

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
July 13, 2021

Members in Attendance

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

Members Absent

Keith Morrison

Staff and Others in Attendance

Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Dan Berentson, Skagit County Public Works
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Ryan Jepperson
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:05 AM, with the delay due to Public Works technical issue

Member Update

The group discussed the Breckenridge/Nelson easement pending in the property queue, including its status and possible solutions to the one-acre house with an easement on it currently. RCO (Washington State Recreation & Conservation Office) is a third-party on the Breckenridge easement, and therefore must approve any boundary-line adjustment.

Jim noted that he must sign off from the meeting at 8 AM.

June Meeting Summary

Sarah noted Andrea's two grammatical changes to better clarify meaning in two sentences.

Jim made a motion to approve, Audrey seconded. All were in favor.

Existing Easement Update

Sarah provided updates on queued properties. Scott brought up the Harmony Dairy (Vander Kooy) easement as an example of the need to vet Farmland Legacy applicants prior to the costly appraisal process for which the County pays. Harmony Dairy offer is pending acceptance, as of its March 2019 appraisal.

The group discussed possible considerations for adjusting the valuation system. Allen offered the idea of setting up a sliding scale valuation based on a point system, with a range of 10-15%. Options were discussed of how to fund—and how to approach—the process of determining other models for land

valuation. Allen stated his willingness to help develop a problem statement, and to take the assessment from there to include a third-party proposing additional tools for valuation. Forterra, American Farmland Trust were mentioned as NGOs/nonprofits who already specialize in such topics, in addition to land use studies by Huxley College, UW or WSU. Dan pointed out that County procurement should not be an issue to resolve this question. Margery offered her perspective as a retired lawyer that the question to frame is How can the County legally justify a deviation from the appraisal?

Monitoring Update

Kai reported that he is through more than halfway of the remote monitoring of the properties. The monitoring is approached by zone.

Scott made reference to the past compilation of monitored properties, and made the request that the board should annual access and review the annual monitoring report.

Marketing/Application Process

Sarah discussed recent marketing and outreach activities. The classified ad running in the Skagit Valley Herald under ‘Agriculture / Miscellaneous’ and the Agricultural Yearbook spring-time insert generated six inquiries to-date. Content on the Farmland Legacy webpage on the county website has been updated, including revised committee contacts, program contact, and corrected or updated links.

Sarah reported preliminary success with social media posts about Farmland Legacy on the County’s main Facebook page. A total of four posts were scheduled for July 2021, and there is insight data on two of the four posts. The two Facebook posts about the program showed higher-than-average engagement rates for Skagit County engagement analytics. One of the most highly-viewed July Facebook post was a link to the Skagitonians article, ‘Forever Farmland’ about the Pierson family property.

Details of the 25th Anniversary Celebration were shared. This includes a date change for the celebration from July to September 2021 which allows for more advance planning and communication about the event. The celebration date is Friday, September 24, 2021, from 3:30 pm to 5 pm. Dave Heldin graciously agreed to host in his iconic red barn at Hedlin Farm in La Conner. The program will begin at 4 pm. Sarah reviewed the draft agenda, including speakers. Sarah invited input from the committee regarding agenda content or speakers.

Invitations to the 25th Anniversary Celebration will be sent by email. Properties with existing easements being monitored will receive a printed invitation as an insert with their annual monitoring letter. Invite list to include: current/queued farmers in the program, state and federal legislators and staff, local electeds, local farm groups and conservation groups, current and former CFAC members, regional land preservation groups, county employees. The Skagit Valley Herald has added the event to their schedule for a reporter to attend.

Sarah brought up reviewing the current Farmland Legacy application process, pointing out that the process is not broken but might be improved upon. Sarah will send links following this meeting with samples of Washington State Conservation Commission’s Office of Farmland Preservation template forms to serve as comparison to the current FLP process.

Property Update/Financial Summary

Sarah provided updates on the properties in the queue and reviewed the financial summary. A brief discussion ensued regarding how to approach farmland-only property (no development rights), keeping in mind that the bulk of the valuation paid to a landowner would come from the development right appraisal. Kai offered his support for such properties because it increases the acreage protected by the program, and because it also means one more person is engaged with the farmland preservation program.

Scott suggested that the group consider meeting in person once a quarter, beginning with the October 2021 Conservation Futures Advisory meeting. The technical requirements for a hybrid option (in person with phone in option) were discussed. The September 14 2021 meeting was confirmed as virtual, on the same GoToMeeting platform as currently in use.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 AM