

Envision Skagit Open House, April 25, 2012

Flip Chart Notes from Public Question and Comment Periods

Questions or comments from members of the public are shown in black text below, as captured by facilitator Lisa Dally Wilson on flip charts. The facilitator did not record responses by Envision Citizen Committee members or project staff to comments and questions. Project staff has provided brief responses below in an effort to summarize Citizen Committee or staff responses provided at the open house.

- How much county \$ has gone into the project?
 - \$1.4 million in federal grant funds, and \$750,000 in local match, over 4-year duration of project. Local match is primarily “in-kind” staff time from county and other participating organizations, and volunteer time of Citizen Committee members. Not all funds have been expended.
- How much time was spent on assessing and discussing water issues?
 - Water issues were discussed and researched. Water rights are very complex, technical and legal matters. The Citizen Committee did not feel it had the time, knowledge or expertise to thoroughly address water issues.
- What is the Farmland Legacy Program?
 - The Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program is a county initiative that purchases unexercised residential development rights on Skagit farmland from willing sellers, establishes agricultural easements on the land, and works to support policies, programs, and plans that enhance the protection of farmland. For additional information, see: <http://www.skagitcounty.net/Common/asp/default.asp?d=ConservationFutures&c=General&p=main.htm>
- Who pays the property tax on land in the FLP?
 - The private landowner retains ownership of the property itself and continues to pay property taxes on the land, at a value that reflects the voluntary sale and removal of the residential development rights
- Are we now in phase 3 of the process?
 - Yes
- Does this have anything to do with UN Agenda 21?
 - No. This is a local, Skagit County planning effort under the direction of the Skagit County Board of Commissioners.
- Do not create another bureaucracy
 - It is not the Citizen Committee’s intent to create another bureaucracy
- Encourage common sense regulation, objectivity
 - Comment noted
- Clarify the role of the Envision Skagit commendations
 - The recommendations were developed for the consideration of the Board of County Commissioners and other elected officials from member jurisdictions of the Skagit Council of

Governments. The elected officials are being asked to consider the recommendations but they are not obligated to approve them.

- An internal process with legislation to avoid outside influence
 - This statement is unclear. The 12 members of the Envision Citizen Committee all live in Skagit County, and the elected officials to whom these recommendations are being presented are all locally elected.
- Can recommendations (like water) be modified throughout the process
 - Yes, the recommendations can be modified through the process. Any changes that might result to county or city comprehensive plans through implementation of the recommendations would need to go through the formal planning processes of those jurisdictions, which would require additional public involvement and the opportunity for modification and amendment.
- Cape Horn – doesn't like recommendation re: flooding; no forceful or involuntary action, people who live there want to stay there, community has taken responsibility
 - The Citizen Committee's recommendations emphasize voluntary purchases or transfers of unexercised (un-built) development rights, from willing sellers, to protect property, public safety, and floodplain function.
- Vision for employment in Skagit County – what % of jobs are local?
 - Currently 47% of Skagit County's workforce commutes out of the county to their jobs. Thirty nine percent (39%) of jobs physically located here in Skagit County are held by workers who commute in from outside the county.
- What are the "guidelines" that were used to develop the recommendations?
 - The Citizen Committee was asked to think about and begin discussing the following three questions, which were also asked of attendees at the 10 public visioning sessions:
 - What do you value most about Skagit Valley that needs to be retained over time?
 - What is missing or lacking here? What do we need to work harder on in the future as a community?
 - What are the greatest challenges facing Skagit Valley in the future – and what can we do to address them?

The Committee was also asked to think about how Skagit County could accommodate another 100,000 residents, which the project's Steering Committee determined to be the "most likely" population growth scenario by 2060. Those questions began a dialogue within the Committee and with the broader community that eventually resulted in the Envision Skagit Citizen Committee's Final Report and Recommendations.
- "Whose" vision is this?
 - It's the vision that the Envision Citizen Committee developed based on the public outreach process they helped conduct and their own experiences living and working in Skagit County.
- Concern about abuse
 - The specific meaning of this comment is unclear.
- Concern about personal property rights and conversations with feds
 - The Citizen Committee's Report and Recommendations acknowledge in several places the Committee's support for protecting private property rights. The U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency, which has provided grant funding for the project, has not influenced any of the Citizen Committee's recommendations.

- How much of these recommendations can be modified by the tribes?
 - The Swinomish and Samish Tribes are members of the Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG). They have the same influence as other SCOG member jurisdictions over regional planning actions undertaken by SCOG.
- Explain uncompensated downzoning
 - Uncompensated downzoning is a zoning action by a jurisdiction that reduces the number of development rights (or development potential) on a parcel of property, without monetary compensation. The Citizen Committee states that it does not support uncompensated downzoning.
- What happens tomorrow and how well will the public be informed?
 - Elected officials from SCOG (<http://scog.net/>) jurisdictions will meet on April 26th to discuss the Citizen Committee's recommendations. The meeting was a public meeting. Notes from the meeting will be made available to the public once they are reviewed and approved by SCOG. The SCOG elected officials will meet again at Burlington City Council Chambers on May 31st, from 9 am to Noon.
- In 1992 GMA was addressing the same issues as today: concern over rural sprawl. The Rural Element of the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan is at risk by this (Envision) plan. Proceed with pre-existing components of the Comprehensive Plan in place.
 - The Envision Citizen Committee's recommendations acknowledge the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan as establishing the planning rules in place today and as the foundation for the Envision recommendations. The Envision recommendations are not intended to replace the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan but rather to build on the framework created by that plan.
- More industrial property needed – feels like this recommendation is protecting property rights and reducing bureaucracy. The Industrial Tax Basket encourages existing jurisdictions to work together. The Farmland Legacy Program is very successful. Speaker is generally supportive of the overall Envision product.
 - Comments noted.
- General property rights concern: supports the recommendations emphasizing voluntary and compensation.
 - Comment noted.
- Concerns about rural communities. Concern that GMA basis/Comprehensive Plan be used as structure.
 - Comment noted. See response above.
- Recommendation 4.7 – “direct” future residential growth into existing cities. Direct is too strong a word, can we say strongly encouraged?
 - The Citizen Committee recognizes that new residents will make voluntary choices about where they wish to live. Cities must offer a high quality of life if the region is going to achieve the Citizen Committee's 90% target for growth going to cities.

- Recommendation 4.9 re: amending development regulations to enable and require clustering; “require” and “regulation” are too strong
 - Comments noted.
- Rec 3.4 language “purchase and remove...residences” is too strong, need to emphasize voluntary; also consider dredging Skagit to manage flooding
 - Comments noted.
- Rural element committee of the Skagit County GMA Comprehensive Plan addressed carrying capacity/population density. This should be used, concerned that rural communities are being referenced to as “wild land,” “conservation land.” Not comfortable with this
 - Comments noted.
- Reliance on build out of potential development rights is misplaced. A) water limitations changes # of development rights. B) geography changes number of rights. C) relying on this is a problem. D) need more density on hills
 - The project’s calculation of 13,000 existing, unexercised rural development rights did not take into account Skagit sub basin water restrictions. (In two of the Skagit sub-basins water reservations limit development more than current rural zoning does; in the other Skagit sub basins, rural zoning is more restrictive than water reservations). With that caveat, the calculation does seek to accurately estimate the number of unexercised development rights under existing policies.
- Recommendation 2.7: seek state, federal or international designation” – why do we need state or federal funding?
 - The Committee felt that state or federal funding could help to achieve locally-supported goals including protecting Skagit farmland and other natural resources.
- Consider who pays for growth, did you consider Eben Fodor’s ideas on growth in Better Not Bigger?
 - The Citizen Committee did not review that particular work.
- Section 3 – what is the chance that these recommendations will become law or ordinances
 - Moving these recommendations into law or ordinances would require action by local elected officials, including county commissioners, mayors and city and town council members, through legally established planning processes requiring additional public participation.
- Favor Skagit Alliance as a mechanism to move forward
 - Comment noted.
- How can Skagit Alliance encourage and receive continued public input?
 - The details of the Skagit Alliance still need to be worked out; the Citizen Committee recognized continued public engagement as very important.
- Flexibility needed in plan, things change!!!
 - Comment noted.
- How well are we considering flood issues in actual construction?
 - Floodplain development is subject to local codes and ordinances which differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.
- Did we consider GMA? County comp plan in discussion? Were there concerns about enforcement?

- The Envision Citizen Committee’s recommendations acknowledge that the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan establishes the planning rules in place today. The Envision recommendations are not intended to replace the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan but rather to build on the framework created by that plan. Even with the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan in place, the Committee was concerned about the impact of 50 years of continued population growth and the number of potential development rights in rural and natural resource lands.
- 2.7 –special heritage designation– ok at the state and federal level, but not international. Not comfortable with UNESCO in control
 - Comment noted.
- Remind ourselves – we live in a rich agricultural valley
 - The Citizen Committee is very aware of this point and made several recommendations to protect agricultural land and support the local farm industry and farmers.
- Lack cost/benefit analysis. Long-term fiscal impacts of major projects have been ignored
 - The Envision project did commission an analysis of the fiscal costs and benefits of growth. That report is available for review at <http://www.skagitcounty.net/EnvisionSkagit/Documents/Final%20Fiscal%20Analysis%20Report.pdf>:
- We need a community open forum to discuss these types of things.
 - The Committee strongly agrees.
- Airport impacts
 - The Citizen Committee’s recommendations seek to protect Skagit Regional Airport from incompatible development.
- Pull together the Army Corps, the tribes, Ecology, quit interagency bickering, SOLVE PROBLEMS
 - Working together to address local problems and opportunities is a major recommendation of the Citizen Committee.
- Wish list – too long, deep, broad, narrow to key elements
 - That is part of the purpose of this consideration and implementation phase of the process.