

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Board
Meeting Summary
September 10, 2024

Members Present | Advisory Rep. Affiliation

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| ☒ Scott DeGraw (chair) District 3 | ☐ Keith Morrison At Large |
| ☐ Jim Glackin Skagit Land Trust | ☒ Owen Peth District 1 |
| ☒ Audrey Gravley Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland | ☒ Sarah Stoner <i>ex officio</i> Skagit County |
| ☒ Margery Hite Skagit Conservation District | ☒ Andrea Xaver District 2 |

Others Present—Affiliation

Alan Chapman, Whatcom County
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Galen Priest, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

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

Review Agenda, Introductions

Agenda approved.

Welcomed guests Galen Priest, Environmental Policy Analyst with Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, and Alan Chapman, Whatcom County Agricultural Advisory Committee Chair.

Review July 9 Meeting Summary

Audrey made a motion to approve minutes; Owen seconded. All in favor.

Property Updates

The group discussed updates on the properties currently in queue for agricultural conservation easements. The queued applicants encompass 585 acres and 13 development rights.

Applicant Property Scoring/Review

FLP 256

The group reviewed and scored FLP property #256, comprising of 40 acres and 1 development right in greater Bow area off Benson Road, east of Farm to Market Road.

The property scored as follows: *Core Criteria* 69, *Edge Criteria* 36. The property scored highest in Core Criteria, which emphasizes the protection of a critical mass of farmland protecting agricultural viability.

Marketing & Application Process

FLP in the News

August 17, 2024: *Skagit Valley Herald* with [SAVING FARMLAND](#) in bold letters across the front page. Plus, a positive shoutout to the work of Farmland Legacy.

August 21, 2024: *La Conner Weekly News* ‘[Farmland protected on county’s ag scenic corridor](#)
Informational Placard Concept: La Conner Statue @ Farmhouse Restaurant

Audrey shared that she and Sarah are working on info placard placed adjacent to 260 acres of farmland protected in 2023, adjacent to south of former Farmhouse Restaurant (now Shawn O'Donnell's).

Small Heritage Farms' Ag Land Protection (CFAB Committee)

Margery is working with Sarah to explore a possible third mechanism to protect farmland in the County: Small Heritage Farms. This is the working title for a possible additional regulatory-compensation option for farmland owners who have an existing residence on a non-conforming lot in the Ag-NRL zone; and who prefer to keep their home part of their farmland. That is, they do not want to enact the Agricultural Land Preservation Code SCC 14.16. 860, a zoning provision allows for the subdivision of a lot of record in Ag-NRL or RRc-NRL into a one-acre tract for an existing house when the property owner donates by a conservation easement for the remainder.

Margery and Sarah are creating a survey to gauge interest in this preservation route.

Monitoring Updates

Kai reported that monitoring work is in process for existing easements, with no issues to report.

Member Updates

Owen brought to the group's attention his concern about farmland in the Sedro-Woolley area that's been farmed for more than 100 years, and now is under threat. Andrea concurred.

Margery shared that Skagit County citizens continue to have a consistent public opinion in favor of farming.

Scott mentioned the upcoming [Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland harvest dinner and auction](#) annual event, scheduled this year for September 21, Saturday.

The group discussed solar pressures on farmland and the Goldeneye battery energy storage system project (BESS) east of Sedro-Woolley. King5 covered the news September 6, 2024, "[Community charged up over proposed Skagit County lithium-ion energy storage facility](#)" and [Salish Current news coverage](#) September 5, 2024. Also, Sarah shared the BoCC-issued [statement](#) of 8/28/24:

It is contrary to Skagit County's Comprehensive Plan, adopted County code, and our community's intergenerational commitment to protect the Skagit's floodplain for farming and fisheries.

The Board of Skagit County Commissioners will continue to advocate on our community's behalf as the Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) and the Governor consider the Goldeneye BESS project.

In addition, the Board of County Commissioners will be evaluating whether major utility developments should be sited on Skagit farmland in general. Currently, [Skagit County Code](#) requires major utility developments on farmland (properties zoned Ag-NRL) obtain a Hearing Examiner Special Use Permit, which involves an open record hearing after significant public notice. The Hearing Examiner Special Use Permit also requires the applicant conduct a vigorous alternative site analysis to ensure no project site other than Skagit farmland would be suitable.

Sarah shared that agricultural data on skagitcountytrends.org/ may be of interest. From that home page skagitcountytrends.org/aToZ.cfm is a list of indicator topics on which EWU gathers Skagit County data,

including agriculture, economic vitality, education, environment, health, housing, public safety, among other data sets.

A sample of the recent ag data provided from skagitcountytrends.org/:

Total Farms and Farms per 1,000 Residents

Since 2007, the number of farms in Skagit County has shrunk. The 2022 Census of Agriculture counted 882 in the county, far below the peak of 1,215 in 2007. Compared to the state overall, however, the county is still “farm-rich”: 6.7 farms are present per 1,000 residents versus 4.2 for Washington.

Financial Summary

The financial summary is updated for September 2024 and reflects easement properties closed and recorded.

Administrative

October 8 CFAB meeting **NO meeting**

Operating Procedures for Advisory Board: Final

Sarah noted that Public Works Natural Resources Division Manager Jenn Johnson has confirmed process for adoption of CFAB’s operating procedures. The procedures are not a recorded document. Jenn has signed the final draft, and today’s meeting sees its adoption/signature by CFAB board chair. The document’s procedures can be revisited at any time by the group for discussion and revision.

A copy of the CFAB operating procedures will be provided to all CFAB members digitally and in hard copy at the November 12, 2024, CFAB meeting—to include in members’ Advisory Board Reference Binder.

CFAC 2024 Meeting Dates

~~October 8 (cancelled)~~

November 12

December 10

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 AM