

ALAB MEETING MINUTES

Monday, January 5, 2015

Members and Alternates Present: Lisen Bonnier, Melanie Blankenship, Bill Struble, Robert Hartzell, Tom Ikeda, Mark Pearce, Dick Nock, Jean-Pierre Wolff, Eric Michielssen, Rick Hawley, Don Warden, David Pruitt, Neil Roberts, Claire Wineman, Dan Rodrigues, Joy Fitzhugh

Absent Members: Chuck Pritchard, Jerry Diefenderfer

Guests Present: Patricia Wilmore - Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance (Government Affairs Coordinator)

Staff Present: Marc Lea, Lynda Auchinachie – SLO County Dept. of Agriculture, Mark Battany – UC Cooperative Extension, James Caruso, Cheryl Cochran, Xzandrea Fowler – SLO County Planning & Building Department

1. **Call to Order:** 6:03 Wolff

2. **Open Comment:**

- Joy Fitzhugh shared that on Friday, January 9, 2015, the Central Coast Regional Water Board will hold a listening session regarding a potential Grazing Regulatory Action Project (GRAP). (Melanie Blankenship brought up this same issue later in the meeting. Members discussed concerns about regulating grazing practices and the general nature of questions to be discussed at the meeting. Chair Jean-Pierre Wolff observed that perhaps less specific discussions means there is nothing set in stone.)

3. **Announcements from ALAB Members & County Ag Department Staff Updates:**

- Eric Michielssen announced there will be a Farmers Guild meeting at the San Luis Obispo Grange Hall March 19, 2015. The goal is to get young people interested in the farming profession.

4. **Previous Minutes: MOTION: Warden** Approve October 6, 2014 minutes: **Motion: 2nd: Nock Approved:** Unanimous by all voting members in attendance. No “No” votes or abstentions.

5. **ALAB Governance: ALAB membership update-reappointments and upcoming changes to ALAB members; update on potential addition of strawberry industry member to ALAB**

- Marc Lea indicated that District 2 representative, Lisen Bonnier, and the Environmental Representative, Rick Hawley, have been renominated for another 4-year term each. Marc shared that he will contact Supervisor Compton for information regarding who will be the District 4 representative.
- Marc Lea summarized October’s discussion about adding a strawberry grower representative position to ALAB. Marc indicated he had researched the process and it was not difficult as it simply involved sending a letter requesting the Board of Supervisors add such a position. Marc raised the questions of who would appoint the

member and should the member be exclusive to strawberries or include other berry growers as well. Marc suggested the Strawberry Commission could nominate a representative.

- Chair Jean-Pierre Wolff indicated that it is important to prioritize membership on the size of industry being represented and since strawberries have been one of the most valuable crops in the county it makes sense to have such a position on ALAB. Jean-Pierre agreed with the suggestion that the Strawberry Commission could be responsible for nominating a member and alternate.
- Claire Wineman stated that she had contacted the Strawberry Commission to assess their level of interest in nominating a member. The Commission indicated they were open to the idea. Claire indicated there was a synergy with other berry growers as well.
- Lisen Bonnier suggested that it made sense to add a fruit representative rather than just focus on a strawberry grower.
- Chair Jean-Pierre Wolff reminded members that what was being represented were similar agricultural practices or issues.
- Joy Fitzhugh suggested the consideration of tree fruits.
- Don Warden provided a brief history of ALAB representation. Don indicated originally there were the five district nominees and representatives from the two existing agricultural organizations, the Cattlemen's Association and Farm Bureau. Later there was recognition of the need to address environmental concerns and the RCDs were added. More recently ALAB has expanded to include commodity groups and others. Don indicated he was not opposed to a berry member but he also expressed his concern that if there are too many commodity specific groups things could get unwieldy. Don shared that past nominees by board members represented a variety of commodities.
- ALAB members discussed the benefits of having the Strawberry Commission involved in the nomination process and the fact the Commission participates in a similar manner with ALABs equivalent in Santa Barbara County.
- Rick Hawley shared he liked the idea of fruit tree representative even though they may not be organized as a whole. Rick noted these crops use water and representation makes sense.
- Chair Jean-Pierre Wolff suggested inquires be made into fruit tree representation.

MOTION: Pearce Recommend to the Board of Supervisors to add a strawberry representative to ALAB : **Motion: 2nd: Roberts Approved:** Unanimous by all voting members in attendance. No "No" votes or abstentions.

6. Presentation: Renewable Energy Streamlining Project , James Caruso – County Planning and Building Department

- James Caruso recapped the California Energy Commission grant program that is aimed at removing regulatory obstacles for renewable energy projects. James noted that renewable projects will most likely be solar and photo voltaic as there isn't much potential for wind generation. James indicated the streamlining program attempts to

eliminate the need for a discretionary permit and the time and uncertainty associated with such permits. The proposed program would allow for up to 160 acres to be approved for development through the ministerial site plan process that is not transparent and does not provide for public notice, hearings, or appeals. The proposed ordinance is complex because it is trying to address issues that would be addressed in the environmental review process. The goal is to facilitate distributive generation up to 20 megawatts through a tiered ministerial approach. The larger the project the less desirable streamlining is because more mitigation may be required. James noted that development cannot occur on Class 1 or 2 soils but that it can occur on Important Agricultural Soils although in some cases mitigation may be required. James also indicated that the proposal includes changes to Williamson Act rules to allow these facilities on contracted land. James shared that the Agricultural Preserve Rules Committee recommend not allowing over 20 acres of development on contracted land as well as a host of other restrictions. The Draft Environmental Impact Report identified Class 1 impacts for both agricultural and visual resources.

- Rick Hawley asked about how transmission lines fit into the calculation of acreage. James Caruso indicated that additional transmission lines kicked the project out of eligibility for streamlining.
- Joy Fitzhugh inquired about roof top development vs. free standing panels. James Caruso stated that on-site winery accessory uses are not a problem and are proposed to be up to three acres in size.
- Rick Hawley noted that solar arrays with agricultural cluster projects could facilitate sprawl by taking away regulatory hurdles.
- James Caruso concluded by indicating there will be a Planning Commission workshop on January 8, 2015, as well as two Planning Commission hearings scheduled for January 22, and February 5, 2015. The proposal will go to the Board of Supervisors (BOS) in March, 2015. James will be sending out links to future hearing staff reports including proposed easement mitigation.
- Rick Hawley asked how easement mitigation worked at a ministerial level.
- James Caruso indicated that streamlining is very complex and requires balance. James shared that the goal is to have a 30-day turn around for project completion. He stressed that transparency costs time and certainty and that was not the goal of the grant, however, if the BOS was interested in more standards, discretion, and/or transparency they could move in that direction as it was not a problem with the grant. James noted that SLO County does not have considerable biological resource issues in the areas that these projects would likely be proposed but we do have agricultural resource problems when it comes to siting the facilities.
- Rick Hawley expressed concern that the energy would be flowing outside our county and suggested equitable taxation.

7. Updates: Potential Agricultural Water Waste Prevention Ordinance; Agricultural Water Offset Program Discussion – Cheryl Cochran

- Cheryl Cochran provided an update on two proposed water regulatory programs that were authorized by the BOS on March 4, 2014. Cheryl indicated that a memo had recently been sent out to agricultural stakeholders summarizing three potential options to address water waste associated with agricultural practices. Cheryl noted that through the outreach process they learned that agricultural irrigation practices are already very efficient and that there have been many improvements over the years. Cheryl stated that the Planning Department will be going to the BOS on February 3, 2015, to get specific direction from the BOS on which option is preferred and direction on all proposed water conservation programs. A public review draft environmental impact report (DEIR) and any proposed ordinances will be out shortly after BOS hearing. The DEIR will also include information on water neutral development including the agricultural offset program. The goal is to have all water programs before the BOS in June 2015.
- Rick Hawley asked if any requirements were based on parcel size and indicated that an educational component would be important. Cheryl responded that parcel size is not a factor in any of the three options although education is.
- Dan Rodrigues shared that there are certified advisors that educate.
- Marc Lea indicated that the Planning Department was responding to a BOS request based on public complaints that occurred prior to the adoption of the urgency ordinance. Marc suggested that what the public views as waste is often a necessary irrigation practice and not waste.
- Jean-Pierre Wolff indicated that the Water Resources Advisory Committee had formed a subcommittee to evaluate the proposals. ALAB had the opportunity to help craft a proposal but declined.
- Melanie Blankenship indicated that complaints should not go to code enforcement but instead to the Agriculture Department.
- Marc Lea indicated that the Agriculture Department already received these complaint calls on occasion and tried to educate the callers regarding the reasons behind these agricultural irrigation practices, especially since most callers concern were regarding a necessary and justified ag irrigation practice.

8. Future Agenda Items: Next meeting – February 2, 2015

Ag Water Waste – County Ordinance update

Meeting Adjourned: 7:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Lynda Auchinachie, County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures