

Meeting Notes
Envision Skagit Citizen Committee
June 9, 2011
8:30 a.m. – 4:30 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

Guests:

Members, Envision Skagit Steering Committee
County Commissioners, City mayors

Meeting Handouts:

1. Meeting Notes, June 2 CC meeting (e-mailed)
2. Envision Skagit 2060 – Local Citizens Plan for the Future (letter from CC to Skagit Valley Herald)
3. Packet, CC draft recommendations for discussion with the GMA Steering Committee and Envision Skagit Steering Committee, June 7, 2011
4. Envision graphics – Red dot maps and pie charts showing city/town/rural growth, June 8, 2011
5. Envision graphics – Maps, Plan Trend and Preferred Future UGA boundaries, June 6, 2011
6. Envision graphics – Map, Preferred Future Development Transfers, Draft, June 8, 2011
7. Draft Session Framework, Envision Skagit Public Meeting
8. Envision Skagit Asks Skagit Valley Residents: What is Your Vision for the Future (public outreach summary)
9. Vision Statement edits in email correspondence from Kerri Cook
10. Outside Envision 2060, Peering In, by Joline Bettendorf
11. Goal Statement VIII. Economics, 6-7-11 draft

Committee Business

The meeting notes for the June 2 meeting were approved, with the date in the heading corrected.

Handout #2 was passed around for review and comments.

Meeting Schedule: After today, the CC has three meetings remaining on its schedule: the June 16 open house with the public; a June 20 work session, which will start at 8:30 and which will include a presentation on a potential feasibility study for an open space bond issue; and June 30, if necessary, to put finishing touches on the CC's recommendations and related materials.

CC Presentation of Recommendations to the ES Steering Committee

After introductions, Kirk reviewed the role of the CC and CC members summarized the draft recommendations. Kirk said he wanted to come back to the Steering Committee for a more in-depth discussion in the summer including results from the Envision model.

Rebecca Bradley, Senior Planner with Mount Vernon, said she thought substantive discussion of the recommendations was premature, since she only first saw them the day before and had not had time to review them.

Kirk said he had been asked before the CC began whether it would deliver a product, on time. Materials were distributed as soon as they were ready. Written comments are welcome after today, as are comments at the June 16 open house.

Margaret Fleek, Planner for Burlington, said she was very impressed with the CC's work. She supports recommendations for the Skagit Smart Growth Alliance (SSGA), the Burlington/Mount Vernon merger, and the industrial tax basket.

Patsy Martin, Executive Director of the Port of Skagit County, echoed Margaret's compliments. She asked if the CC had examples for its key recommendations.

Tim said that Seattle offered good examples for in-fill housing and Metro Vancouver demonstrated how a much larger population could be concentrated on a similar amount of land to Skagit Valley. Kirk noted that Ed McMahon's presentation at the Lincoln Theatre, which is on the Envision Skagit website, included many great examples.

Gary Christensen, Director of Skagit County Planning and Development Services, applauded the CC's work. He said he noticed only one recommendation, for a Skagit Food Systems Strategy, with a specific timeline. He asked if there are others.

Kim said that creating the SSGA was the first priority. Kirk said that millions of state and federal dollars were allocated to Puget Sound and sustainability issues, and that Skagit could attract some of this for implementation. Lisa noted that the CC had two more meetings and could be discussing adding timelines.

Carolyn Kelly, Manager of the Skagit Conservation District, said she appreciated the CC's community approach, as demonstrated by its recommendations for affordable housing and the food supply.

Shirley Solomon, Executive Director of the Skagit Watershed Council, echoed others' compliments. She said she would look through the recommendations in detail, focusing on how they would affect salmon. She supports creation of the SSGA.

Margaret Studer, board member of Futurewise, said she looked forward to an in-depth discussion of the CC's recommendations. In reviewing them, she was struck by the need for new revenue for implementation and by what she saw as inconsistencies in how the CC proposes to address development in the floodplain. She asked that the CC clarify its recommendations for rural villages other than Alger and Conway Hill.

Margaret Fleek said, with reference to floodplain development, that I-5 and the BNSF railroad were not going away. The highest priority is removing dwelling units from the floodway. UGAs should not expand in the floodplain, but they are already there.

Paul Kriegel, with Goodyear Nelson, said he thought that Skagit County's CaRD program should not be changed. Kerri said that when the CC called for reforming CaRD, at a minimum this meant enforcing the existing rules.

Jan Ellingson, with Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate, said the CC's recommendations made her proud to have been on the Steering Committee. She especially appreciated that the CC did not recommend any potential "takings" of property rights. She supports the SSGA and agreed that Alger and Conway Hill were the right rural villages to recommend for expansion.

Ryan noted that the CC's recommendations reflected what they heard from the public, not just their own vision. Peggy praised her fellow CC members and Kirk for his good work. Kirk praised the team that supported him. Lisa passed out handouts 4, 5 and 6 for review outside of the meeting. Kirk asked for comments by June 17, so they can be discussed at the CC's June 20 meeting.

Public Meeting Coordination: Planning and Format

After brief CC discussion of the meeting with the Steering Committee, Lisa summarized handout #7, the proposed framework for the June 16 public meeting. Kirk said that revised goal statements would be on the Envision Skagit website by Monday. Posters would be sent as pdf's to CC members before the weekend. A news release would go to local papers and the project's listserv. Articles about the project in the [Skagit Valley Herald](#) would also provide details on the public meeting.

The CC agreed that the open house should include a "clearinghouse" table to provide the CC's overall vision and help attendees find where they can get more details on recommendations of interest. Other tables might combine more than one goal statement, such as housing and transportation, to help ensure there would be more than one CC member at each table. The overall presentation needs to answer the question, why plan for another 100,000 people? The meeting should be an opportunity for questions and answers as well as feedback. Gus said he would do what he could to provide translators for Spanish speakers.

CC Presentation of Recommendations to the BCC and Mayors

Kirk said that Cory was missing the first part of the day's meeting because of a work commitment, and that John Cheney was absent due to illness. He said that the CC's recommendations would be formally sent to the GMA Steering Committee and the Skagit Council of Governments in early July.

After CC members summarized their recommendations, Burlington Mayor Ed Brunz and Anacortes Mayor Dean Maxwell thanked the CC for its work. Mayor Maxwell said that jobs were his biggest concern.

Sedro Woolley Mayor Mike Anderson said he supported the proposed 90/10 ratio for growth between urban and rural areas, but wanted to know whether the current 80/20 target was being met. Kirk said that the actual ratio had been closer to 75/25 in recent years.

County Commissioner Ron Wesen said he appreciated that, looking out 50 years, things would have to change. He asked whether there was a timeline for the CC's recommendations.

Kim said we should start planning now for the SSGA. Peggy noted that the Reality Check exercise would be a catalyst for SSGA.

Mount Vernon Mayor Bud Norris said it was premature for him to comment and that he would discuss the recommendations with his city council. He noted the CC's support for ecological restoration of 2,700 acres of farmland under the Tidegate Fish Initiative and asked if the CC thought it was okay to sacrifice farmland if it was replaced under a no net loss policy. Commissioner Wesen noted that the 2,700 acres was a negotiated mitigation for operation and maintenance of the drainage system.

County Commissioner Ken Dahlstedt said that economics would be critical. Would the community be willing to tax itself to accomplish its goals? He said that consolidating governments or government services could save money, but poses political challenges.

Gus said that looking out 50 years, economic development requires other things to be successful, including affordable housing. Tim noted the CC recommendation for 1,600 acres of new industrial land. Kirk said that an economics goal statement was in progress.

County Commissioner Sharon Dillon applauded the CC's "holistic" work. She said the county did not have the population density for extensive bus service now, but it might in 50 years. Kim said that van-size public transportation could potentially work now.

Commissioner Wesen noted that one-third of workers in Skagit County commute outside of the county for their jobs. Did the CC recommend changing that? Kirk said that the Envision model projected a need for 1,000 more acres of industrial land, so the higher figure (recommended by the CC and Patsy Martin) assumed a greater number of jobs within the county.

Lisa passed out handouts 4, 5, and 6 for review outside of the meeting. Kirk said that the CC would distribute a final product within a week or two of June 30.

Public Meeting Coordination (continued)

The CC agreed that there would be three formal presentations at the public meeting. Each would be 10-15 minutes, with another 10-15 minutes for questions and answers. Kirk, Tim, and Kerri would present. Kirk will work with Josh to put together a slide show, with one slide per highlighted recommendation. All CC members should participate in answering questions.

Discussion of Input Received During AM Sessions

Lisa noted the questions about timelines. After some discussion, the CC agreed to let staff identify recommendations with fast timelines, for CC review. Grace requested that her minority opinion for a floodplain management plan be included.

Jim asked that the recommendation for a Skagit Food Systems Strategy replace "social justice" with "social equity." After CC discussion of the potential for affordable housing to be lost with redevelopment, Grace asked that the Compact Communities section be amended to acknowledge this.

The CC discussed how rural villages other than Alger and Conway Hill should be handled in the recommendations. Kirk said the county comp plan designated rural villages for Edison and Conway (both of which are in the floodplain), Bay View, Big Lake, Rockport, Marblemount, and Clear Lake. He noted that much of Bayview is in the “airport environs overlay” (flight zone). The CC agreed to note in explanatory language that the other rural villages exist and are capable of taking some additional development under existing zoning. The CC parked whether to identify the other villages on Envision maps, pending advice from Josh.

Lisa asked whether there were any other changes CC members wanted to make following the morning’s meetings. Ryan said that handout #6, the map of development transfers, had confusing coloring, with two shades of green and two shades of purple that refer to different things.

Messaging and Communication Strategy

The CC discussed the increase of 100,000 residents projected for 2060. CC members noted that the Steering Committee recommended the number to the CC and that it is lower than the State’s “medium” projection for Skagit County. Tim asked that a “Frequently Asked Questions” sheet be prepared for the public meeting, which would include these points. The CC agreed that the presentation at the public meeting should discuss this at the beginning.

Kirk said the meeting with the Skagit Valley Herald went well yesterday and that an article would appear tomorrow. Gus, Ryan, Peggy, and Jim volunteered to join Kirk for a meeting with the Herald editorial board.

After the CC’s final report is issued, CC members agreed they should go back to groups they met with earlier to present the recommendations. Gus asked that the full recommendations be translated into Spanish for distribution. The CC agreed that a 1-2 page Executive Summary should also be written, separate from the highlighted recommendations, telling the project’s overall story and including some pictures.

Final Products to be Reviewed/Written

Carrying Capacity: Kirk said he would review materials he had received from the Municipal Research and Services Center and would distribute the most relevant to the CC, for discussion on June 20.

Climate Change: The CC generally supported the revised statement on climate change that was included in handout 3, but amended a reference to the “likely” consequences of climate change to read “potential” and also added a reference to agriculture and crop viability to the list of challenges for incorporating climate uncertainty.

Economics: The CC agreed to change the title of this goal statement to “Economic Vitality.” The CC discussed a variety of potential edits and additions to handout #11, including references to the importance of marine-related industries, potential hurdles for small businesses, the roles of EDASC and the ports, the CC’s “no net loss” recommendation for Ag-NRL lands, tourism, the need for sustainable use of resources, and the importance of broadband access to east Skagit County. Kirk agreed to write an updated draft for CC review. The CC delegated Ryan to share the draft with Don Wick, Executive Director of EDASC, for comments and suggestions for additional ideas.

After some discussion of whether new industrial land for the industrial tax basket should be located outside of cities, the CC agreed to leave this vague for now. Tim agreed to draft some short additional language for that recommendation in Goal Statement 1.

Water: Kirk confirmed that Anacortes' water right far exceeds projected demand through 2060. He said the Skagit PUD had told him their rights should be sufficient to meet water demand for the medium-low projection for population growth through 2060 (the projection being used by Envision Skagit), but they might be strained to meet demand for the medium projection.

Doris said that water and wastewater were a "big blank spot" in the CC's recommendations. Kim suggested recommendations on water conservation and enforcement of septic system regulations. Tim said that water and wastewater were huge topics but at this stage it was almost impossible to do them justice. The CC might make one or two recommendations and acknowledge the need for more. Jim suggested asking the SSGA or a Water Task Force to address the issues in more depth. Ryan expressed concern that the CC had already tasked the SSGA with a lot. Lisa said that she would work with Doris to draft a short goal statement for CC review.

Vision Statement

The CC reviewed handout #9. Kirk said the Vision Statement would be placed on the inside front cover of the CC's recommendations and would probably be referenced again in the report. The CC agreed to delete "for ourselves, for the greater human community, and for coming generations" from the first sentence and "that public safety be considered as part of all land use decisions" from the third sentence. The CC asked to add a reference to regional collaboration, and to break the Vision Statement into a second paragraph after the second sentence.

Next Steps/Next Meeting

Lisa asked that CC members arrive for the public meeting at 3:30, half an hour before the start, to help ensure that everything is ready. She noted that the CC parked discussion of transfers or purchases of development rights on forest land.

4:30 Adjourn