

**Skagit County Conservation Futures Program Advisory Board
(CFAC)**

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 9, 2014

Members in Attendance

Scott DeGraw, Chair

Owen Peth, Vice-Chair

Keith Wiggers

Steve Sakuma

Carolyn Kelly

Staff in Attendance

Kara Symonds, Skagit County Public Works

Linda Christensen, Skagit County Planning Department

Chris Elder, Whatcom County PDR Outreach Coordinator

Open

Meeting opened at 7:00 a.m.

Member Update

There were no member updates.

Meeting Minutes

Keith moved to approve the August 12, 2014 meeting minutes and Steve seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Financials

Kara presented a spreadsheet document that shows what easements are pending and how much USDA & RCO still owe the county.

Chris Elder mentioned that USDA accepted three properties in Washington State for the 2014 grant submittal and Skagit County received one of those.

Scott asked Kara if she had heard from USDA regarding the 2013 grant agreement and whether the details of easement terms have been determined. Kara responded that USDA has not responded. Skagit County and USDA are working on a number of other issues and Kara feels the 2013 agreement discussion will occur at a later time. Carolyn requested Kara to ask USDA for an update on the 2013 agreement discussion.

Carolyn reported that a first cut for eligible funding opportunities have been made from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

Old Business

Farmland Legacy Signs

Kara met with Allen Rozema, Executive Director of Skagitians to Preserve Farmland (SPF) and they determined that progress will be made in 2015. Allen said the goal is for SPF to pledge up to five signs per year and the County will do the installation. Allen is ready to add the sign cost to their 2015 budget. Scott asked the group to think about 10 possible sign locations by the October meeting.

Customer Service

Scott spoke with a couple of property owners who completed the easement process from start to finish. He wanted to learn how well the Farmland Legacy Program process worked or didn't work. Suggestions are listed below.

1. Send out an evaluation form after the process is complete.
2. Clear communication
3. Transparency
4. Follow-up
5. General customer service
6. Make sure the landowner receives a copy of the appraisal sooner than later
7. Take written notes at the initial meeting with the landowner; what are their incentives or goals for conserving their farmland, tax incentives, estate planning, financial hardship, estuary potential, just to name a few.
8. Give the landowner a folder with information regarding the program and their options for land conservation.
9. Advise the landowner to consult with an attorney, accountant, and family members.
10. Ask farm agencies to educate local accountants regarding tax and estate planning rules and incentives for land conservation.
11. Design the easement document so the restrictions and other important areas of the easement are an easy to read document and have a check-off list for these items.

Owen suggested that the final step-by-step process should be posted on the FLP website. Kara distributed the draft process document and said this is a work in progress and there will be additional steps inserted as the process continues. Steve asked that this document be put into a Power Point document so we could over time build a simplistic but concise briefing that can be given to prospective applicants.

Term Limits

Scott would like the CFAC to think about a procedural strategy for members whose term limits are maturing so that we can balance new members with the experience of tenured members. Scott is also recommending that groups that have a seat on the board rotate their members too.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 a.m.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, October 14, 2014.