

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
January 11, 2022

Andrea Xaver	Keith Morrison	Margery Hite
Scott DeGraw	Owen Peth	Trisha Logue (ex-officio)

Members Absent

Audrey Gravley
Jim Glackin
Hal Hart (ex-officio)

Staff and Others in Attendance

Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Mike See, Skagit County Public Works
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:05 AM.

Member Updates

Scott reports that the people looking for a power substation site keep contacting him and are offering to pay a good sum. Currently, they want to pay Scott for a non-binding 12-month contract while they continue to find another property for hosting their energy site. Bottom line: The pressure on ag land continues.

Sarah reports on the hiring of Grace Kane as Skagit County Public Works Director, beginning January 18, 2021, to overlap with Dan Berentson before he wraps up his tenure at the end of January 2022. Sarah will forward to the group the County e-news release announcing Grace Kane as director.

December Meeting Summary

Andrea made a motion to approve, Owen seconded. All were in favor.

Monitoring Update | End of Year Report

Kai presented a review of the program's monitoring for 2021. As of 2021, FLP is complete on its monitoring. As reported in September, the 2021 USDA monitoring was complete in at the end of September. Total of 171 properties under conservation easement observation.

Kai shared the monitoring database which has a record of each observed property, the observation date and any pertinent notes. Most of the observation is done using aerial monitoring photos using Google Earth and the iMap County data to access the most recent aerial imagery. These mapping tools allow for comparison of year-over-year observed changes to the property that may not be obvious from the road. The ArcGIS application also includes the Farmland Legacy (FLP) properties as a layer option on the map. Kai uses the ArcGIS app as a tool during his driving-observation monitoring to make a real-time record of the FLP properties he's observed. Kai geographically clusters the physical property

monitoring. Kai also looks up each parcel number listed in the FLP database to check for any new changes under the Documents tab for each parcel.

Kai demonstrated to the group how to access the FLP properties within the County iMap layer (skagitcounty.net/Maps/iMap/ > Map Categories > Planning and Development > Farmland Legacy Properties)

Kai shared the monitoring report. This report database will continue to be expanded to include data such as impervious surface total calculations per FLP property. Scott asked about status of any properties potentially in violation. Kai shared live Google Earth images showing that FLP-49 appears to have cleaned up many of their remnant cars. FLP-2 also is only potential violation that are flagged for monitoring.

Kai noted that Sarah, as the program coordinator, monitors the Hedlin FLP, to remove any questions of conflict of interest due to Kai's connection to Hedlin Farms.

Easement Review Subcommittee (Members: Andrea, Keith, Owen)

Purpose: 1. Review the current FLP easement template to identify what might be obstacles to a landowner signing the Conservation Easement; recommend what might be considered for elimination, and/or not relevant to conservation of the ag land; 2. Review the current FLP conservation easement and the Subcommittee's recommended changes from a legal standpoint to ensure that the contract is watertight and ironclad. Subcommittee chair: Owen

Owen reported that the group didn't have the chance to meet in person due to recent holidays and winter weather obstacles. As subcommittee chair, Owen's identified goals include: the overarching goal that the deed of conservation easement template should be in lockstep with the purpose of the FLP program.

The process for the subcommittee is first to make a draft of suggested changes to the deed; then review those proposed change with the full CFAC board. Then, legal review of the proposed changes. The final step is Board of County Commissioners review and approval.

Margery asked about water rights in the deed, relative to a farmer who owns land with no water rights. Owen explains water isn't a necessity to farm in this county—most years, farmers don't need to irrigate. But from Owen's perspective, the water rights issue isn't relevant to a conservation-focused program.

Valuation Process Review Subcommittee (Members: Scott, Margery, Audrey, Jim)

Purpose: make recommendations, if needed, to improve the overall valuation process (versus the appraisal process which is simply one tool for valuation. Evaluate barriers to participation: Is it our appraisal amounts that is the issue? Or do we need to have our appraisals approached differently? See below including a review of the FLP Property Ranking/Scoring Process Review—how the scoring process relates to valuation. Subcommittee chair: Scott.

Scott reported that the group didn't have the chance to meet in person due to recent holidays and weather obstacles. Each subcommittee member has been tasked with researching different assignments. Margery researched State guidelines on conservation easements—and regulations governing valuations; she couldn't find any. Now she is checking if the County has general policies governing valuations. Jim is researching values of homes that were split off from ag land to gather data on what those homes are valued—to use as a comparison tool for development rights. Scott is researching other ag appraisers.

Scott clarified that any review of the FLP scoring process will be separate from the current work of a valuation process review.

Marketing / Application Process

FLP News Release, 2021

Sarah reported that the Farmland Legacy Program (FLP) news release announcing the fourth protected property of 2021 (Tobiasons) generated a front page article in [The Skagit Valley Herald](#) (“[Another piece of local farmland protected from development](#)”) on the newly protected property and FLP in general. The Herald article garnered attention on [social media thanks to Skagitonains’](#) swift sharing of the news. The [Skagit Food Coop](#) and [GenuineSkagitValley](#) also gave FLP a plug via social media this December and January.

The December 27, 2021, [Farmland Legacy Program \(FLP\) news release](#) (“[Skagit County Takes Another 103 Acres Out of the Path of Development](#)”) is accessible on the County website. The ag-friendly [VisitSkagitValley](#) also made room on their website for the December news release.

Annual Report 2021

Target date of May 5, 2022, to print and insert Annual Report into Skagit Valley Herald, then follow up with mailings to stakeholders both local and regional. Andrea and Sarah have met to flush out initial plan for content and have asked Kai to work on USDA numbers. Any other input, please let any one of us know!

Skagit Ag Summit & Idaho Ag Roundtable presentations

Sarah shared that she will present Farmland Legacy’s work at the 2021 Skagit Ag Summit (February 11, 2021), hosted by WSU, along with County presenters from Planning (agritourism) and Natural Resources (Voluntary Stewardship) and Commissioner Wesen. She has also been invited by the American Farmland Trust, a national preservation group, to present the Skagit County Farmland Legacy program as a model of long-standing success to a group of Idaho constituents interested in ag land preservation (January 18, 2021).

Comparison to Other Ag Land Preservation Programs in WA State

Sarah reported on FLP as one of the most successful ag land preservation programs in the State of Washington. In terms of comparison to the King County, Skagit County has 89,000 acres of ag-zoned land with nearly 14,000 acres protected (16%) in its 25th year. King County has 48,200 acres of ag land with 15,400 acres protected (32%) in its 40th year. Discussion ensued of general areas of farmland existing in King County—areas noted on their website are primarily in the Green, Sammamish, and Snoqualmie River Valleys, and on the Enumclaw Plateau and Vashon Island. Owen encourages our CFAC members to drive through farmland in Pierce, King and Snohomish for a good example of what we don’t want Skagit County farmland to look like: no protections of parcel sizes, for example.

New Applicant Review / Property Ranking

FLP 169

The group ranked FLP applicant #169, comprising 80.49 acres and potentially 2 development rights (pending official Lot Certification; application with Planning in December filed and pending deed revision)—located in Conway at the Conway interchange between I-5 and Pioneer Highway. This applicant sits south of an existing FLP easement.

Application Development Status: An initial application for this property was submitted to FLP in 2012, with one development right. It's possible that the land around the applicant's barn can be included, in which case, County Senior Planner recommends a Reverse BLA. This Reverse BLA will unattach the barn from the house parcel (looks like that a BLA done through Planning). The Reversal creates a new deed, which once a new deed is in hand from the BLA Reversal—which is expected to be in hand at the end of next week, Jan 21—Grace can proceed with the Lot Certification. Scoring his property now will keep his application moving forward.

The property scored as follows: *Original Criteria 47, Core Criteria 54, Edge Criteria 68.*
The group noted that the location of applicant's farm correlates to its scoring value: the application scored highest in Edge Criteria, which emphasizes the property's high threat of conversion.

FLP 237

The group ranked FLP applicant #237, comprising 57.3 acres and 1 development right (pending official Lot Certification; application filed with Planning in December)—located in West Mount Vernon on Calhoun Road. This applicant sits west south of an existing FLP easement.

The property scored as follows: *Original Criteria 28, Core Criteria 64, Edge Criteria 31.*
The group noted that the location of applicant's land correlates to its scoring value: it scored highest in Core Criteria, scoring criteria developed to emphasize the preservation of a critical mass of farmland.

Easement Status / Property Updates

Sarah provided updates on the properties in the queue. The queued applicants encompass 573 acres and 13 development rights.

Financial Summary / 2021 Revenue Summary

The financial report is refreshed for January 2022 with the removal of data and properties closed in 2021. The group reviewed the status of the 2021 revenues and expenditures to-date.

Total properties closed in 2021 to-date: \$1,465,000 in Conservation Futures tax funded easement acquisitions representing four agricultural conservation easements, 770+ new acres protected and 17 single-family home development rights extinguished.

Conservation easements on ag land divisions generated through Planning & Development Services (PDS) via the [Agricultural Land Preservation Code, SCC 14.16.860](#) totaled 126 new acres protected. Four easements generated through PDS ranged in size from the largest at 50-ish acres to the smallest at 18 acres. **Total farmland acres protected in 2021 = 896 acres.**

The group reviewed the 2021 Conservation Futures revenues, which totaled \$1,015,873-, as follows:

Taxes

Real & Personal Property Tax	\$953,563-
Leasehold Excise Tax	\$7,461-
Timber Excise Tax	\$13,363-

Intergovernmental Revenues

DNR—ALEA	\$1,190-
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State Land & Timber Sales	\$38,716-
<i>Miscellaneous Revenues</i>	
Investment Interest	\$601-
Other Interest Earnings	\$29-
Space Facility Lease LT&DNR	\$660-
Private Contributions	\$285-

Administrative Business

CFAC 2022 Meeting Dates

January 11	May 10	September 13
February 8	June 14	October 11
March 8	July 12	November 8
April 12	August 9	December 13

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 AM