

**BOARD OF ISLAND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MINUTES OF MEETING
OCTOBER 20, 2009 – SPECIAL SESSION**

The Board of Island County Commissioners met in Special Session on October 20, 2009 beginning at 6:00 p.m. at the Camano Senior and Community Center, 606 Arrowhead Road, Camano Island, WA. The purpose of the Special Session was to consider whether to accept, modify and accept, or reject the Whidbey Island Conservation District's and Snohomish Conservation District's proposed system of special monetary assessments on land following public comment. John Dean, Chairman, Helen Price Johnson, Member, and Angie Homola, Member were present.

Attendance: Approximately 10 members of the public and press

Also attending were the Snohomish County Conservation District Board of Supervisors Monte Marti, Duane Weston, and Adam Farnham; Whidbey Island Conservation District Board of Supervisors Fran Einterz and Duke LaBaron; Ron Schultz from the Washington State Conservation Commission; Karen Bishop, Manager from the Whidbey Island Conservation District and Lois Ruskell, Information and Education Coordinator for the Snohomish Conservation District.

The following, as a result of the public hearing, are on file with the Clerk of the Board:

- *Attendance sheets*
- *Special Session Notice*
- *Power Point Presentation and Hand-outs*

Chairman Dean opened the public hearing to consider whether to accept, modify and accept, or reject the Whidbey Island Conservation District's and Snohomish Conservation District's proposed system of special monetary assessment on land. The public hearing, he said, is the second of such presentations; the other public hearing was held in Coupeville on October 14. The Board would not make a decision at the public hearing but rather hear a presentation from the Conservation Districts and take public comment on the proposal. The Chairman turned the meeting over to Lois Ruskell for the Power Point presentation.

Ms. Ruskell provided a Power Point presentation (*on file with the Clerk of the Board*) explaining the function of the Conservation Districts and the proposal for a special assessment that will benefit both Whidbey (the assessment collected on Whidbey would be used by the Whidbey Island Conservation District to serve the residents of Whidbey) and Camano (the assessment collected on Camano would be used by the Snohomish Conservation District to serve the residents of Camano). Commentary included:

- History of the Conservation Districts
- Relevant state statutes
- Support organizations
- Washington State Districts
- The Districts with assessments (13)
- Work of the WICD and SCD
- Areas of activities and programs
- Natural resource planning and technical assistance
- Low impact development
- Preserving sustainable farm and forest land
- Public outreach, education and partnerships

**BOARD OF ISLAND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MINUTES OF MEETING
OCTOBER 20, 2009 – SPECIAL SESSION**

- Estimated assessment revenue
- Current WICD budget
- System of assessment
- Assessment process

At this point Chairman Dean invited to the microphone, in order of the attendance sheets on file with the Clerk of the Board, those who wished to comment for or against the proposed assessment. Concerns and opinions by those who support and did not support the proposed assessment included:

- The Northwest Agriculture Business Center supports the programs of the Districts. Stable, reliable, consistent source of funding is a must for the organization to provide staffing necessary to maintain programs on a year-to-year basis. The Districts are the key interface for management and conservation of natural resources.
- Cannot expect the Board of Supervisors to dedicate resources on Camano if the public does not step up to provide funding.
- The Camano Island Watershed Management Committee and its Comprehensive Plan and Camano Island Non-Point Pollution Prevention Action Plan speak to recommendations that deal specifically with the Snohomish Conservation District.
- The Water Resource Advisory Committee supports the Water Quality Monitoring Program that is the centerpiece of the environmental policy of Island County.
- Conservation Districts are non-regulatory
- The amount ultimately raised is small and hopefully can be used to help leverage other funds from other sources.
- Concerns were expressed about sustainable water on Camano and its aquifers.
- No additional taxes especially with fixed incomes, current economy, and lost jobs
- Essential services must be maintained but anything other cannot be afforded. Just because the citizens can be taxed does not make it right.

Senator Haugen said property owners' use of Conservation District services is purely voluntary and more importantly, is non-regulatory. She said that citizens need to be responsible to help take care of the Islands and be educated as to just how fragile the system is. She supports the proposed assessment.

Chairman Dean closed public comment and provided the floor to the Districts for closing remarks.

Conservation District Board members concluded by saying:

- The assessment would solve many issues
- Water issues can be addressed with education
- Natural resources must be protected
- The Conservation Districts are non-regulatory
- A benefit of the assessment is that it is controlled locally, providing management for the types of projects and activities desired for the area
- The Districts are audited and accountability methods are in place
- Important to maintain trained staff who can be most effective when called upon
- Obtaining and operating on grant funds is challenging

**BOARD OF ISLAND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MINUTES OF MEETING
OCTOBER 20, 2009 – SPECIAL SESSION**

- Each year the Districts' work plan is presented to the Board of Commissioners for review. Since the Board will return to the County Seat as required by statute to deliberate and arrive at a decision, Chairman Dean suggested that the discussion occur on Monday, October 26.

For those in attendance Commissioner Homola commented about a concern not to duplicate services. Priorities of the Board, she said, include management and maintenance of clean water and hiring a hydrogeologist. While the County works on regulation and enforcement in that regard she believes help is needed in the field with boots on the ground for that to occur. The Commissioner added that the Board does not raise taxes, other than the 1% permitted by law for property taxes. Property values increase when people spend money on a house or a building in excess from what it was previously which sets the value. Additionally, the County is trying to bring its permitting costs back in line with where they should be and it is important that long range planning exists so growth is manageable. An appropriate fee should be charged for the permit submitted and adequate staff on hand to review the permits. Burn permit fees were raised a small amount so that the County could help with the cost of the shared technician with Skagit County. Commissioner Homola believes another priority of the Board is critical areas, that the Commissioners do spend a fair amount of time and emphasis on Camano issues, and the County cannot afford to not take care of resources.

Commissioner Price Johnson remarked that one thing heard in each public hearing is that people care deeply about where we live; the Board is keenly aware of how important it is to take care of this place. Some of us, she said, may differ down the road about how that should be accomplished but believes it important to find common ground. With being blessed to live on Whidbey or Camano comes responsibility.

The Special Session adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
ISLAND COUNTY, WASHINGTON

John Dean, Chairman

Helen Price Johnson, Member

Angie Homola, Member

ATTEST:

Elaine Marlow, Clerk of the Board