

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ABBREVIATED MINUTES

April 8th, 2010

4:00 – 6:00 pm

Present:	Tim Aldrich	Absent:	
	Jeff Stevens		
	Bob Clark		Jenny Tollefson
	Ethel MacDonald		Jed Little
	Adam Liljeblad		
	Bert Lindler		
	Gary Knudsen		
	Maureen Hartman		
	Mary Manning		
	Ginny Fay, Park Board Rep (via phone)		

Also Present: Jackie Corday, Open Space Program Mgr, Paul Hubbard (CFAC)

Community Food & Agricultural Coalition (CFAC)

Paul Hubbard from CFAC gave a presentation about the just released CFAC report entitled: LOSING GROUND – The Future of Farms and Food in Missoula County. The 46 page report includes an overview of Missoula County's agricultural history, identifies the factors changing farming, sets forth maps and statistics showing how dramatic the loss of farmland to development has been over the past couple decades, and makes recommendations on how to help protect from the further loss of important agricultural soils. Paul began by giving an overview of CFAC's origins, which formed in 2005 through a joint resolution of the City and County in order to provide local government with in-pu-t on agricultural issues. Their mission "is to develop and strengthen Missoula County's food system: promoting sustainable agriculture, building regional self-reliance; and assuring all citizens equal access to healthy, affordable, and culturally-appropriate food. CFAC facilitates dialogue, education, and collaboration within the community, encouraging creative problem-solving and proactive policy advocacy."

Paul informed us that from 1986 to present, over 29,000 acres of farm and ranchland has been lost due mainly to development, both residential and commercial. Roughly 80% of the lands containing the best ag soils have been subdivided into parcels smaller than 40 acres. About 16,000 acres of cropland are still used to grow crops (about 12,000 of those acres are irrigated), which is enough to remain an important part of our economy, culture, and landscape. However, those remaining acres are continually at threat of being developed, and thus the purpose of the report was to emphasize the need to plan for and implement tools to protect our remaining soils.

Paul pointed out many reasons to protect farmland, including the economics (nearly \$7.6 million of ag sales in 2007 in Missoula County), locally produced food supplies our farmers markets, restaurants, grocery stores, and schools (the University of MT alone spent over \$3.7 million on Montana produced foods), cultural, social and historical values, and the benefits to clean water and wildlife. The report makes 5 recommendations to help preserve farmland:

- 1) **Identify Agricultural Cornerstone Areas that are priorities for farm and ranchland protection in the City and County.** Similar to the Open Space Plan Cornerstones, a planning document that identifies conserving contiguous areas of sufficient size to support viable farming and ranching will help minimize conflicts between farmers and their non-agriculture neighbors.
- 2) **Mitigate the loss of important farm and ranchlands by enacting Agricultural Resource Standards in the City and County zoning and subdivision regulations.** These regs would

require the permanent conservation of agricultural land, similar to how parkland dedication is required for subdivisions. This would provide predictability for developers and elected officials.

- 3) **Identify incentives to encourage and reward conservation.** A diverse set of tools that include voluntary incentives are needed. Existing incentives, such as the use of Open Space Bond funds to acquire conservation easements, are too few and limited in scope to affect local farmland conservation at a meaningful scale.
- 4) **Assist beginning farmers and ranchers in securing land and establishing viable operations.** The CFAC Land Link Montana Program can be developed further to help with this.
- 5) **Expand the capacity of Missoula's markets to source locally grown foods.** CFAC will continue to work directly with farmers and ranchers in accessing local markets.

Gerhard stated that CFAC and Audubon should look for opportunities to collaborate on subdivision review as there are often issues of common interest. Sprawl and the loss of ag land to development impacts wildlife and birds.

Conference Calls for OSAC Meetings. Jackie and Tim lead off on a discussion about OSAC meeting attendance and conference calls. Tim stated how important it is for everyone to do their best to attend in person and Jackie said she was concerned about how often telephone conferencing is now occurring – it is being requested almost every month instead of it being an occasional thing that happens once in a while. She suggested that maybe adopting a policy on calling in so that it returns to being an occasional occurrence instead of every month. For example, one guideline could be that people can call in if we need a quorum for a final project vote and they have attended the Rough Cut and fieldtrip (which was the case w/ Moe in March). But if it's just updates and non-action item presentations, maybe that's best for the member who couldn't be there to just review the minutes. Jackie said it is up to a majority vote of members to decide, what, if any, policy should be adopted and then asked for everyone's in-put.

Adam said he prefers to keep the call-ins limited, which Ethel agreed with, adding the less they are used the better. Mary also agreed, and said she liked to keep the option for calling in available for when we have decisions to make on projects. Gerhard echoed Mary's comments. Jeff said he had no strong objections to people calling in, but didn't want it to happen every month and Bob and Bert agreed with that. Moe said it's more meaningful to have people attend in person so would like to limit the call ins to when they're really needed for projects. Ginny said she'd like to have the call in option available all the time. Tim said we are most effective as a group when we meet face to face and that calling in needs to be the exception rather than the rule.

Updates. Jackie informed members that OPG has been working on updating the subdivision regulations, mostly to reflect changes that were passed in the 2009 Legislative Session. Jackie, Brianna Randall from the Clark Fork Coalition, Peter Nielson from the City/County Health Dept., FWP staff, along with Tim and Gerhard attended a Planning Board meeting to address proposed changes in the riparian regulations that could significantly protect the required buffer area to the riparian zone by prohibiting placement of development within the buffer area. Currently, the regulations prohibit development in the riparian area, but do not specifically prohibit it in the buffer zone.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm with the next meeting date scheduled for 4:00 – 6:30pm on Thursday, June 10th at Currents.