

**Skagit Alternative Futures Project
Steering Committee Meeting Summary
Wednesday, September 2, 2009
Skagit Valley College Multi-Purpose Room**

Attendance

Members

Margaret Fleek, City of Burlington	Paul Kriegel, Private Forester	Sara Young, Port of Skagit County, alternate for Patsy Martin
Rebecca Ponzio, Puget Sound Partnership	Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland	Mike Shelby, Western Washington Agriculture Association
Shirley Solomon, Skagit Watershed Council	Larry Wasserman, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community	Carolyn Kelly, Skagit Conservation District
Gary Christensen, Skagit County Planning & Development Services		

Other Participants:

Kirk Johnson, Skagit County	Josh Greenberg, Skagit County	Kendra Smith, Skagit County
Linda Christensen, Skagit County	Lisa Dally Wilson, Dally Environmental	John Lombard, University of Washington
Sara Breslow, University of Washington	Michael Rylko, Environmental Protection Agency	

Handouts:

1. Master Timeline
2. Potential Issues for Future Scenarios Development
3. Stakeholder Committee Composition and Selection Criteria, Draft

The 10th meeting of the Alternative Futures Steering Committee began at 9:10 a.m.

Welcome, Agenda Review and Brief Business (Presented by Kirk):

- The August 5th meetings notes will be available for approval next month
- The Master Project Timeline specifies roles and milestones for the steering committee and technical and stakeholder committees (see updated handout)
- The stakeholder committee will not be appointed until early 2010 due to the timing of EPA supplemental funding
- Given this timeline, development of the Preferred Future may carry into early 2011 with implementation of recommendations in 2011-12

Discussion of “Parking Lot” Issues from August Meeting (Facilitated by Lisa)

Steering Committee Vetting of Technical Committee Assumptions

Steering committee commented about how they would like to vet assumptions made by technical committees (e.g. how land management practices would impact salmon):

- Gauge need for vetting on an as-needed basis

- More thoroughly vet assumptions once indicators are finalized
- How will you reconcile inevitable inconsistent assumptions? (John responded it would depend on the nature of the differences. First, make assumptions clear when stating results. Very stark differences may warrant throwing an indicator out, or presenting results from two sets of assumptions.)

Implementation of Stakeholder Committee Recommendations (Presented by Kirk)

Project recommendations will likely be implemented as follows:

- Changes to county policies and code will go through County legislative process
- In some cases, recommendations will inform, but not determine County plans (e.g. Shoreline Master Plan update has detailed scientific and legal requirements).
- Changes to county-wide planning policies or urban growth areas will need to go through the Growth Management Steering Committee

Stakeholder Committee (Presented by Kirk)

Cities had recently asked that each be represented on the Stakeholder Committee, in one case by a mayor himself. The County (Commissioners and staff) have decided that the Stakeholders Committee should be composed of citizens representing diverse interests, locations, and ages, rather than elected officials for the following reasons:

- The Committee needs to remain a manageable size of 15-20 people;
- Elected will be directly involved in implementation when recommendations are considered by the Board of County Commissioners, city councils, Growth Management Steering Committee, and Skagit Council of Governments, and
- City staff are represented on the Steering Committee and Growth Management Technical Committees.

Steering Committee members commented:

- There should be regular communication between a citizen-based Stakeholder Committee and SCOG in order to ensure constant communication between citizens and elected officials
- City and tribal staff members who are on the Stakeholders Committee could report directly to their elected officials.
- One person felt the project should result in a plan of what Skagit County citizens want for the future, not local governments telling them what they have to do.

Lisa concluded that given the continuing expressions of doubt, the question of how a citizens-based Stakeholder Committee would link to elected officials, implementation, and the cities would remain on the Parking Lot.

Climate Change Analysis

Alan Hamlet of UW will likely give a half hour presentation on how regional climate research may be applied to the Skagit and used in Envision at a Steering Committee meeting this fall. The climate analysis is expected to be part of the supplemental grant proposal to EPA, and additional funds are being sought from UW's College of the Environment. A proposal was made to consult with the Skagit Science Climate Consortium, whose ongoing research on climate issues in the Skagit could be incorporated into the Project using an adaptive management approach. A formal request will be made to the Consortium to discuss this proposal during their November meeting.

Steering Committee Brainstorming on Elements of Initial Futures (introduced by Kirk, facilitated by Lisa)

See the revised “Alternative Futures Bingo” matrix for substantive changes to that document; additional comments from the conversation are recorded here.

Kirk reviewed the purpose of developing alternative future scenarios:

- To produce visions and decision rules for modeling purposes only, and *not* positions for lobbying;
- To assess the effects of different ways of distributing and allocating projected population on the landscape at a relatively basic level and rough scale;
- To evaluate impacts to all indicators under each future;
- To articulate both broad visions for a particular future and/or specific decision rules that would enable you to achieve that vision;
- To integrate these visions in a way that will “lift all boats” in the preferred future.

He cautioned that not all issues will be modelable; Josh will inform us what we can and cannot do in Envision. Results from this discussion will be shared with the technical committees, and in turn their reactions will be shared with this group. The matrix discussed at the meeting consisted of project staff’s best guesses and placeholders, and the ensuing discussion was intended to be an opportunity to brainstorm, make corrections, and clarify misunderstandings, rather than engage in argument or debate.

Ag/Forestry Future

Issues for consideration were:

- Very important to retain the current agricultural land base.
- Location (i.e. delta vs. upriver) and contiguity of parcels are important.
- What are other ideas for ag-protection measures? E.g. TDRs; farming-only 40-acre parcels; no further subdivision of ag parcels; urban-farmland separators
- Re: no net loss of forest land: large forest land owners are probably more open to selling development rights than small owners, depending on how economic circumstances could change in 50 years.
- What should be analyzed for ensuring forestry sustainability? I.e. profit, and therefore whether a landowner can meet regulatory requirements, and whether ecosystem services will be compensated.
- There are thousands of small forest landowners who are important to the forestry industry who could have one harvest in their lifetime, which will be worthwhile if they can access a niche market, but not if they are subjected to higher regulations.

Ecosystem Future

Issues for consideration were:

- Given the projected impacts of climate change, restoring the floodplain will entail staying ahead of the curve – i.e. restoring biological processes as they are lost due to climate change.
- Ideas for restoration included: Gages Slough; removing 400 houses in floodway between Sedro Woolley and Concrete; relocating the town of Hamilton; allowing attrition of floodplain structures over time due to the combination of destruction by flooding and federal policy that no longer allows building in the floodplain (floodway?)

The tribes’ priorities are:

- All beaches are certified for safe shellfish harvest
- Water quality standards are met in all streams.

- Harvestable numbers of fish are available (not historic numbers) for both tribal and non-tribal fishing, which translates to sufficient habitat and sufficient spawners to support that harvest.

Plan Trend Future/Development Future

Issues for consideration were:

- A challenge for developing the plan trend future is what to do with urban growth boundaries when cities fill up – e.g. increase density or expand.
- Nobody is specifically designated to work on the development future yet, but a focus group could be pulled together from people in the development community.
- Issues for the development future to address include: needing industrial land to provide living wage jobs and foster a healthy economy; adequate land for cities to provide taxes for services for the large proportion of the projected population they are expected to accommodate; affordable/farmworker/migrant housing
- The need for land for affordable housing puts pressure on ag, forestry, and conservation goals; this result should be captured in the evaluation of indicators.

Other Suggestions and Issues for Consideration:

- What scale should be considered when visioning: city, county, region, or world? E.g. important to have enough jobs and housing at regional scale; Skagit should also be recognized for assets at global level - Pacific flyway, huge river, important agricultural base - which all also require an intact land base.
- Ecotourism as economic development could be addressed in development future.
- New technologies may be unimaginable so it is important to think broadly and creatively – e.g. consider Vancouver, BC's density, livability and walkability.
- What is the relationship between density, transit, development, property values, and population? Would presence of a transit system connecting Skagit to neighboring metropolitan areas encourage more development?
- Why is the group not considering no growth or declining population numbers, and therefore sticking with the philosophy that you're either growing or dying?
- Group has not made the same assumptions for jobs as for population; a common stated concern is that you grow beyond your ability to pay for infrastructure. The project needs an urban/development economist who is ideally viewed by all as objective and who can help consider those kinds of assumptions.
- Learn from others as to how to keep a rural place small but linked to transit
- Bring in a future expert who could look at transportation and economic trends

Wrap-Up

- See handout for committee comments on Stakeholder Committee criteria
- Committee members were reminded to do outreach with their constituencies
- Kirk asked for input on whether there should be more attention to assumptions in the plan trend or to building the alternative futures at the next meeting.

Parking Lot

- How do we involve city and county electeds to ensure they support outcomes?
- Revisit population assumptions
- Look at ag and other communities on the east coast, Europe, and other places

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.