

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Board
Meeting Summary
November 12, 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
Jenn Johnson, Skagit County Public Works
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services, LLC
Galen Priest, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

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

Review Agenda, Introductions

Agenda approved. All attendees introduced themselves by name, affiliation, and profession.

Review September 10 Meeting Summary

Audrey made a motion to approve minutes; Andrea 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 14 development rights.

Applicant Property Scoring/Review

FLP 257

The group reviewed and scored FLP property #257, comprising of 40 acres and 1 development right in greater La Conner area off Best Road. The appraisal report for this property was ordered October 17.

The property scored as follows: *Core Criteria 64, Edge Criteria 43*. The property scored highest in Core Criteria, which emphasizes the protection of a critical mass of farmland protecting agricultural viability.

FLP 258

The group reviewed and scored FLP property #258, comprising of 80 acres and 2 development rights in greater Bow area off Farm to Market Road. The appraisal report for the property was ordered October 23.

The property scored as follows: *Core Criteria 46, Edge Criteria 34*. The property scored highest in Core Criteria, which emphasizes the protection of a critical mass of farmland protecting agricultural viability.

Marketing & Application Process

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 protection 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.

Keith pointed out that small farms in Skagit County do and can make a substantial income, mentioning his farmer neighbor as an example. Scott reminded the group that each Skagit ag program has their specialty, and that CFAB and FLP's main goal is the preservation of farmland. The group discussed how to define 'small heritage farm.'

Further discussion included noting that many 'heritage' small farms in Skagit were built well before Comprehensive plan regulations took effect. Therefore, many of these lots have home sites that are somewhat irregular and non-conforming (i.e. sewer quite a distance from the house). This means that the home sites on these older farms can't always be segregated into one acre, as required by the Ag Land Preservation (ALP).

The Agricultural Land Preservation Code SCC 14.16. 860's zoning provision code requires the subdivisional home site be no more than one acre with no exceptions.

Margery and Sarah are finalizing a survey to gauge interest in this preservation route. A draft of the survey will be available for members to review and provide input prior to survey distribution.

Monitoring Updates

Kai reported that monitoring reports for all USDA easements have been submitted as of this week. State contacts for USDA have yet to confirm receipt of the reports, as requested. The group discussed the early deadline of September 1 monitoring report submission. This early deadline offers priority preference to those seeking USDA funding for easements. Kai has met this priority deadline each year with this year as an exception. FLP does not currently seek state or federal grant partners. The group concurred that when it is possible, it's best to meet the priority deadline in case of third-party funding.

Member Updates

Andrea shared the Skagit Valley Herald news clipping '[Skagit Valley Farms wins international awards](#)' (November 2, 2024)

Audrey shared that Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland's new executive director Lora Claus started her new role last week. Audrey will meet with Lora this afternoon to connect as an SPF board member.

Sarah shared printed copies of the recently released 2024 national report, '[Status of Local PACE Programs](#).' This 8-page report summarizes the status of 106 independently funded, local purchase of agricultural conservation easement (PACE) programs in 21 states. The status and summaries for six

Washington state local farmland and ranchland protection programs, including Skagit County Farmland Legacy, appear on page 6 of the [report](#).

Sarah mentioned the compelling article discussing Idaho farmland protection and pressures, [‘Idaho is losing a farm a day. Farmers are aging. How will we feed a growing population?’](#) (Idaho Statesman, August 2, 2024).

Sarah and Scott will present tomorrow on Farmland Legacy at the Whatcom County Agricultural Advisory Committee in Bellingham. Whatcom County staff will attend the January CFAB meeting to present on their county purchase of agricultural conservation easement (PACE) program.

Financial Summary

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

Administrative

Member Reappointments

Sarah shared that Margery and Andrea have each agreed to serve for another four-year term, with their current terms both expiring at the end of 2024. Margery’s appointment represents the Skagit Conservation District; Andrea’s appointment represents Skagit County District 2.

Officer Nominations, Chair & Vice Chair (2025-26)

The group discussed board officer nominations for the December 2024 meeting. Nominations for December’s CFAB officer elections: Scott DeGraw for chair and Andrea Xaver for vice-chair. Officer nominations occur at the end of every even year, per CFAB’s recently adopted policies and procedures.

Operating Procedures for Advisory Board

A copy of the CFAB operating procedures was provided to all CFAB members digitally and in hard copy at today’s CFAB meeting. Members can update their CF Advisory Board Reference Binder.

CFAC 2024 Meeting Dates

December 10

CFAC 2025 Meeting Dates

January 14

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 AM