

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
September 13, 2022

Members in Attendance

Andrea Xaver	Jim Glackin	Trisha Logue (ex-officio)	Hal Hart (ex-officio)
Keith Morrison	Scott DeGraw	Audrey Gravley	

Members Absent

Margery Hite	Owen Peth
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Staff and Others in Attendance

Heather Spore, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Kate Galambos, Skagit County Public Works
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works

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

Review Agenda

Agenda approved.

August 9 Meeting Summary

Jim made a motion to approve; Andrea seconded. All were in favor.

Andrea brought up the question of whether or not to note if those in attendance should be delineated as attending in person versus attending the meeting remotely.

Kate Galambos introduced herself. Kate is the new VSP (Voluntary Stewardship Program) Coordinator within the Natural Resources division of Public Works. The position coordinates voluntary stewardship programs across the County. It applies especially for property owners who have critical areas, or who may have questions about what conservation / compensation programs they may be eligible for. The overall purpose of the VSP is to avoid a regulatory approach to protecting critical areas.

Easement Status, Property Updates

The group discussed updates on the five properties currently in queue for agricultural conservation easements. The queued applicants encompass 440 acres and 9 development rights.

Protected farmland properties in 2022 total 285 acres, to-date. These acres include

- 227 acres protected year-to-date through the [Ag Lands Preservation Code](#) (0 development rights extinguished through this protective mechanism), and
- 57 acres protected year-to-date through the Farmland Legacy Program (with two development rights extinguished to-date). A 90.5 acres easement earlier in the year didn't add newly protected acreage; it extinguished one residential development right on already-protected acreage.

Monitoring Update

Kai reported that all the Farmland Legacy easements are turned in to the USDA for their early-bird deadline of August 31. Kai has just a few reports to finish up to be complete for the program's annual easement monitoring. He's doing easement database clean up as well as double-checking impervious surface recordings on easements. He anticipates coming to the group at the end of the year with a report.

Jim asked if there's a system for outreach when a Farmland Legacy (FLP) easement property changes hands. Kai described the current process of monitoring, which uses current property owner addresses from the County Assessor records. Jim explains that the City of Mount Vernon sends "Drainage Easement" letters to new property owner within the city alerting them of their drainage easement; perhaps FLP should adopt a similar system. Audrey suggests that whoever purchased that easement property is likely not as invested in that conservation easement as the original owner who protected it with the easement.

Kai estimates that, annually, roughly 10 FLP properties might change hands. Half might be generational transitions or quit claims from spouse deaths; perhaps five property transitions per year of easements are actual sales.

Marketing & Application Process

Newly Closed Ag Easement—FLP-237

Sarah shared that last week, a news release distributed to the press and ag community featuring the newly protected 57 acres in La Conner. Skagit Valley Food Co-op's newsletter editor expressed an interest in sharing this story. The social media post on Skagit County government pages were well received and included photos of the property owner with her grandchildren as well as photos of her land planted in tulips and daffodils.

Other media who picked up this news release:

- La Conner Weekly News: <https://laconnerweeklynews.com/Content/Default/Community/Article/Joyce-Johnson-helps-protect-more-farmland-in-Skagit/-3/495/7375>
- Visit Skagit Valley: <https://www.visitskagitvalley.com/skagit-county-permanently-protects-190th-farmland-property/>
- Skagit Valley Herald 9/8/2022 https://www.goskagit.com/townnews/agriculture/skagit-county-protects-more-farmland/article_d91f3a12-2ec5-11ed-8b16-170c738dc015.html
- Everett Post 9/8/2022: <https://www.everettpost.com/local-news/skagit-county-permanently-protects-190th-farmland-property-bringing-total-to-more-than-14000-acres-protected>

Jim asked about Capitol Press as an advertising vehicle, and to perhaps consider an ad twice a year. He points out it's not so much frequency but constancy. Also, advertising with them might increase their likelihood to pick up a press release.

Marketing & Application Process

La Conner Weekly News

A Farmland Legacy ad in the La Conner Weekly News is in draft stages.

New Applicant Review / Property Ranking

FLP 247

The group ranked FLP applicant #247, comprising 25.5 acres and one lot certified development right.

The property scored as follows: *Original Criteria 30, Core Criteria 61, Edge Criteria 34.*

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 preservation of a critical mass of farmland.

FLP 248

The group ranked FLP applicant #248, comprising 60+/- acres and no available development right.

The property scored as follows: *Original Criteria 32, Core Criteria 67, Edge Criteria 34.*

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 preservation of a critical mass of farmland.

FLP 249

The group tabled the ranking of FLP applicant #249, due pending family legacy matters regarding the one existing development right.

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 was to give an overview to the full CFAC membership of subcommittee's findings and suggested changes, tabled due to Owen's absence.

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 reports that he's working with an ag appraiser and asks about the County process to hire this appraiser for a Farmland Legacy valuation. Trisha explains that a contract, specifically, a Professional Services Agreement (PSA), must be in place to hire them. The PSA would spell out their Scope of Services. Scott would want to have them appraise an applicant property with an existing appraisal, for a comparison read on valuations.

Member Updates

Members discussed the high demand on Skagit farmland. Andrea mentions receiving \$68,000 offers for a small chunk of her farmland. Audrey reports receiving offer letters for a camping spot in Lyman by the river. Audrey shares that the Skagitonians auction is this Saturday, honoring Dave Hedlin.

Kai shares that the town of La Conner is looking to reduce their ag set back from 25 feet to 15 feet. This means, hypothetically, a patio or ADU structure could be 10 feet closer to a property line (that borders a field, say). La Conner town property often adjoins county property, with many homes right along fields. Hal will ask his Planning & Development Services team to send a letter to the town.

Financial Summary

The group reviewed the status of the 2022 revenues and expenditures to-date. Total properties closed in 2022 to-date: \$200,000 in easement acquisitions representing 147 acres and two development rights.

Administrative Business

Members agreed to cancel the October 11 meeting, due to anticipated member absences. The group also noted that for its farming members, August and October can be particularly difficult months to attend.

CFAC 2022 Meeting Dates

~~October 11~~

November 8

December 13

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 AM