

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
March 8, 2022

Members in Attendance

Andrea Xaver	Jim Glackin	Margery Hite	Scott DeGraw
Audrey Gravley	Keith Morrison	Owen Peth	

Members Absent

Hal Hart (ex-officio) Trisha Logue (ex-officio)

Staff and Others in Attendance

Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Grace Kane, Skagit County Public Works
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:00 AM.

Review Agenda

Agenda approved.

February Meeting Summary

Andrea noted three minor syntax typos to correct which she will call in to Sarah after the meeting. Jim made a motion to approve; Andrea seconded. All were in favor.

Easement Status / Property Updates

The group reviewed the map of queued properties; Sarah provided updates on the properties in the queue. The queued applicants encompass 560 acres and 13 development rights.

Discussion ensued regarding FLP#236 the inclusion of a non-contiguous parcel with its development right in use.

Land divisions via Planning & Development Services (PDS) via the County [Agricultural Land Preservation Code, SCC 14.16.860](#) mean that 50 acres of farmland already have been placed under Conservation easement protections in 2022. One land division placed 18 acres of farmland under protection (with an additional acre subdivided for the homestead); another protected 32 acres of farmland, (with an additional acre subdivided for the homestead). Easements through PDS represent roughly 20% of total protected acreage in the Farmland Legacy program.

Inquiries

Sarah reported that meetings with two interested FLP applicants included Planning & Development Staff (PDS) Brandon Black. This allowed PDS to address the applicants' boundary line questions while also discussing and answering questions about enrolling in FLP.

New Applicant Review / Property Ranking

FLP 167

The group ranked FLP applicant #167, comprising 10 acres and one lot certified development right.

The property scored as follows: *Original Criteria 47, Core Criteria 36, Edge Criteria 61.*

The group noted that the location of applicant's land correlates to its scoring value: it scored highest in Edge Criteria, scoring criteria developed to emphasize threat of conversion.

Sarah shared a modification to the existing FLP application form. The form now includes a question about "total farming operation" of both total owned and leased land in the County. This question provides a broader picture of the applicant's farming operation in Skagit County beyond the specific parcels on the application.

Allen shared information on state legislation circa 2012 that now legally prohibits the extension of city UGAs (Urban Growth Areas) into the floodplain. This legislation most affects the City of Mount Vernon: generally speaking, the legislation means that the city of Mount Vernon is limited to its currently drawn boundaries.

Marketing & Application Process

Annual Report 2021

Target date of May 5, 2022, Thursday, for a printed insert of 2021 Annual Report into Skagit Valley Herald. Then, follow up direct mailings of the annual report to stakeholders both local and regional. Andrea and Sarah have met to flush out initial plan for content and Kai is to work on updating USDA numbers. Final file is due to Skagit Publishing April 25, 2022.

Skagit Ag Summit 2022

Sarah shared that she presented Farmland Legacy's work at the 2022 Skagit Ag Summit—approximately 30 people in person, and an additional 30 to 40 people attending virtually (February 11, 2022), hosted by WSU—along with County presenters from Planning (agritourism), Natural Resources (Voluntary Stewardship), and Commissioner Wesen.

She brought up the takeaway from one of the presentations on "Agriculture and Solar: Why Should We Care," by Addie Candib, American Farmland Trust PNW Regional Director headquartered in Bellingham. Main takeaway was that the pressures of finding locations for solar power panels will be applied mostly to rural lands, including farmland. This is generating creative solutions for some farmers in California, and it's something we need to be aware of for farmland pressures in the PNW.

Dairy Farm Report

The group noted the recent article in the Skagit Valley Herald, '[Once plentiful in Skagit County, the number of dairy farms continues to shrink](#)'

FLP Promotional Videos—SPF Partner

Sarah shared that she and Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland (SPF) will create a partner video using content and videos produced by SPF. SPF has put together videos in support of FLP, to promote the program. The County's communications staff has given the all-clear; once the videos are ready, the next step will be to make a "launch" plan. Sarah noted that videos have a long-lasting shelf life. The content will likely end up living on the County FLP webpage, along with the content already there.

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

Tabled due to time constraints.

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.

Tabled due to time constraints.

Member Updates

Andrea shared that recent news reports Snohomish County as expected to have a population of one million people by the year 2044. Skagit County population is currently at 133,000. As pressures grow in Snohomish County, she believes we can expect to see those population pressures move north from Snohomish into the Skagit.

Sarah mentions “old business” from February 8, 2022, meeting where the group had a question regarding provisions for farmworker housing. She clarifies that there is no provision for farmworker housing in County code, per her recent inquiry with PDS. The conservation easement in use for FLP easements only makes a mention of farmworker housing as being “okay if for temporary use.”

Scott proposes meeting in person for the April 12 CFAC meeting, or perhaps offering a hybrid option of teleconference and in-person. Sarah proposes also gathering as a group within the next three weeks, for the purposes of a group photo. Scott will initiate email communication regarding these gatherings.

Financial Summary

The financial report is refreshed for 2022, with one FLP easement property closed for 2022 (FLP #190).

Administrative Business

CFAC 2022 Meeting Dates

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 AM