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Subject: Jefferson commissioners favor 150-foot shoreline buffer in new plan

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Jefferson commissioners favor 150-foot shoreline buffer in new plan

By Jeff Chew
Peninsula Daily News

PORT TOWNSEND -- After 1,035 public comments, hearings and at least 27 hours of deliberations this week, Jefferson County commissioners finished reviewing a proposed shoreline master program, and said they favor a 150-foot standard marine buffer for new homes, as well as a prohibition on marine aquaculture.

"We went with the 150-foot buffer to start with, that will be adjusted lot by lot, permit by permit, as people can justify it," county Commissioner David Sullivan, D-Cape George and board chairman, said late Thursday afternoon.

Final draft on the way

Commissioners referred their revisions and recommendations to the Department of Community Development's Stacie Hoskins, planning manager, and Michelle McConnell, planning associate.

Hoskins told the commissioners that the Department of Community Development staff would try to bring back the final draft for the commissioners' consideration by their Oct. 19 meeting.

Sullivan said he believes there is room for adjustment on the buffer requirement.

The buffer was widely opposed by property rights advocates and real estate agents, who said that it would devalue waterfront properties, of which about 30 percent still can be developed in the county.

The 150-foot standard shoreline buffer was recommended by the county Department of Community Development.

The Jefferson County Planning Commission, which is appointed by the elected county commissioners, recommended a 50-foot buffer along shoreline residential and high-intensity shoreline growth designations.

The panel included provisions to encourage locating structures along no- and low-bank marine shores at an elevation to avoid any potential threat of sea level rise because of global climate change.

Conservancy shorelines, which are relatively undeveloped and natural areas,

are proposed to have the more stringent 150-foot buffers.

A 100-foot buffer proposed on lakes remains in the proposal.

A 150-foot buffer also remains on streams and rivers in the county.

Property rights advocates, real estate agents and others called on county leaders to leave alone the existing 30-foot buffers from the high-water mark.

Aquaculture

As deliberations were winding up, County Commissioner Phil Johnson argued to ban all aquaculture in Jefferson County.

Both county Commissioner John Austin and Sullivan, however, said the door should be left open to upland aquaculture fish tanks so long as they are healthy and do not harm the environment through waste or chemicals such as antibiotics.

The commissioners, once they approve the shoreline master program draft, will forward it to the state Department of Ecology for the final review and adoption process. Ecology will open a comment period and public hearing.

Final adoption is anticipated for sometime in mid to late 2010.

The shoreline master program is intended to maintain existing shoreline resources, foster shoreline recovery over time and to balance use and protection.

Jefferson County is required to update its program in compliance with the state's 1971 Shoreline Management Act and the 2003 Shoreline Master Program Guidelines.

All jurisdictions in the state must update their shoreline master programs by 2014.

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