

SW Idaho county mulls plan to convert farmland to mixed use

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

The Board of Canyon County Commissioners on Dec. 20 postponed action on a development group’s plan to convert 129.8 acres of farmland near Caldwell, Idaho, into 1-acre home lots and light commercial uses. The Canyon County Planning and Zoning Commission Nov. 15 voted to recommend county commissioners deny the proposal because of its potential to harm the area’s agricultural character.

County spokesman Joe Decker said the two county commissioners present on Dec. 20 voted to table the proposed rezone and comprehensive plan amendment until 1:30 p.m. Jan. 10. Applicants had requested that all three members be present for the decision.

Karcher Farms LLC and SS Karcher LLC seek rezoning and other classification changes at the southwest corner of Karcher Road (Idaho 55) and Farmway Road. If the county commission upholds P&Z’s denial, the applicant can appeal.

Plans call for 74 single-family home lots on 90.8 acres, and service- and neighborhood-commercial uses on 39 acres, the applicants’ representative, Shawn Nickel of SLN Planning in Eagle wrote to Canyon County Development Services staff.

The site lies in an area with a mix of current and developing land uses, requiring future land planning as the area transitions to greater residential densities, he wrote. Adjacent land to the east and west already is zoned commercial and



Capital Press File

Sweet corn seed is harvested in a Canyon County, Idaho, field near Nampa. A proposal to subdivide farmland in the county will be taken up by county commissioners in January.

residential, with uses in place or planned.

Vineyards are among uses in the area, particularly west of Farmway Road. On the Idaho 55 corridor, “all housing projects should be kept east of Farmway Road,” Huston Vineyards owner Gregg Alger, whose operation is three-plus miles west of Farmway, said in an interview. “And any commercial developments should be limited exclusively to agri-tourism or agriculture.”

A report by Canyon County planning staff said the proposed development would negatively affect the agricultural character of the area, traffic, and established residential uses.

No trend for residential and commercial development has been demonstrated in the area to the extent rezoning is needed, and “development to the thresholds proposed is premature based on forecasts for households and jobs, a lack of existing residential zoning and a lack of ser-

vices being available to support the project,” the staff report said. And the site is not in an area of (Caldwell) city impact where growth is expected, county planners wrote.

Individual wells and septic systems are proposed. Several local residents, in letters to Canyon County Development Services, expressed concern about the project’s potential impact on the aquifer and existing wells.

Nickel wrote that the project would be done in phases, each sized in part based on septic requirements administered by the Southwest District Health Department.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation easements are on parts of the site for Forest Canal, Burns Lateral and Gibbons Drain.

By using pressurized irrigation for the new lots and eventually discontinuing flood irrigation for farming, the property’s annual water consumption would drop, Nickel wrote.

Burley short-line rail terminal expands reach

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Watco Cos. plans to keep extending the reach of its Burley, Idaho, short-line railroad terminal that specializes in agricultural commodities.

The Pittsburg, Kan.-based company in the fall of 2016 acquired the 120-plus-acre complex, previously used for manufacturing recreational vehicles. Watco in January 2017 began operating the terminal, which specializes in perishable foods and refrigerated cars with roll-on racks.

The Burley terminal, served by Eastern Idaho Railroad, at the outset had only Bethlehem, Pa., as a destination.

“As of Nov. 26, we have added a destination at

Rochelle, Ill.,” said Owen Zidar, Watco senior vice president of strategy and customer development. The new site gets Idaho-originating foods into the Chicago area, from which they can be promptly trucked 200 to 300 miles to many other major cities. “So basically we’ve just expanded potential destinations for Idaho potatoes, onions and butter,” he said.

Impacts include “broader Watco coverage for Idaho perishable shippers,” he said. “It gives them a truck-competitive alternative.”

The 72-foot rail cars, which hold four full-truck-load equivalents, can end up in trains operated by larger railroads, or at terminals where their cargo is placed

on trucks for transport over a shorter distance to a final destination. Zidar, who participated in a recent Idaho Farm Bureau Federation panel on transportation, said a tight labor market and recently stricter daily limitations on truck drivers have increased rail’s competitiveness.

Watco plans to add a Tacoma, Wash., destination eventually, to provide easier access to export and West Coast domestic markets while increasing opportunities for eastbound loads, he said. Longer-term plans call for adding a Jacksonville, Fla., or Atlanta destination, and setting up a terminal or warehouse in Omaha.

Watco owns about 40 short-line railroads, and 87 terminals and port operations.

USDA relaxes some school nutrition standards

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — USDA intends to give schools more flexibility in nutrition programs when it comes to milk, whole grains and sodium to ensure those standards are not only healthful but practical.

The new rule, which goes into effect Feb. 11, gives schools the option of offering flavored, low-fat milk and reduces the requirement for whole grains to half of weekly offerings. It also provides more time for schools to reduce sodium levels and eliminates the third and final sodium target.

Schools have faced challenges serving meals that are both appetizing to students and meet the nutrition stan-



Laura Seitz/Associated Press File

In this 2017 photo, students line up for lunch at a middle school in Sandy, Utah. The USDA has scaled back school lunch standards implemented under the Obama administration, including one that required only whole grains be served.

dards. The new standards will allow schools to serve healthful meals that meet local preferences, USDA Secretary Sonny Purdue said.

“If kids are not eating what is being served, they are not benefiting, and food is being wasted,” he said.

The relaxed standards aren’t likely to change offerings in cafeterias throughout the Twin Falls, Idaho, School District, where most students clean their plates, Lori Rieth, the district’s food service supervisor, said.

The district is meeting the current standards and offering a variety of options that students like. Food manufacturers have evolved with improved products that meet the standards and appeal to students, she said.

The district is able to purchase low-sodium products, and only uses salt in kitchen preparation when needed. Salt is not provided to students, and spice stations are provided at the middle schools and high schools so students can add flavor without adding sodium, she said.

The district has also been using whole grains for quite a few years. The wheat it’s able to obtain has gone from dark and heavy to whiter and lighter, she said.

“Things have come a long way, and the product is so much nicer,” she said.

The district also has a test kitchen where it’s able to work on recipes and taste vendors’ products. Staff also takes into account feedback from student surveys on cafeteria offerings, she said.

“We’re not going to make everybody happy every meal, but we try hard. For the most part, we see a lot of kids eating their meals,” she said.

The district serves fat-free flavored and white milk and 1 percent white milk. It has the option of serving 2 percent white milk, but prefers to use those calories elsewhere. Students are used to the milk offerings, and the district will keep with the status quo, she said.

“We’re able to supply them (students) with nutritious meals and give them access to a wide variety of nutritious foods; that’s our goal,” she said.

If meeting nutritional standards is a burden for schools, they can get a waiver and opt out, she said. “We don’t have that problem here,” she said.

BIGGER IS NOW WIDER

INTRODUCING THE 120-INCH TRACK SPACING OPTION ON OUR BIGGEST 9RX SERIES MODELS

It's a difference you can feel especially on wet fields and hillsides. Our new 120-inch track spacing option delivers a strong grip when turning under load in tough field conditions.

At the same time, it gives you the flotation you need. Which reduces compaction, soil disturbance and soil berming on headland turns.

And because the track spacing is 120 inches wide, it helps keep mud and debris from building up between the tracks and tractor frame. Find out more about this new option in tractors that's quickly gaining traction. Ask your John Deere dealer today and get wider. **Nothing runs like a Deere.**

JOHN DEERE

See it in action at JohnDeere.com/9RX

John Deere Dealers

See one of these dealers for a demonstration

Belkorp Ag, LLC
Modesto, CA

Campbell Tractor & Implement
Fruitland, ID
Homedale, ID
Nampa, ID
Wendell, ID

Kern Machinery Inc.
Bakersfield, CA
Buttonwillow, CA
Delano, CA

Papé Machinery
Four Lakes, WA
Madras, OR
Merrill, OR
Moscow, ID
Ponderay, ID
Tangent, OR
Tekoa, WA
Walla Walla, WA

RDO Equipment Co.
Pasco, WA

Stotz Equipment
American Falls, ID

Washington Tractor, Incorporated
Chehalis, WA
Ellensburg, WA
Lynden, WA
Quincy, WA

