

From: [Rebecca Messinger](#)
To: [Oliver Orjiako](#); [Jose Alvarez](#); [Sonja Wiser](#)
Subject: FW: The agriculture exemption removal process failed your constituents
Date: Tuesday, March 26, 2024 8:53:54 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)

Please see the below comments from CCCU. Thank you.



Rebecca Messinger
Clerk to the Council
COUNTY MANAGER'S OFFICE

564-397-4305



From: Kathleen Otto <Kathleen.Otto@clark.wa.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2024 8:06 AM
To: Rebecca Messinger <Rebecca.Messinger@clark.wa.gov>
Subject: FW: The agriculture exemption removal process failed your constituents



Kathleen Otto
County Manager

564.397.2458



From: Clark County Citizens United, Inc. <cccuinc@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, March 25, 2024 9:41 PM
To: Gary Medvigy <Gary.Medvigy@clark.wa.gov>; Karen Bowerman <Karen.Bowerman@clark.wa.gov>; Michelle Belkot <Michelle.Belkot@clark.wa.gov>; Glen Yung <Glen.Yung@clark.wa.gov>; Sue Marshall <Sue.Marshall@clark.wa.gov>; Kathleen Otto <Kathleen.Otto@clark.wa.gov>

Subject: Fw: The agriculture exemption removal process failed your constituents

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Clark County Council

March 25, 2024

P.O.Box 5000

Vancouver, Washington 98666

FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Re: The agriculture exemption removal process failed your constituents

Dear Councilors,

As President of Clark County Citizens United, Inc. and former President of the Clark County Dairy Womens Association,

I know that Spring is officially here and soon farmers and gardeners will be getting their farm fresh produce ready to sell. The Dairy Woman's Association depends on that farm fresh fruit to make their renowned peach milkshakes at their Clark County Fair ice cream booth. That booth was the first such booth at the annual event and brings in thousands of dollars to benefit our communities. In addition, the organization puts on an "Agriculture in the Schools" program, to allow children to see first hand what agriculture is all about. But without farmers, none of this would be possible.

Additionally, the robust 4-H Youth Clubs will be working with their livestock and projects. They are busy training, grooming and growing their animals to exhibit at the Clark County Fair and Junior Livestock Auction, where their animals sell for thousands of dollars. It's most unfortunate, the enthusiasm local folks have for locally grown food and 4-H Youth isn't reflected in the actions of county staff when creating agricultural policies. What a shame.

CCCU's membership is witnessing how county staff is trying to end a decades long exemption for agricultural buildings, allowed in counties throughout Washington State. Agriculture is much different than other industries and requires costly investments in land, equipment, fuel, water, is seasonal and labor intensive. Profit margins are slim, especially for small family farms. These farms dominate local agriculture in Clark County and around the country. They aren't able to easily absorb increases in costs because they can't be reflected in what they're being paid for products. They can only charge what the market will bear, so they walk a fine financial line.

With the recent council vote to remove the agriculture building exemption, there was no staff outreach to stakeholders, no presentations from CCCU's membership, equestrians, landowners, Clark-Cowlitz Farm Bureau or WSU Extension managers.

Consequently, stakeholder comments were not taken into account in staff's analysis and recommendations. Therefore, no one was able to offer ways to mitigate harmful impacts. It is noteworthy that, in this situation, these stakeholders are taxpaying constituents and aren't being represented by the elected Clark County Councilors.

CCCU's membership is concerned the elected officials are continually relying on county agencies and staff to provide a full and complete analysis that supports staff's recommendations. But what happens if agency reports are faulty, incomplete and tainted with bias? Ultimately, staff is highly influencing the Council's policies. In this situation, staff miserably failed to provide an adequate report, let alone an analysis that considered the consequences of added costs to an already cost-burdened and volatile industry. In this case, it was not an analysis and staff simply created a statement in support of an unspecified and costly permitting process, based on incomplete data. The Council is dangerously making uneducated decisions that negatively impact the lives and livelihoods of your rural taxpaying citizens.

The process should have gone differently.

1. Staff should have identified and consulted with those most likely to be impacted by their proposed changes;

- Farmers, equestrians, avid gardeners, 4-H Youth clubs, WSU Extension, and rural land owners.
- All should have been identified as critical stakeholders important to the public process.

2. The process was woefully one sided.

- The disregard for the stakeholders demonstrates bias and was used to arrive at a particular result.
- Members of staff are professionals and know full well how the public process should unfold.

3. Questions need to be asked:

How are they going to offset potential costs?

Is the criteria so restrictive that it will be prohibitive?

What is the unspecified need for an agricultural building permit?

Where is the existing policy data, that has been serving the current community and future needs?.

Why is none of this addressed in staff's presentation?

The removal of the agriculture building exemption and the required permitting proposal didn't come from the stakeholders, so where did the proposal come from? State law allows local governments to exempt certain buildings from the building code

requirements and staff knows that. Our farmers, gardeners, 4-H Youth, equestrians and land owners all deserve better from county agencies, professional staff and the Clark County Council. If the process doesn't change soon, people will be wondering what happened to all the local family farms that used to provide fresh produce? They will ask where did all the 4-H kids, showing their animals at the Fair, go?

It is farm season in Clark County, just as it has always been for many decades. Landowners, farmers and children are once again looking forward to raising their animals and crops. But CCCU sees that little by little, that lifestyle and culture is being destroyed by draconian and unreasonable county regulation. CCCU asks the councilors to get a handle on the problem, before it is too late.

Sincerely,

Susan Rasmussen, President

Clark County Citizens United, Inc.
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