

## MINUTES

### Board of Directors Meeting • December 18, 2003

#### ATTENDANCE

Members present: Juan Aguilar and Dixie Kracht, co-chairs; Gloria Burton, Guillermo Castaneda, Lupe Gamboa, Pete Garza, Mike Gempler, Billie Heath, Alicia McRae, John Smith, Mario Villanueva. Members absent: Julie Keen, Tomas Villanueva, Heyward Watson. Staff: Tom Byers and Liza Couchman, Cedar River Group; Brien Thane, Office of Rural & Farmworker Housing (fiscal agent).

#### WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Dixie Kracht, co-chair, called the meeting of the Washington State Farmworker Housing Trust (WSFHT) Board of Directors (Board) to order. She welcomed those present and recognized a quorum.

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Kracht gave those who had not yet reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting a moment to do so, and invited a motion to approve.

Upon motion made (Aguilar) and seconded (Castaneda) the minutes of the WSFHT Board meeting held on November 24, 2003 were approved without objection.

In deference to the Bylaws, it was requested that staff indicated members both present and not present in future minutes.

#### STAFF REPORTS

Tom Byers reported that counsel Robert L. Kaplan is preparing the filing for 501(c)(3) status on WSFHT's behalf. Mr. Kaplan's advice is that WSFHT's status as a legal corporation is sufficient to conduct business in the meantime, but that it should indicate "IRS certification pending" if conducting any fundraising business.

Brien Thane reported that his work on the HUD application is pending feedback from the Executive Committee, which will meet immediately following the Board meeting.

Mr. Byers also reported that a suggested media protocol is forthcoming, which is being developed from talking points circulated as a result of contact with the *Yakima Herald*. He noted that comments on the talking points are welcome. He also noted that *Herald* reporter Ben Romano, is very engaged and interested in accompanying the Board on any of its site visits.

#### PRESENTATION: TRENDS IN WASHINGTON AGRICULTURE

Ms. Kracht introduced Tom Schotzko of Washington State University, to review trends in the agricultural sector of Washington State.

Mr. Schotzko briefly reviewed his familiarity with the agricultural sector in Washington, developed over 25 years, and shared a compilation of handouts (not appended due to length; copies available from staff) showing a variety historical and time-point data through the 1997 Agricultural Census as the basis for a discussion of the past as an indicator of future trends.

Key points that emerged from Mr. Schotzko's presentation included:

- With the number of farms decreasing, the average size has increased such that few farms of 50 acres or less remain.
- While all crops grown in Washington are grown elsewhere, Washington maintains distinct advantages in wheat and fruit.
- Despite changes and efficiencies (most notably in processing), orchards still require approximately 200 hours per acre, with labor representing 40% of production costs due to the need for pruning, thinning and harvesting.
- The apple market is showing a decline in growth, but level or modestly increased demand for labor, characterized by a considerable increase in full-time (greater than 150 days) employees and some decrease in short-term workers.

The Board thanked Mr. Schotzko for so generously sharing his time and expertise. Mr. Schotzko indicated his openness to follow-up contact as the Board's work progresses.

#### **PRESENTATION: GROWERS COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE**

The Board received a presentation, "Strategies for Increasing Stability and Productivity in the Washington State Agricultural Workforce" (not appended due to length; copies available from staff) by Board member Mike Gempler, which he has delivered in other venues on behalf of the Washington Growers League.

Key points of Mr. Gempler's presentation included:

- Washington's agricultural market is experiencing flat/declining prices.
- Labor represents 35-40% of agricultural production costs.
- 68% of October's peak season workers are unemployed by November.
- An improved immigration system, better recruitment and utilization, and development of housing will foster a stable, legal and qualified workforce.
- Worker training and adoption of labor-saving technology will increase workforce productivity, and
- More year-round jobs will be available for qualified workers if peaks in seasonal employment demand are flattened.

The Board thanked Mr. Gempler, then conducted a brief discussion of the information shared by him and Mr. Schotzko over boxed lunch.

#### **VISIT BY U.S. SENATOR PATTY MURRAY**

Ms. Kracht and Mr. Aguilar welcomed Senator Patty Murray, and thanked her for her vision in bringing together the diverse group that comprises the Board to address a common need. Senator Murray introduced her staff, and Board members introduced themselves.

Senator Murray expressed her appreciation and enthusiasm that the Board has indeed come together and is developing a comprehensive plan to show the need for resources that can be raised by a new, non-governmental entity. She thanked Board members for their willingness to devote expertise, time and leadership in contributing to the dignity of the lives of people they may never know.

Senator Murray then lead a brief discussion during which the following points were made:

- When the Board is ready with a plan and ready to approach prospective funders, Senator Murray and her office will facilitate contacts.
- While Senator Murray's office does not have the staff capacity to assist with statistical forecasting, she is willing to use her good office to identify and recruit possible resources with that capacity.
- Agricultural workforce stability and the status of documentation of workers are related, and potentially affected by the Agricultural Jobs Bill pending in the U.S. Senate. The Bill is a result of years-long attempt at compromise and has strong bi-partisan support. Its prospects for passage in 2004 are good.
- Although Washington state agriculture is distressed and full-time workers have lost jobs, it is the role of the federal government to ensure the sustainability of agriculture in the long run.
- While there are no funding opportunities on the immediate horizon, the work the Board is doing will help Senator Murray to secure resources for the area and the state incoming years.

#### **RESEARCH ON NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Tom Byers referred Board members to the "Preliminary Report on Housing Needs of Farmworkers in Washington State" (not appended due to length; copies available from staff), prepared for the Board by researcher Trang Tu. He asked the Board to review the needs assessment over the holidays in preparation for detailed discussion during January's meeting.

Mr. Byers highlighted the report's introduction of the phrases "local" and "non-local" rather than more frequently used—but more freighted, terms—as consistent with the Board goal of presenting issues in non-biased language as part of its work.

Mr. Byers also highlighted the consistency between data shared by Tom Shotzko and included in the needs assessment showing that the shift in the ration of local permanent to non-local seasonal employment over the past five years, from 50%-50% to 66%-33%.

#### **EXECUTIVE & NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Juan Aguilar referred the Board to the resume and references of Skagit grower Mike Youngquist, recommended by Lon Inaba and Pete Garza for appointment to fill a Board vacancy, and reported that Mr. Youngquist is interested in serving. The Executive Committee will develop a recommendation to the Board.

Mr. Aguilar also reported that the Executive Committee will meet to reach a decision and develop a recommendation to the Board regarding the pending agreement for staff services.

#### **REVIEW OF JANUARY WORKPLAN**

Tom Byers led a review of the Board's workplan for the coming month, including:

- Board site visits by staff
- Continued research
- Further development of nomenclature
- Development of a plan for broader stakeholder involvement
- Further development of media contact protocol
- Preliminary summary of site visit issues

During follow-up discussion of the recent media coverage, Board members deliberated on the appropriate response to requests by media or citizens to attend Board meetings. Some Board members and staff indicated a need for a defined policy. Board consensus favored staff development of a policy to the effect that Board meetings are open, but that business is conducted by and within the Board.

By Board consensus, the January meeting was set for Yakima, with call-in capacity needed. Mario Villanueva graciously volunteered to host the meeting at the Diocese offices.

Upon motion made (Castaneda) and seconded (McRae), the Board approved unanimously that the meeting adjourn at 2:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
President/Vice President