other areas.

Chairman Barnes commented that the tourist centers look great except for the Gomer School site. He inquired if there are any business agencies that are interested in stepping forward and developing this project. Mr. Louie stated that there has been some discussion about incorporating that site as part of the agritourist center, but the details still need to be worked out. He said that there are some limitations on what can be done with the site.

Commissioner Mahoney spoke on the subject of the Williamson Act. He wanted to know if staff is looking at a proposal where if a person who has land in the Williamson Act, but wanted to develop it, could get out of the contract quicker. Mr. Yankovich stated that staff is exploring the idea of taking the area of the property that is under contract, if in an agritourist center (ATC), out of contract but leaving the remainder under contract. He stated that the owner would enter into a new contract minus the property that is in the ATC. Mr. Yankovich noted that it would not apply to all the properties under contract because not all the properties have ATC's. He commented that staff would need to go back and amend the county's local rules with regard to land conservation contracts to allow for that, and it would only apply to the Suisun Valley.

Commissioner Mahoney wanted to know if the time period for the non-renewal of a contract would be expedited or if it would still be a ten year process. Mr. Yankovich stated that staff will explore this further by working with the Department of Conservation.

Commissioner Mahoney inquired about assessment districts. Mr. Yankovich stated that ideally there would be one district. He said that there may be several districts, but only if the

property owners vote to approve such a district, noting that it is a voluntary option. He stated that there is going to need to be some type of cooperation amongst the property owners within the ATC's to actually realize the long term goals.

Commissioner Rhoads-Poston inquired about the tax consequence if a piece of property is taken out of the Williamson Act. Jim Louie stated that once a piece of property is taken out of contract the property owner will be taxed on the fair market value of that property. The value would be established by the assessor's office.

Commissioner Rhoads-Poston spoke with regard to the subject of parking. Jim Louie stated that the initial step may just be cooperation among the various property owners. He said this is a long term plan and the initial phase is going to be small steps to try to create the value. He noted that staff has had some discussion with property owners in the Mankas Corner area and they are willing to cooperate. Mr. Louie said that staff will explore the least expensive way to make it work because to make the tourist centers work it has to be economically viable.

Since there were no further comments, Chairman Barnes opened the public hearing.

Robert Hansen, 5444 Williams Road, Fairfield, stated that he feels this is a good plan. He stated that he hoped staff does not rush this plan and takes the time to get all the aspects in order so that there is constant change. He commented that one of the main problems in the area is traffic, and that the county needs to pay close attention to that when looking at traffic flow for the valley.

Margo McGlone, 2849 Sundown Circle, Fairfield, stated that she is the founding member and president of the Gomer School Historical Association which was formed in 1986. She stated that the purpose of the association was to make the historical part of the school building available for non-profit groups to use and to collect historical memorabilia. She stated that the intent is to educate children and adults about the history of the Suisun Valley. Ms. McGlone said that one of the things that makes Solano County unique from Napa and Sonoma is having a building like Gomer school. She stated that it is a landmark and needs to be protected.

Shirley Schaufel, 2545 LedgeWood, Fairfield, stated that she has lived in the Suisun Valley for 40 years. She mentioned that years ago she received a president's fellowship to conduct historic research in Suisun Valley. She explained that at that time she measured stone houses and other historic buildings in the valley as part of a Historic American Building Survey. She stated that she has been an exhibit designer and museum developer for the past 25 years. Ms. Schaufel stated that her work has been largely funded by cultural organizations such as the Marin Community Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities and the Cultural Facilities Fund. She stated that one thing she had learned in her experiences is if you want to develop a program you need to be very careful about the structure in which that is done. She said there is a system

for developing nonprofit cultural organizations that needs to be adhered to in order to do the job correctly. She commented that she was surprised to see that there were 8 sites being considered as visitor centers. She noted how difficult is it for organizations to staff, fund and operate just one visitor center. Ms. Schaufel offered her services to the county and submitted a plan to staff for the development of a visitors center at Mankas Corner. She also commented that until flooding is brought under control in Suisun Valley nothing will develop there.

Derrick Lum, 2506 Mankas Corner Road, Fairfield had a question regarding the Williamson Act and the coordination with the proposed A-20 zoning for the Suisun Valley. He wanted to ensure the process would be coordinated to allow farmers in the Valley to take advantage of both the Williamson Act and A-20 zoning to continue their agricultural activities for the future.

Lawrence Clement, 2155 Pomona Place, Fairfield, stated that he has been working in the county with farmers and the agricultural community for the past 36 years. He stated that in reading the plan document he found nothing missing. He stated that the plan includes everything that could possibly be in a plan. Mr. Clement commented that this led him into thinking that maybe there is too much there. He stated that in the beginning of each chapter it talks about maintaining the rural character and ag identity of the Suisun Valley. It talks about the ambience, the value, and the uniqueness of the area. He stated that when you provide a lot of specific detail it starts looking like a strip mall. Mr. Clement stated that this is a unique area, a small area, and it is going to be difficult to compete with something like Napa or Sonoma. He stated that the county should develop its own uniqueness, its own way of attracting tourism because that is going to be the salvation of agriculture in the Valley. Mr. Clement stated that he believed in the agritourism function and that it is going to be a very good system, but the county needs to do something to attract people to the area. He said that it identifies a reasonable vision and it also provides for some economic benefit and economic gain. Mr. Clement stated that he would like to see in the final plan something that is more general that will provide the landowners and individuals out there the opportunity to be creative.

Mr. Clement stated that the biggest weakness in the plan is the economic section. He believed that there needs to be some detailed analysis. He said this economy is not going to support this and the people out there certainly do not have the kind of money to put into this, and he did not believe the county does either. He stated that it has to have something that is a more attainable and more reasonable.

Since there were no further speakers, Chairman Barnes closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Mahoney stated that with regard to preserving agriculture he has always looked at the zoning itself as preserving agriculture. He stated that there was a time when in the county a landowner could subdivide 100 acres and develop the land. He stated that this was the reason the county went to ag zoning in larger portions throughout the county, which

which allowed development to be more centered around cities. He stated that once acreage is brought down from 100 acres to 20 acres it is a lot easier to develop and sell off the land, and there comes a point when the land is not viable for farming anymore. Mr. Mahoney stated that bigger units are more cost effective. He stated that breaking the land down in smaller units will eliminate the agricultural potential in the area.

Jim Louie stated that in the general plan, as part of the study, it was indicated that due to the type of agricultural activity for this region 20 acres would be the minimum lot size for agriculture in the Suisun Valley. He stated that what staff is anticipating at this point is that a landowner will be able to drop to 20 acres, but will also be able to retain acreage under Williamson Act contract. He stated that it is going to be different than for example agricultural land in Dixon where they need larger parcels to maintain the economic scale for the type of farming they are doing, vs. the agricultural tourism and value added farming and agricultural activity in the Suisun Valley. He stated that this was part of what was recognized in the American Farm Trust study and also in the UC Davis study, and is why the areas were separated into these agricultural regions recognizing that each region had different economic activities and different types of farming activities. Mr. Louie stated that the county will be tailoring the various plans to fit those areas with their own standards.

Commissioner Mahoney stated again that once zoning starts allowing smaller parcels the potential for development and the potential for a farmer that once had 100 acres and now has five 20 acre parcels makes it a lot easier to sell off property. He commented that the county could be zoning themselves out of potential agricultural production in the area.

Commissioner Boschee spoke with regard to the number of tourist centers commenting that it is a real potential for the county. He believed that the county should look at how this concept can be developed on a countywide basis and to start looking strategically at where to put centers that can best promote the products that are being developed in Solano County. He said that we want to be able to provide a market for our farmers and to provide a place where they can go and sell their products. Mr. Boschee stated that he believed people within the county are very interested in buying local fresh products and they should be provided a place where they can go and buy that product. He believed that it should be looked at as an overall county plan and not just for each individual valley with their own tourism spot. He believed the plan has a lot of potential and is something that is going to help preserve the agricultural feel of Solano County.

Commissioner Boschee stated that the overall traffic issue needs to be looked at as it relates to the agritourist centers. He said the county needs to have a plan to reduce the impact on the people who are living out there and the impact on the farmers themselves. He said that he believed the county is moving in the right direction and this is great idea. He said the county needs to start working on trying to again look at it as a countywide plan not just each individual valley that is developing their own strategic plan.

Chairman Barnes stated that in future discussions with regard to the 8 tourist centers, he

suggested staff look closely at the possibility of a reduction in the number of centers. He said that he hoped that this plan moves forward rather than be stalled by budget cuts and tough economic times. He said he is looking forward to seeing the Suisun Valley attract more visitors to their fruit orchards, vegetable farms, and vineyards.

3. **NOMINATION and ELECTION** of Chairperson and Vice-chairperson for the ensuing year.

It was motioned and seconded to nominate Commissioner Mahoney and Commissioner Boschee as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **ANNOUNCEMENTS and REPORTS**

Chairman Barnes wanted to know if Potrero Hills Landfill is still using grass clippings for cover, and if so, how long will they continue to do this. Mr. Yankovich stated that the landfill does use alternate daily cover, but has been experiencing a bit of a hold up in terms of their expansion project. He noted that they also use dirt as well as the grass clippings for cover.

Chairman Barnes was concerned that by using these clippings it would lower the county's percentage of recyclable material for state reporting. Mr. Yankovich stated that he did not know the exact percentage or to what extent the cover is being used, but he would get that information and forward it to the commission. Chairman Barnes commented that the citizens of Solano County should get credit for doing their part to recycle.

5. Since there was no further business, the meeting was **adjourned**.