

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Board
Meeting Summary
January 9, 2024

Members in Attendance

Scott DeGraw	Jim Glackin	Audrey Gravley	Owen Peth
Margery Hite	Sarah Stoner (ex-officio)	Andrea Xavier	Keith Morrison

Members Absent

Staff and Others in Attendance

Jenn Johnson, Skagit County Public Works
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:30AM.

Review Agenda

Agenda approved, with consensus to remove Committee Reports from the agenda.

December 12 Meeting Summary

Jim made a motion to approve minutes; Keith seconded. All in favor.

Property Updates

The group discussed updates on the properties currently in queue for agricultural conservation easements. The queued applicants encompass 430 acres and 8 development rights.

- **2023 recap closed or expected to close/record:** 425 acres protected in 2023 with eight development rights extinguished on these protected acres.
- **25-year total, at close of 2023:** 14,745 acres protected; 273 residential housing development rights extinguished.

Marketing & Application Process

Press Release: Year in Review 2023

The [2023 year-in-review of Farmland Legacy's work](#) was just approved for release. The content needed okay by the Commissioners. Sarah will send out the press release via 8,000 subscribers on the County press release list serve, along with directly sending the release to media, and select recipients involved in agriculture and conservation locally and regionally.

Mapping Mastery

Sarah reported that she is working to better capture aerial images of protected farmland for use in projects, scoring reviews, presenting, etc. Should make for better access for everyone: the advisory board, for viewing properties, the public, the media, and presentations like the Ag Summit. Sarah shared a sample of the 700-acre block of contiguous, protected farmland currently in Bow, for feedback from the group. Feedback was to add directionals and key road names to the map.

Statewide Recording Fee Increase, 1/1/2024

A statewide recording fee increase went into effect January 1, 2024, adding a \$100 surcharge to most documents. The standard first page recording fee will be \$303.50. See 2SHB 1474 for further details. This created an issue for two Farmland Legacy easement closings that were delayed until 2024 at the last minute, by request of the landowner for their tax purposes. The landowner assumed the added \$100 fee, since the delay was at their request.

Farmland Legacy Awarded \$100,000 Land Transfer Navigator Grant

Farmland Legacy is one of only 36 entities across the nation awarded a [\\$100,000 grant over a 4-year period](#) starting last fall, from American Farmland Trust. Among its requirements for the grant, requirements include one in-person training each of the four years. This meeting is scheduled for the end of January, January 28-31, 2024. Sarah will be out of office at this training in Savannah, Georgia. All expenses are covered by the grant.

The grant was only available to holders of Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) easements. Farmland Legacy holds multiple FRPP easements.

Goal of the Land Transfer Navigator grant: to support transfer of agricultural lands to the next generation of farmers. As per grant goals below, grant funds will be used locally to:

- Encourage more dialogue and action for succession planning and land transfer;
- Build organizational capacity;
- Integrate succession planning and land transfer work as a vital aspect of land protection;
- Promote forward-thinking and innovative ideas towards supporting land transfer work;
- Leverage organizational knowledge;
- Harness the expertise within the organization to advance land and farm transfer initiatives through annual action plans.

Monitoring Report

Kai reported that monitoring work is wrapped up for 2023 easements. Kai is now including impervious surface calculations in the FLP monitoring summary report spreadsheet. He also shares that USDA reports were submitted on time by the USDA's early-bird deadline (for preferred consideration of funding) of August 31; USDA has confirmed receipt of these 70 or so easement monitoring reports.

Member Updates

Owen shared information on a property in Bow sold as a one-acre lot, ready to build. The group discussed this lot as a model for including factors in the appraisal valuation process. The group discussed several marketing ideas for 2024, including targeted mailing lists in Skagit farmland. Scott reminded the group of the three-legged stool of farmland preservation: 1. Farming must be profitable. 2. The supporting network of ag businesses must remain local. 3. Community support is vital.

Financial Summary

The financial summary is updated for 2023 and reflects easement properties closed and recorded.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 AM