

**Skagit Alternative Futures Project  
Steering Committee Meeting Summary  
Wednesday, July 1, 2009  
Skagit Valley College Multi-Purpose Room**

**Attendance**

**Members**

Rebecca Bradley-Lowell, City of Mount Vernon	John Doyle, Town of La Conner	Jan Ellingson, Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate Exec.
Margaret Fleek, City of Burlington	Paul Kriegel, Private Forester	Ryan Larsen, City of Anacortes
Sara Young, Port of Skagit County, alternate for Patsy Martin	Kevin Morse, The Nature Conservancy	Rebecca Ponzio, Puget Sound Partnership
Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland	Mike Shelby, Western Washington Agriculture Association	Shirley Solomon, Skagit Watershed Council
Margaret Studer, Futurewise	Larry Wasserman, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community	Gary Christensen, Skagit County Planning & Development Services

**Other Participants:**

Kirk Johnson, Skagit County	Kendra Smith, Skagit County	Tim Holloran, Skagit County
Josh Greenberg, Skagit County	Linda Christensen, Skagit County	Lisa Dally Wilson, Dally Environmental
John Lombard, University of Washington	Sara Breslow, University of Washington	Derek Poon, Environmental Protection Agency
John Bolte, University of Oregon		

**Handouts:**

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| 1. Project Summary  | 3. May 6, 2009 Meeting Summary Draft                  |
| 2. Stakeholder Committee Composition and Selection Criteria Draft | 4. Skagit Alternative Futures Model Framework - Draft |

The eighth meeting of the Alternative Futures Steering Committee began at 9:05 a.m.

**Welcome from Commissioner Dillon:**

County Commissioner Sharon Dillon thanked Steering Committee members for their participation in the project. Alternative Futures is “hugely important” to her, a “long-time dream.” All three Commissioners are committed to implementing what comes out of the process. She encouraged the Steering Committee to continue with its work and to bring it forward to the Stakeholders Committee.

**May 6 Steering Committee meeting summary:**

The Steering Committee approved the May 6 meeting summary with no changes.

Kirk mentioned an article from the *Skagit Valley Herald* discussing the announcement of federal funding for the Fisher Slough and Hansen Creek habitat enhancement and floodplain restoration projects. The Nature Conservancy is the Fisher Slough project

manager. The project was cited as a good example of cooperation by local conservation groups, agricultural interests, tribes and the Skagit Watershed Council, with support from the Puget Sound Partnership.

**Brief Project Update and Discussion:**

Kirk briefly discussed items in the project update memo, including the EPA funding delay, status of contract discussions with Oregon State University for Envision, and the need to reduce/delay certain by the University of Washington. Derek Poon said EPA is extremely supportive of this project which is doing “cutting edge work.” A final EPA decision is expected by year’s end.

Kirk discussed and circulated a letter to EPA seeking financial support for the Envision software piece, which many Steering Committee members signed.

**Process Discussion: Stakeholder Committee Selection:**

Lisa Dally Wilson introduced the discussion, referring to a handout proposing a list of interests that should be represented on the committee and proposed committee member selection criteria. She said the management team felt it was important to keep the committee size down to about 15 to keep the group efficient.

A wide ranging discussion about the Stakeholder Committee ensued. That discussion is organized here into the following themes:

- What is the Committee’s purpose?
- Who should be at the table?
- What is the product they will develop?
- What types of outcomes will or should result from their work?
- How will the product be implemented by the County and others?

**Purpose of Stakeholder Committee:**

The fundamental purpose of the Stakeholder Committee has been described as follows in previous meetings and project written documents including the revised draft vision statement:

The Stakeholder Committee will review the evaluations of the first four futures and develop a “Preferred” future that can receive broad support (ideally consensus) among Committee members. To the greatest extent possible, the Preferred future will accommodate population growth and the impacts of climate change while supporting a high quality of life, including ecosystem functions and processes and the multiple benefits that they provide, a strong and diverse economy founded on commercially viable natural resource-based industries and other innovative businesses, and vibrant, well-planned and fiscally healthy cities, towns and rural communities.

Lisa suggested Committee members would need to be in constant communication with their constituency or organization.

### **Who should be at the table?**

Questions and comments included:

- Will the committee include or be primarily composed of elected officials? This issue has not been entirely resolved yet.
- Project staff are seeking written comments from Steering Committee members for future discussion. Staff will also speak with and provide the Steering Committee's thoughts to the County Commissioners who will make the final Stakeholders Committee appointments.
- The time commitment and level of detail ((including possible orientation field trips) may be excessive for elected officials.
- Some Steering Committee members believe their elected officials (such as mayors) will want some role in the Committee nonetheless.
- Each city needs to be represented on the Stakeholder Committee and each city has its own adoption process.

### **What kind of issues will the Stakeholder Committee address in developing the preferred alternative?**

The preferred alternative will address fundamental issues of growth and development, including:

- where will new people and jobs be located, the sizes and locations of, and densities within urban growth areas;
- the location and distribution of population in the rural area and on natural resource lands;
- where and how critical areas will be protected;
- mediation of competing demands for uses of natural resource lands, from production of agricultural and forest products to habitat restoration, enhancement and mitigations, to locations for urban and rural expansion.

Others thought the process could be very helpful to jurisdictions doing shoreline planning updates (although a city representative said they were for the most part done);

- help avoid bad things from happening like new Fully contained communities.
- Needs to address “mega issues” such as affordable housing given a limited land supply and the upward effects of regulation on housing prices.

### **What kind of product will the Stakeholder Committee develop?**

Comments included:

- The recommendations should not be watered down for political reasons (“happy talk”), and should be provided directly to policy makers/implementers.
- Greatest fear is the product may end up being mediocre.
- A hope that the various participating interests will fully embrace the plan (“98% if not a 100%”) and put it into operation.
- While each person is there representing an entity or interest, we all have a broader common goal: What is going to be good for the Skagit? We can identify that together and make it happen.
- A “nicely compiled document” could be used by all participants for granting writing and other fund raising purposes to show that the county is united.
- There was a request for the final product to be described in writing (see Attachment 1).

### **How will the product be implemented by the County and others?**

There was confusion or lack of clarity about how the results of the process would be implemented by the County and others. Comments:

- There appeared to be a weakening in the County commitment to implement the results.
- City and tribe representatives were unsure what their organizations' roles would be in implementation because they have their own separate adoption processes.
- Kirk Johnson said the process would link directly to the County's upcoming updates of its Comprehensive Plan, development regulations, potential incentive proposals, critical areas ordinance, and shoreline planning,
- He drew a diagram on the white board showing how the recommendations from the Stakeholder Committee would be further considered by the county.
- Gary Christensen stated: "The process will be instructive of our policy processes, the 2012 Comprehensive Plan, and the shoreline master program. The results from this process will be very influential."
- The cities and county could adopt the process recommendations as a "guiding vision" and then implement specific actions through their city and county plans and regulations.
- Would there be an ongoing role for the Stakeholders Committee after delivering its recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners?

### **Follow-up:**

Lisa Dally Wilson said project staff would ask Steering Committee members for written comments on representation on the Stakeholders Committee, selection criteria, and thoughts on the amount of time and level of engagement that should be requested.

### **Envision Presentation with John Bolte.**

The meeting notes contain minimal detail about John's presentation and the resulting discussion. There were some questions on modeling of impervious surface. One member said federal lands should be included within the modeling.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:30 p.m.

## Attachment 1

### WRITTEN DESCRIPTION OF THE STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE PRODUCT

#### *Discussion Draft – Subject to Refinement through Discussions with the Steering Committee and the Skagit County Board of Commissioners*

The Stakeholders Committee will develop a “preferred future” to guide development, conservation, and natural resource use in the Skagit and Samish watersheds within Skagit County over the next 50 years. The Stakeholders Committee will also develop a set of implementation recommendations to make that preferred future a reality over time.

The Stakeholders Committee’s product will likely be in the form of a report that includes:

- An adopted vision statement for the planning area
- A set of final indicators for assessing the wellbeing of the Skagit ecosystem, natural resource industries and the broader economy of which they are part, urban and rural communities, and progress on growth management goals.
- An analysis of each the alternative futures and the preferred future against these indicators and a scorecard for each future.
- Maps, G.I.S. analyses & land use visualizations depicting the alternative futures and the “preferred future” recommended by the Stakeholders Committee.
- A set of policy recommendations and implementation measures intended to move the County toward the preferred future over time. This will likely include recommendations for consideration and implemental by the county, the cities and towns, tribal governments, non-profit organizations, citizens, the private sector, and state and federal agencies.

#### **Implementation Responsibility**

The County will have responsibility for implementing recommendations related to County plans, policies, zoning and land use regulations. Cities within the watershed will likely have some responsibilities as well. Modification of the County’s Comprehensive Plan will involve changes to policies related to land use, urban growth areas, rural development, natural resource lands, critical areas, water management, and other issues. The Alternative Futures study will also support the County’s update of its Shoreline Master Program and completion of a surface water management plan, due in 2011 under the County’s NPDES municipal storm water permit.

The Growth Management Act Steering Committee, which includes the County and the cities, will be responsible for amending countywide planning policies, as needed.

Programmatic recommendations will likely have multiple responsible parties, including non-profits and the private sector as well as governments. At least some recommendations concerning financial incentives will likely require the support of the Puget Sound Partnership and potentially the State Legislature for implementation. Funding for restoration will also require assistance from the Partnership, the Legislature, and the federal government.