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CLARK COUNTY

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QP16#0539

Farmers urge county council to protect agriculture



NATALIE BEHRING/The Columbian

Local farmers and food advocates rally in front of the Clark County Public Service Center prior to Tuesday's council meeting.

Madore, Stewart say they'll work to address concerns

By KAITLIN GILLESPIE
Columbian staff writer

A group of local farmers and food advocates urged the Clark County council Tuesday to consider action they say would protect and encourage local agriculture.

Most called for the council to undergo a Transfer of Development Rights, or TDRs, pilot program, which the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan

has allowed the county to do since 1994.

TDRs, a land-use strategy employed by counties and cities nationwide, allow rural property owners to sell their development rights to private developers, promoting dense development in urban areas without reducing the amount of rural or resource land available.

"They would give landowners tools to conserve their land and make farming a more profitable endeavor," said Warren Neth, a director of Slow

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Farmers

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Food Southwest Washington.

Food System Council Chair Garrett Hoyt and three of his young sons described the quality of life they all feel they gain from farming.

"I like that local farms keep nature alive," said Hoyt's son, Caden.

Hoyt spoke on behalf of TDRs, saying the council should have considered implementing a pilot program for years.

Councilor David Madore said based on what he's heard about TDRs, he fears they may lead to "slums" in Clark County. He added that he was willing to hear more about the program,

however.

At a rally prior to the meeting, about 15 advocates and their families raised signs reading "Farming is not dead," "No farms, no food," and "In Local Food We Trust" — a throwback to last week's heated public comment period over posting "In God We Trust" in the county's public hearing chambers.

Anne Lawrence, a board member of the Clark-Cowlitz Farm Bureau, said she was concerned about how the proposed Alternative Four of the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan update may take valuable farm land out of production.

"This county has a treasure of soil and weather and rain," Lawrence said. "We can grow stone fruit and tree fruit. We have seafood, freshwater fish. If

we pave it over, we won't be able to feed ourselves."

The council took no action Tuesday evening, as the discussion was not related to a matter on the meeting agenda, but Councilors Jeanne Stewart and Madore expressed interest in hearing more from local farmers.

"I'm very interested in identifying types of problems and any solutions that you think may help so we can work together on solutions," Stewart said.

The county is currently updating its Comprehensive Growth Management Plan, which has to be finalized and submitted for state review by April 30, 2016.

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