

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
December 8, 2020

Members in Attendance

Steve Sakuma	Scott DeGraw	Margery Hite	Keith Morrison
Jim Glackin	Andrea Xaver	Owen Peth	

Members Absent

None

Staff and Others in Attendance

Kara Symonds, Skagit County Public Works
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:00 AM

Members Update

Andrea updated the group on a conversation with Peter Browning. She shared the 2017 newspaper insert with him for background. She also highlighted an article in the paper on Sunday about how Skagit Land Trust's work is continuing. She's looking for us to do similar articles. Kara mentioned that the FLP will have time on the Ag Summit agenda on January 29.

November Meeting Summary

Kara will add Kai to the summary.

Jim made a motion to approve the summary as modified, Margery second. All were in favor.

Agricultural Yearbook

Kara shared a description of the goal of the Agricultural Yearbook. This will serve as a component of the Voluntary Stewardship Program's long-term viability of agriculture report in addition to capturing a snapshot of Skagit agriculture in time. The committee provided feedback on the FLP's contribution to the Yearbook, including: Protect over encumbered, Keeping the advisory committee name consistent, and spell out acronyms, e.g. TFI. Andrea will share additional notes in follow up correspondence.

The yearbook will be presented to the Board of County Commissioners and Kara will send a link to that presentation to the group.

Owen added that while researching founding documents, they specifically noted the group should come up with a pricing formula because the cost of appraisals will be high; Kara will add this to the agenda for next meeting.

Marketing/Application Process

The group reviewed the marketing and outreach materials and made the following comments:

- There should be a simple call to action
- Add the milestones of the process
- Remove the protect an acre section
- Use the area to create an appeal to take further action
- Change reduce farm debt to reinvest in other land acquisitions
- Outline how to get involved
- Keep in mind we're marketing to landowners, but need to stay sensitive to the taxpayer
- Survey former enrollees on why they were interested in the Program
- Allen shared there was a 2008 limited marketing study – a poll to ag landowners, operators, and taxpayers that found there wasn't many tax incentives to donate an easement. Another finding was that a lot of people don't know what a Conservation Easement or understand what it means to sell a development right
- The materials could point out that it's a willing seller process, that there is no taking
- One benefit to the landowner is that they receive an appraisal but we want to be careful that people don't use the program
- Materials could also point out that you continue to farm the land
- The group discussed lot certifications as a potential barrier. Allen shared that his landowners languished in the queue for almost a year. SPF has underwritten many for applicants.

The group discussed the merits of a tax mailer, the target audience, bringing awareness, and the context of the mailing. Allen wondered if there was a way to segment the audience such as only sending this to current use enrollments. There needs to be a link between Conservation Futures on their bill and the preservation of farmland. The group ultimately decided to hold off on this specific mailer and focus on the brochure. Owen added that it's been three years since the newspaper insert, that should be a goal as well. Kai will update materials for the next meeting.

Review Mission/Objectives

Since the last meeting, Andrea shared her research on the concept of purchasing development rights on forest land between Big Lake and Lake McMurray. Andrea would object to using money for that project unless there are more details. DNR has forest legacy program and there are other programs available for forestry.

Allen shared the proposal with his board and they considered it a serious concern that these were even brought forward. By ordinance, this program should only be applied in Ag-NRL and critical areas within Ag-NRL. Keith strongly agrees that this Program is all about saving farmland and facilitating that. Margery concurred and wondered if we need to do something different to articulate that. The group discussed sharing information with Parks interests.

The group discussed how the Program could improve, such as building trust in the farmland community, reducing easement execution to 60 or 90 days max. If they become frustrated with the process they

won't want to participate again. Kara shared that there is widespread support for a full time employee and will submit the drafted job description to Human Resources asap, as a full time employee would address these concerns. The full time employee could focus on helping landowners develop applications, working with landowners through the lot certification process, subordination agreements, commenting on PDS's land division easements, outreach, marketing, meeting with families, and being responsive to the ongoing land management issues with the properties under easement.

Property Update/Financial Summary

Kara reviewed the status of all applications in process and the revenues and expenses thus far for 2020. The group discussed putting in an advertisement to the paper to celebrate 2020, which could include a map.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 AM