Meeting Notes
Envision Skagit Citizen Committee
June 2, 2011
8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Skagit County Administration Building

Attendees:

Kerri Cook
Cory Ertel
Peggy Flynn
Jim Meyer
Kim Mower
Grace Popoff
Gustavo Ramos, Jr.
Doris Robbins
Tim Rosenhan
Ryan Sakuma
Nate Youngquist

Staff:

Kirk Johnson, Skagit Co. PM
Lisa Dally Wilson, Facilitator
Josh Greenberg, Skagit GIS
John Lombard, consultant

Meeting Handouts:

1. Meeting Notes, May 13-14 CC Retreat (e-mailed)
2. Goal Statement I: A Regional Vision: Stronger Regional Coordination, Collaboration and Cooperation, 5-27-11 draft
3. Goal Statement II. Protect Natural Resource Lands and Industries (agriculture, forestry, fish and shellfish), 5-26-11 draft
4. Goal Statement III. Protect, Preserve, Restore Environmental Resources and Values, 5-27-11 draft
5. Goal Statement IV. Compact Communities and Conservation Development, 5-27-11 draft
6. Goal Statement V. Sustainable Transportation, 5-27-11 draft
7. Goal Statement VI. Water, 5-27-11 draft (footer mistakenly said 5-11-11)
8. Goal Statement VII. Housing Variety and Affordability, 6-2-11 draft
9. Goal VIII – Preparing for Climate Change, 5-27-11 draft
10. Cover letter and Highlighted Recommendations for Discussion with County Commissioners and City Mayors
11. Additional Highlighted Recommendations, for Discussion with the Envision Skagit Steering Committee

Committee Business

The meeting notes for the May 13-14 retreat were approved, with three amendments:

- On page 4, the first sentence of the bottom paragraph was amended to read: "Grace asked that the introduction to the rural development recommendations recognize that responsible rural development could minimize environmental impacts."
- On page 6, the second sentence of the second paragraph was amended to read: "Cory and Peggy said they thought it was appropriate for growth to be concentrated in existing cities, including Mount Vernon and Burlington, which are the county's core cities, with access to I-5 and the best opportunities for compact, dense development."
- On page 7, the first sentence of the first full paragraph was amended to read: "Cory asked whether the CC recommendations should include a section specifically devoted to flooding and floodplain issues."

Janicki Tour: Kirk said that Janicki Industries had offered to provide a tour of a commercial thinning operation in July, which would highlight the company's certified sustainable practices and the access it provides for recreational use of forest lands. Interested committee members could sign up at today's meeting.

Citizen Committee Product: Kirk said that, based on a review of the CC's original charge, CC members should not share CC products with outside groups yet. Products would become public in advance of the public meeting on June 16. If CC members have concerns with recommendations that have been endorsed by the CC as a whole, they can draft a minority opinion for inclusion in the CC's final report. Kirk said he believed the CC's recommendations will have the greatest influence if they are viewed as independent.

Tim said that, from a public relations perspective, the CC's lead recommendation should be that the county and cities need to work together. He said it was important that the CC speak directly to the Skagit Valley Herald early, ideally before the meeting with mayors and county commissioners. Lisa asked that the CC park these concerns for later discussion on the agenda about the meeting with elected officials and next steps.

Review and Edit Changes to Recommendations

Goal Statement 1 – Regional: Cory asked whether the CC would look at maps and try to recommend where new industrial lands should be located. Kirk said that was in the parking lot—it would be desirable, if the CC has time, given other priority needs. Grace asked whether recommendation 4, which states that new industrial lands should be "within UGAs," conflicted with recommendation 3, which would distribute revenues from these lands across jurisdictions. After further discussion, the CC agreed to modify the recommendation so that it calls for new industrial land to be outside of "NRL" land (instead of only agricultural land) and that it be "readily" served by appropriate infrastructure, deleting the reference to UGAs.

CC members were concerned that the explanation for recommendation 5, for possible consolidation of government services and taxing districts, was too negative. Grace noted that some citizens favor multiple, smaller districts because they see them as offering better access and representation. CC members approved adding "library districts" to the first sentence, and changing "health districts" to "hospital districts."

As part of the background for recommendation 6, Peggy suggested noting that Mount Vernon and Burlington have joined in an appeal of FEMA's flood mapping, as an example of collaboration and common interests between the two cities.

In response to a question that Kirk raised at the end of handout #2, the CC agreed to let staff decide where background details should be included in documents to be shared with elected officials, the Steering Committee, and the public. Tim stressed, however, that the background at the end of the handout should be available to the Skagit Valley Herald before an article would be written on the industrial revenue sharing proposal.

Goal Statement 2 – Natural Resource Lands: The CC agreed that the title for the goal statement should include "Aquatic Resources" and should add "fish and shellfish" to the industries listed. Given the lack of recommendations for fish and shellfish, John suggested that recommendations 10 and 11 from the

Environment goal statement, concerning salmon and the Clean Samish Initiative, could be copied in the Natural Resources statement.

In considering Comment [K2} in handout #3, the CC decided to delete the second and third sentences in the explanation for recommendation 2 as confusing and unnecessary.

The CC discussed recommendation 4.a), on the Farmland Legacy Program, at some length. CC members recalled recommending doubling funding for the program at the May retreat. Josh said that the Envision model showed this led to buying up development rights in the middle Skagit and Sauk valleys. He noted that the only legal use of lands purchased under the program is farming; they cannot be used for ecological restoration. With Grace abstaining, the CC approved editing the recommendation so that it specified "doubling" funding for the program, provided that this would not preclude restoration in the middle Skagit River of NRL lands not actually being farmed. Kirk noted that The Nature Conservancy would be coming to the CC's June 20 meeting to discuss a feasibility study for a bond issue to acquire open space, which could help fund purchases of development rights on farmland.

The CC discussed recommendation 4.d), on stormwater management to protect farmland. Members noted that, with the scope of the goal statement broadened to include fish and shellfish, the scope of this recommendation could be broadened to include benefits to those industries. Kerri recommended referring to the comments submitted to the project by Taylor Shellfish.

Goal Statement 3 – Environment: The CC agreed that the Skagit Smart Growth Alliance could help with recommendations 1 and 2 in handout #4, concerning development of a long-range conservation plan and next steps for the County's open space plan.

Cory asked where funds would come from to implement recommendation 4, to purchase and remove residences from the floodway. John noted that FEMA can help pay for floodway buyouts, but a local match was required. Kirk asked if we could park the issue, saying that many other recommendations would require additional funds to implement but did not identify anticipated sources. Lisa said that an economics section that was still coming could discuss funding issues.

Staff confirmed that recommendation 5 would include new residences for farmers in its call for eliminating future residential and commercial development in the floodplain. Cory asked if farmers would be okay with that. Kim said some farmers would support it and some would not, but many recommendations would ruffle feathers in the community. The CC made no changes to the recommendation.

In response to Comment [L2] on recommendation 6, Kim said she favored keeping the final sentence of the explanation, which calls for replacing Ag-NRL land that is lost for restoration in the middle Skagit under the CC's "no net loss" policy. No CC members stated opposition. After some discussion, the CC agreed to delete the first sentence of the explanation as redundant with the second sentence. The CC also approved adding a new paragraph at the beginning of the explanation that briefly discusses the benefits for habitat and flood storage from restoration.

The CC agreed that the language for recommendation 9, on farmland that might be affected by sea level rise, should parallel the language approved for recommendation 1.b) in goal statement 2.

After some discussion of the impacts on salmon runs of tribal and non-tribal fishing, Kirk said that he and John would do a little research and work and discuss language with Nate for a possible new or additional statement for recommendation 10, to be reviewed with the CC by e-mail.

On recommendation 11, supporting the Clean Samish Initiative, Kim noted that wildlife can also be a significant source of bacterial pollution and should be mentioned in the explanation. Kirk said that he would add some statistics on the economic value of the Samish shellfish industry.

On recommendation 13, the CC approved adding education to the list of strategies that can help protect riparian areas.

Goal Statement 4 – Compact Communities: The CC agreed to modify the introduction in handout #5, so it begins by noting that the CC has heard from the public that it wants to protect farmland, open space, and natural areas, and that with population growth the only way to accomplish that is through compact, dense cities. The CC also agreed that, especially given public comment at the meeting with the Hispanic community, "sports fields" should be added to the list of needed amenities for urban areas.

Staff agreed to delete the second paragraph on page 2, concerning the challenge of transferring or purchasing sufficient development rights in the rural area to support a 90/10 urban/rural allocation, and instead discuss potential costs in the new economics section.

The CC agreed to add a reference to the Skagit Smart Growth Alliance in the explanation to recommendation 3, as a potential partner to work with Skagit County on amending the CaRD ordinance.

The CC agreed to modify the wording of recommendation 5, so it states that FCCs "should be avoided in Skagit County unless" they can achieve their densities through 1:1 TDRs.

The CC agreed that the overall goal statement would be better organized if the urban development recommendations, 6 – 10, were re-ordered to become recommendations 2-6.

The CC agreed to add language under recommendation 6 discussing sustainable redevelopment, potentially borrowing language from the Skagit County Climate Action Plan.

The CC agreed to restore language proposed for deletion in handout #5 on recommendation 7, concerning redevelopment of urbanized floodplains. After some discussion, the CC agreed to replace the first two bullets in the explanation with a more general statement, to be vetted by e-mail, noting that floodplain development already must meet flood-proofing and mitigation requirements, which will likely grow stricter under evolving federal regulations. The CC also agreed that the explanation should begin by referring to the amount of existing infrastructure and the cultural and historical significance of existing development in the floodplain. Explanatory language for recommendation 9 should be parallel.

Goal Statement 5 – Transportation: The CC agreed that recommendation 1.c. in handout #6 should be changed to become a general statement on returning historic rail corridors to active rail use, referring to the Tommy Thompson and Cascade trails as possible examples.

Goal Statement 6 – Water: Kirk said that he had not received written responses from Anacortes and Skagit PUD, but that he was told the PUD had sufficient water rights to meet OFM forecasts through 2060 and that Anacortes was similarly situated. Because the recommendations in handout #7 are

currently all either copied from other goal statements or are sketchy and vague, staff recommends that they be replaced by a brief general statement that water issues are so integral and related to other recommendations that we have dealt with them throughout other goal statements. The CC agreed, but reserved the possibility that there still might be one or two recommendations that are specific to the water goal statement.

Goal Statement 7 – Housing: Tim asked that a general statement be added to the introduction to handout #8, noting that more urban housing is needed to provide an adequate supply to keep housing affordable.

The CC also agreed that a recommendation should be added that supports the Skagit County Housing Advisory Committee, calling for the committee to consider the long-term supply of affordable housing. Kirk volunteered to draft this.

The CC also amended recommendation 2 to delete the specific reference to Seattle's High Point neighborhood. Gus requested that the reference to farmworker housing specify that this includes migrant farmworkers.

Goal Statement 8 – Climate Change recommendations: Lisa noted that the CC had not yet discussed recommendations on climate change and that what was before the CC was drafted by staff. She asked how the CC wanted to proceed.

Kim said that if the CC did not mention climate change in a 50-year plan, it would be seen as siding with those who don't believe in climate change or think it can be safely ignored. Cory noted that the Skagit County Climate Action Report was the result of a year's worth of deliberations. Gus said he believed the CC's report should say something on the topic. Tim said he was OK acknowledging that the CC did not have a lot of time to discuss the subject and that the UW report on Skagit climate change research was not yet out. Peggy said that if the sea level rise recommendation in the natural resources and environment goal statements belonged anywhere, it would be here. Lisa asked if it would be okay for staff to draft a more general statement about climate change, for vetting with the committee by e-mail. The CC agreed.

Vision Statement

The CC discussed the vision statement in the cover letter of handout #10. CC members raised questions about the references to "connections to the natural world" and "natural systems." Some members asking for more specific references to the ecosystem and to the reliance of humans on a healthy, vibrant natural world. Other CC members were concerned that the reference to the economy appeared as an afterthought, and that there was no discussion of sustainability or a human culture that honors the values discussed in the vision statement. Lisa said that, given all of these concerns, the vision statement should be dropped from the letter to the elected officials. She will reserve a half-hour at the next CC meeting for further discussion.

Meeting with Mayors/BCC and Steering Committee

The CC continued discussion of the cover letter in handout #10. Tim suggested that it stress the importance of collaboration at the beginning, to blunt potential opposition the recommendations might

receive from the cities. He said the letter should stress that the CC has dealt with long-term problems that others have not faced.

The CC agreed that the letter should refer to Skagit County, not the Skagit Valley, particularly out of concern not to exclude Anacortes.

The CC agreed that it has not prioritized recommendations and that its recommendations are so interrelated it would be difficult to do so. In the list of highlighted recommendations, numbers should be replaced with bullets to avoid any implied prioritization. The recommendation for a Smart Growth Alliance should come first, because of its logical relationship with other recommendations.

Kirk said he would send materials to the elected officials and Steering Committee on Tuesday. The CC agreed that the materials should include all of the goal statements in their latest forms, with the cover letter referring to recommendations for water, climate change, and economics as "in progress."

Kirk asked for volunteers to present at the meetings. CC members agreed that it would be best for individual members to present on those recommendations where they have had the greatest involvement. Members agreed that Jim would provide the introduction, Peggy would discuss the Skagit Smart Growth Alliance, Tim would discuss the industrial tax basket and Burlington/Mount Vernon merger, Kim would discuss the natural resources recommendations (with Ryan, Jim, and Nate as back-up), Kerri would discuss the environmental recommendations (coordinating with Grace), Tim and Peggy would discuss compact communities and conservation development, Grace would discuss transportation, and Gus would discuss housing.

Kirk said he was planning to assign seating, with CC members and elected officials alternating. The afternoon of June 9, the CC would discuss the meetings with electeds and the Steering Committee and any changes they wished to make in their recommendations. Staff would provide as quick a turnaround of revisions as possible, with the goal of posting updated recommendations on the project website on Monday, June 13. The public meeting on June 16 would run from 4 to 8.

Lisa said she will try to draw out all of the electeds at the June 9 meeting, and that CC members should take turns responding. She will go over the CC's remaining schedule early on June 9, before the meeting with the Steering Committee begins at 9.

12:45 Adjourn