

All of us, I would hope, are committed to the sacrosanctity of farming in the Skagit Valley. With that said, I would ask you to reduce the agricultural setback to 15 feet allowing property owners to reasonably develop their properties with the addition of decks, fencing and stairs...

From a sun-shading standpoint, the amenities listed above are a non-issue. From a public safety standpoint, a well-built deck with an appropriate handrail system removes that argument entirely. Presently, there are multiple upon multiple of properties with fencing directly on the property line. Never once have I heard of an incident where those fences impeded a right to farm or created a safety issue. And again, those are fences directly on the property line. What I am asking for is much more conservative.

It is my understanding that the town's former planner was comfortable with administrative variances for decks... within the agricultural setback under certain circumstances. I also understand that the current planner takes a more conservative approach and has requested that the planning commission review the issue for possible implementation into the town's permanent code. I further understand that the planning commission did review the issue and was initially comfortable with a 15-foot setback. In fact, I believe the commissioner who made this recommendation is a member of a longstanding farming family in our community.

At a subsequent meeting, the planning commission reversed its initial view when confronted with public comment. I believe most of the comment was based on emotion rather than reason. The fear that one day the Skagit Valley could turn into the Renton Valley based on this issue is simply unfounded and imposes an undue hardship on property owners.

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