

Memorandum

To: Planning Commission
County Council

CC: Sophia Cassam, Planner I, DCD
Linda Kuller, AICP, Planning Manager, DCD
Erika Shook, AICP, Director, DCD
Ryan Page, Affordable Housing Coordinator SJC Health & Community Services

From: San Juan County Agricultural Resource Committee (ARC)
Steve Bernheim, Chair, ARC
Faith Van De Putte, Coordinator, ARC

Date: January 28, 2020

Subject: Comments on Preliminary Draft Housing Element dated January 9, 2020

Purpose

To provide the Planning Commission and County Planners with the ARC's recommendations for the 'Preliminary Draft Housing Element' dated January 9, 2020.

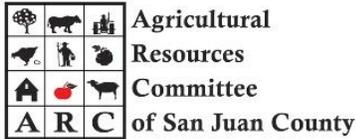
Background

The Agricultural Resource Committee (ARC) is a Citizen Advisory Committee composed of 15 voting seats, half of whom are members of the farming community. The ARC 2019 Work Plan includes engaging and collaborating in the Comprehensive Plan Update process by researching and proposing amendments to ensure consistency and support for a stronger agricultural economy. The ARC also serves as a listening post for the Agricultural community and conducts outreach throughout the year to help inform priorities.

All ARC members have had the opportunity to suggest changes to the recommendations. The ARC then voted on and passed the final recommendations by electronic (e-mail) vote completed on January 27, 2020.

Attachment

The ARC's adopted recommendations are attached.



Recommendations are based on the draft found at:

https://www.sanjuanco.com/DocumentCenter/View/19635/2020-01-09_DCD_Cassam_Housing_Element_HNA_CC_StaffReport

Narrative Comments:

Housing affects the viability of agriculture in San Juan County through two important factors: labor and succession. The housing needs of farms differ from those of non-farm properties, and innovative zoning, land use and development regulations that take those differences into account will be needed in order to ensure generational farm succession and adequate access to farm labor for long-term agricultural viability. Housing is reported as a primary area of concern and challenge at listening sessions organized by the ARC on Orcas, San Juan and Lopez in 2019 and 2020.

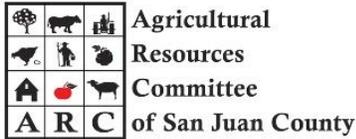
Agricultural businesses are labor intensive. With limited affordable housing in the islands many farms provide housing in order to attract and retain workers. According to the [*Economic Analysis of Resource Land*](#) (2017) agricultural employment in San Juan County is projected to increase at a compound annual growth rate of 1.5% per year. There has been a tradition of trailers, tiny homes, rooms in barns, tents and other substandard housing options to meet the need for both seasonal and long term housing on farms. However, these uses often don't fit into the current regulatory framework or provide adequate long term housing. The ARC hopes to both provide a regulatory pathway for alternative housing options such as tiny homes and clarify the regulations around farm worker housing.

Ownership transition is the time when farmland is at the highest risk for development. The complexities of handing over a farm business and land ownership are exacerbated by the common problem that the owner's main asset is the land. The average farmer in San Juan County is 65 and many struggle with the challenge of how to hand their farm over. If we in San Juan County are serious about protecting farmland we must look carefully at issues of succession and allow for regulatory pathways for succession housing.

There is a clear need for additional housing on working farms and farms transitioning to the next generation. Innovative solutions can help meet this need without opening up regulatory loopholes and ensure that any additional housing is consistent with preserving rural character and the goals of Agricultural Resource Land and Rural Farm Forest.

Recommended Amendments by Section

The ARC strongly supports the bulk of the Preliminary Draft Housing Element and very much appreciates the opportunity to provide these comments and proposed amendments.



Goal 1

Policy 4: Increase the availability of seasonal rentals for workers. Support development of specific standards for locating seasonal and year-round worker housing such as dorms, bunkhouses, hostels, group homes, home shares, farm worker housing and other communal living arrangements.

Policy 5: Allow farmworker housing on ARL and RFF land designation properties where commercial agriculture is conducted, including, but not limited to those ~~not only those~~ properties in agricultural open space tax programs.

Goal 4

Policy 6: Develop standards for tiny home building site plans where water and sewer services exist, ~~and~~ adopt the Washington State Building Code Council's tiny home codes in 2020 and form an advisory committee to evaluate drafting regulations for siting tiny home communities.

Goal 4 New Policies

New Policy 8: Allow for Tier 1, 2 and 3 grey water systems and encourage innovation and adoption of systems that meet state requirements.

New Policy 9: Allow for sewage and wastewater treatment with products listed on the List of Registered On-site Treatment and Distribution Products As Established in Chapter 246-272A WAC.

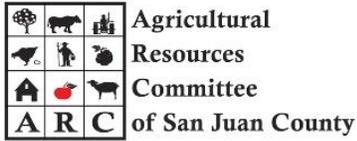
Goal 5 Revised

Goal 5. Demonstrate the County's promotion of ~~Promote~~ climate resiliency by minimizing the environmental impacts of the existing and future housing stock in San Juan County and reducing the County's greenhouse gas emissions associated with housing by 50% by 2030.

Goal 5

New Policy 5: Adopt new "Sustainable Development" codes that incentivize sustainable housing development.

New Policy 6: Support working farms and farmland succession by allowing for development of additional housing units on RFF and ARL when the cumulative environmental impact of such developments is no greater than allowed for a single family housing development.



Goal 6

New Policy 5: Encourage public-private partnerships with Land Trusts and owner-occupied housing cooperatives to create affordable housing on RFF and ARL consistent with rural character.

New Policy 6: Support USDA Rural Development Farm Labor Housing Direct Loans & Grants programs that provide construction, improvement, repair and purchase of housing for domestic farm laborers.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

On Behalf of the Agricultural Resource Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink on a light blue background, appearing to read "SMB".

Steve Bernheim, ARC Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Faith Van De Putte".

Faith Van De Putte, ARC Coordinator