

ISLAND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS - MINUTES OF MEETING

SPECIAL SESSION - APRIL 15, 1997 - COUNTY CONFERENCE

The Board of Island County Commissioners met in Special Session on April 15, 1997, at 7:00 p.m. at the Oak Harbor Senior Center, Oak Harbor, Wa. Mike Shelton, Chairman, Wm. L. McDowell, Member, and Tom Shaughnessy, Member, were present. Also in attendance were Margaret Rosenkranz, Auditor/ Clerk of the Board and Ellen Meyer, Secy. to the Board. Twenty-three people attended the meeting. Mark Burley, served as Moderator, and Molly McPherson, as Sgt. of Arms.

The purpose of the special session was to conduct a "County Conference", the second in a series of four sponsored by the Commissioners and a non-partisan committee. The conference was designed as an open forum for those who cannot attend regular meetings of the Board in Coupeville during the day. Each Commissioner presented a short "State of the County" address, covering the topics noted below.

Commissioner Mac McDowell, District #2

- New integrated communication dispatch center (I-COM) April 1 - one location in terms of emergency services
- Public Works Department no longer just a Road Department and addresses such issues as drainage.
- Paths and Trails are being dealt with in a more comprehensive manner.
- Mini GIS mapping system implemented - will soon be available to the public via the Internet
- Island County Code, County Commissioners minutes, Hearing Examiner decisions now on the Internet

- Growth Management Act (GMA) concept forces all the growth in UGAs with remaining area kept relatively rural. Interpretation of the Act has been 1 house per 5 acres as the smallest subdivision, which he disagrees with. He is hopeful that the County can adopt a comprehensive plan late Spring or early Summer.

Tom Shaughnessy, Commissioner, District #3.

- The County is in the process of developing a comprehensive plan and that is moving along. He has some problems with GMA and the 5 acre minimum in rural residential zone, and sees the need in some areas of the County for at least 1 for 1, and need to look at the issue of economics - supply and demand. Looking at the history of the County and those who have lots on the waterfront, a good many who are retired and on fixed incomes, he worries about them being taxed off their property.
- A Hydrogeologist has been hired and the County contracted with USGS to study aquifer recharge areas .
- County finances are in extremely good shape.

With recent storms this winter and many people impacted by stormwater runoff, the issue of forming a County-wide stormwater utility has come up again. Since there are many areas of the County where storm and surface water has been dealt with he is concerned about a potential "double taxing" of individuals who paid to take care of storm/surface water issues during development.

- Sheriff precincts established on South Whidbey, North Whidbey and Camano Island.

Conservation Futures and Parks - progressing well overall.

Mike Shelton, Commissioner, District #1

- GMA is a State law the County is obligated to enact. Some who live in rural parts of the County probably will not be overly pleased with the end result but there are a fair amount of people who are willing to look for creative solutions.
- Island County has one of the better Public Health Departments in the State. Low income health clinic in Oak Harbor addresses those who might not otherwise be able to afford health care in a preventive way. Developmental disabilities programs here are really out in front of the curve. A managed care system will be put in place 1 July, hopefully resulting in the best mental health care within the framework of the budget.
- Financially the County is sound. The County did not take the 6% increase in property taxes allowed, instead opted for 3%, roughly equal to inflation.

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Questions accepted verbally from audience members and in writing, are summarized with Commissioner responses below.

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Mental Health Issues: Dollars Need To Be Provided For Adults With Mental Illness Or Brain Disorder. RSN Money Is Being Cut In Many Ways (North Sound Regional Support Network). There Are No Jobs To Speak Of For Folks; Housing An Issue For Years.

Commissioner McDowell understood that cuts in for Island County mental health probably would not occur - the method of funding actually provided additional dollars to Skagit County, and Skagit County will make up the shortfall to Island County. He was willing to relook at the issue of mental health funding based on priorities county wide. The County negotiated with Unions to create some positions within county government to hire developmentally disabled.

Commissioner Shelton is a strong supporter of mental health programs and hoped the end result of the changes through RSN would provide solid program for the mentally ill.

Commissioner Shaughnessy pointed out that he and Commissioner McDowell serve on the Northwest Regional Council (NWRC), mainly dealing with services for the elderly, while Commissioner Shelton serves on the RSN.

Growth Management Issues:

- ***Timber Cutting - Is GMA The Cause?***
- ***GMA In Downzoning Certain Parcels Equivalent To "Taking" Under The***
- ***Constitution - how is it not a "taking"?***
- ***Unregulated Growth Last 5-10 Years; Most Counties Have Passed GMA Plans, Why Does It Seem The County Is Having So Much Trouble With GMA?***

Commissioner Shelton. GMA requires designation of commercial forest lands which are to be preserved. The Forest Practices Act, a State law, governs what and how people can harvest timber. Forest practices in Island County are governed by the FPA. GMA is not designed to magically limit growth. Under GMA the OFM indicates the number of people to plan for in a 20 year period, which is 30,000 for Island County. Within perimeters of the Act this must be done in the fairest way possible so the greatest amount of people can buy into it. Rural character is the thing 100% of the people agree on retaining but that has a different definition to different people. On the taking issue, the courts have ruled that a rezone is not a taking, rather a person has to be denied any use of his/her property.

Commissioner McDowell. Preservation does not mean a prohibition of cutting timber but preservation for the purpose of timber. The Act itself does not address anything to do with clear cutting. Only 14 counties have submitted GMA plans and only 4 have been completed out of the 39 counties. As far as the statement about unregulated growth in Island County, many think it is over regulated. He disagrees with GMA requiring 1 house per 5 acres - a football field is roughly 1 acre and the idea 5 for 1 house on the waterfront is not good planning, though there are areas where 1 for 5 is good. The Court ruled that zoning is not a "taking" under the Constitution. "Taking" refers to economic value i.e. 20 acres and today you could divide into four five acres lots - it has a value and it is not a taking if you say 1 per 20 in the future. He does not think that is right, however.

Commissioner Shaughnessy. GMA tells us to plan to accommodate growth yet does not really accommodate growth, rather is more of a land use act. Look at the case where someone who bought 20 acres 30 years ago and wants to divide it - it is an emotional issue in the County.

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Seeking Additional Revenue From Grants

Commissioner Shelton commented that in today's world grant funding is a critical part of operation of Island County and felt it was incumbent on elected officials to make sure citizens receive the same level of services other communities receive through actively seeking grant dollars.

Commissioner McDowell recognized grants were an integral part of government. He would accept grants but did not think any government should accept money for programs they don't believe in just to get a grant. Of major concern too are those grants with requirements attached, for example, retaining employees hired with grant funds once grant funding is discontinued.

Commissioner Shaughnessy agreed the important thing to look at would be strings attached to acceptance of the grant.

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Process For Planning Ahead

Commissioner McDowell believed the Commissioners did a good job of planning for finances and budgeting; budget forecasts are made and planning for capital facilities. Water is an important issue; while Oak Harbor has a water pipeline from the mainland, the water for the County is based on wells. The County hired a Hydrogeologist and now monitor 60 wells [soon to be 100] and within some number of months there will be good data from which to make good decisions.

Although Commissioner Shelton acknowledged a ways to go, he felt the County as a whole did a much better job planning for the future today than previously. All dollars are not allocated and a reserve has been set aside which represents approximately 10% of Current Expense budget.

It was frustrating to Commissioner Shaughnessy though that the Commissioners had to be, in most cases, reactive rather than proactive.

Saltwater Intrusion In Some Areas.

There are fairly strict policies in place through the Health Department. Areas are identified as areas where wells have experienced saltwater intrusion. We also have a Memorandum of Understanding with the State Department of Ecology regarding permits for development in those areas. A new well must withstand testing and be approved.

County Henni Gravel Pit. (1) Contaminated Soil In A Pile 200' From A Home (2) Road Kill - When County Picks Up Some Number Normally They Are Dumped And Buried; However If Only 1 Or 2 They Are Dumped And Left To The Coyotes.

Soil came from Whidbey Avenue site of the County's old road shop, now the site of the new health care facility. The site was contaminated by a neighbor's fuel/oil tank and 60 years' worth of use as a road shop, and Commissioner McDowell was aware the County hauled contaminated soil from some other area and put on that pile. In agreeing to the remediation plan for this property, Commissioner Shelton recalled that the Commissioners were told the soil would be taken to the Henni Pit, but understood it was to be a contained site. Commissioner McDowell will check further into this matter.

The Commissioners were not aware of the issue related to road kill, and Commissioner Shaughnessy will check into the matter.

Greenbank Farm - Worth Preserving - Status?

Commissioner Shelton. This presents a unique opportunity and problem for Island County to consider. There is a commercial aspect of the farm where buildings are located and a wine tasting facility. The Coupeville Port District is going to buy the cleared area where commercial facilities are located(1.2 million). It is proposed that the County provide 1.4 million from Conservation Futures Funds and bonding to purchase the timbered area around that, and the Nature Conservancy to contribute \$200,000 towards purchasing the wetlands and forest lands going down to the wetland. There are very legitimate concerns about the County's proposed purchase - the County has to come up with a program to ensure allocation of these funds over time are equal throughout the County. Other properties have been purchased, such as Double Bluff, Ala Spit, and the Freund Property, but none on Camano Island. Conservation futures is a tax levied against property taxes enacted by a previous board. It is true when government buys those properties it comes off the tax rolls and that loss of property tax is made up by the rest of the county property tax payers.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

ISLAND COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Mike Shelton, Chairman

Wm. L. McDowell, Member

Attest: Tom Shaughnessy, Member

Margaret Rosenkranz, County Auditor

& Ex-Officio Clerk of the Board