

Minutes

Guemes Island Ferry Operations Public Forum
Guemes Island Community Hall ~ 7549 Guemes Island Road
March 22, 2012 at 6:00 p.m.

Introductions:

Ron Wesen, Board of Skagit County Commissioners, District 1 Commissioner
Glen Veal, Chairman, Guemes Island Ferry Committee
Henry Hash, Director of Skagit County Public Works
Rachel Beck, Ferry Operations Division Manager
Jim Martin, Public Works Accounting Tech

The purpose of the public forum by Resolution:

The purpose is to provide opportunities for collaborative discussions between the County and the public on issues relating to Guemes Island Ferry Operations; and to provide the County and the Guemes Island Ferry Committee, other organizations, and citizens at large with a public venue to discuss issues relating to Guemes Island Ferry Operations.

This is an opportunity to hear from you on any and all issues or concerns regarding ferry operations; a platform for anyone to speak on any topic that they wish. Skagit County staff is here to listen, take input, and answer questions as best we can. If we don't have answers for you, we are happy to get back with you on things you wish to know about ferry operations.

Items for Discussion:

- 2012 Ferry Operations Work Plan
- Draft Modified Ferry Sailing Schedules
- Public Works recommendation to expand Sunday hours of operation until 10:00 p.m. during the peak season
- Public Works recommendation to expand the peak season dates to May 1 through September 30

Customer Satisfaction Survey:

Rachel asked that surveys be returned by March 30th, 2012, which is about one week from now to get those in. Skagit County co-sponsored the survey with the Skagit County Extension and the Guemes Island Ferry Committee. One survey to each address was sent out around March 1st, and so far WSU has received back roughly 250. Many phone calls have come in with advice and complaints, and therefore, next time 2 per household will be sent out. There are extra surveys and cover letters on the table tonight for those who need them. Rachel stated she could also be reached by e-mail. Henry commented that it is easy enough to make copies if you need more than one survey, or you can call us and we will send you another survey. Rachel said that they can also copy them at home. Kay Haaland at the WSU Extension has the hardest job which is counting them. She has tallied about 150 with about 100 to go. She has sent in some responses and based on responses to Question 5, the sailing schedule received the most comments. They included extended hours of operation on Sundays, more consistency for on-time sailings, sailings every hour and ½ hour, bring back the midnight on Fridays and Saturdays, runs earlier in the mornings, add more service at no extra cost. Other comments mostly focused on management improvement and site/property and facilities in which the Guemes Island waiting shed was mentioned. There were requests to bring back the 10-trip or yearly passes and some miscellaneous comments and compliments. Rachel asked if there was anything anyone would like to share regarding the survey. Someone wanted one survey per voter, but Rachel explained that the mailing list is not organized by registered voters, but comes from the Assessor's Office. Too many newsletters were sent out in a previous mailing; therefore, the mailing list was cleaned up. The surveys were a starting point and were not focused on one thing to get started. A question was asked about dealing with demographics. The purpose of the survey was not to see how many in each household would fill one out. Kay is splitting the responses into two categories, those who reside on the Island more than 6 months a year and those less than 6 months.

2012 Ferry Operations Work Plan:

According to the resolution that adopted the plan, the plan is distributed at the beginning of each calendar during the first quarter. There are a number of different items on the work plan, but Rachel focused on three this evening which are the ferry sailing schedule, ferry ticketing and the fare recovery model; these items have associated deadlines. All other items are long-range plans. Rachel encouraged everyone to send comments to Skagit County at any time and gave the contact information to do so. A question was raised regarding public posting of the comments receive by Public Works from the citizens at large. They are not made readily available usually unless something came from them. An example was the Operations Status Report section last year where Rachel shared with the Board the suggestions she was getting. Rachel commented that she does not receive an overwhelming amount of feedback, but that she could work with linetime to figure something out. It was suggested that more of the comments received be put on-line and Rachel said that she would try to find more time to include more comments. There was a question regarding the present fare structure being included on the Work Plan. Rachel commented that ticketing would be an ongoing issue addressed as needed. There were not more questions.

Draft Modified Ferry Sailing Schedules & Recommendations to Expand the Peak Season Dates:

Rachel presented a schedule from 1921 given to her which included roughly 6 runs per day. She stated that we have come a long way! Rachel presented the current sailing schedule (on page 3 of agenda packets) which is the same all year. Page 4 of the agenda packets addresses a suggested modified schedule for non-peak and one on Page 5 for the peak season, both of which are in the draft phase at this time. Anything in yellow is a time change, and green is the addition of a new run. On Saturday, during the non-peak season there are two additional runs; all other days stay the same. On Saturday and Sunday during the peak season, each day has 4 additional runs. Sunday has the hours of operation ending at 10:00 p.m. during the peak season. Rachel commented that the schedule is being changed again mostly to improve the schedule and to address problem areas in the current schedule. Improvements will likely provide greater consistency in a schedule that hopefully will not change for some time. Rachel praised the ferry staff for the effort and work they put into bringing these proposals forward. Many years of sailing expertise was involved in creating this schedule that hopefully works for everyone; the staff knows the system very well. If the schedule works for the most part for the staff and for the ridership, we are happy.

Rachel wants a safer mode of operating without running late on Friday evening back-to-back runs and cutting corners on policies and procedures. Little things that sometimes get overlooked due to staff rushing can cause problems that the ferry and staff can get in trouble for. Staff noted some opportunities for improvement to include catch-up time, safety net, flexibility in the schedule, ability to address bottlenecks and appropriate and consistent meal times, to keep staff safe and happy. Rachel reviewed the schedule draft which included the new run times along with new break times. With the current schedule, there are times now when there can be two breaks in the morning, a lunch break and no afternoon break, or no morning break, a lunch break and two afternoon breaks. Ideally, a morning break, lunch break and afternoon break would like to be had in keeping with consistency. Rachel also pointed out the grueling back-to-back runs, which exist only on Fridays, need to be eliminated. Currently, there are 7 of these runs on Friday evenings, where the afternoon shift ferry staff take their first break after only one run, then do the 7 back to back runs with no break. Little changes in keeping with consistency means a lot for the morale of the ferry staff and to Public Works to do the right things for our staff to maintain a happy crew.

Rachel asked for comments to set a schedule for peak and non-peak seasons that works best for everyone, without more schedule changes.

The number of runs Monday through Thursday has remained the same on non-peak, the only change is that instead of a 6:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. there is a 6:15 p.m. and a 6:45 p.m. The dinner break is then after the 6:45 p.m. instead of after the 6:30 p.m. After the dinner break, there is an 8:00 p.m. and an 8:30 p.m. On non-peak Fridays, same number of runs per day and for consistency there is a 6:15 p.m. and a 6:45 p.m. After the dinner break on Fridays, there is an 8:00 p.m. and an 8:30 p.m. Rachel also pointed out how important is to have at least two runs after each break on the existing schedule, with the exception of shift change each day. Two runs have been added on non-peak Saturday, one in the morning and afternoon, and a 6:15 p.m. and a 6:45 p.m. The number of runs on Sunday has remained the same, but with a time change around 5:00 p.m. Breaks and shift changes were reviewed.

According to contract between Skagit County and the Union, every employee on every shift must get two 15 minute breaks; however, staff who work 6 hour shifts is agreeable to taking one 15 minute break and then a

40 minute meal break. A comment was heard from the audience regarding the negotiation of the Union Contract and Rachel commented that she has no control or authority over the union contracts and they are outside of her and other panel members' power.

Comment received regarding the driving force behind the sailing schedule; is it based on ridership needs or union needs? The biggest problem is seen where traffic back-ups occur on the dock. Rachel offered an option to alleviate the problem by offering to add more people and boats to help with the rotation, but the expenses of staffing will go up. Another comment was received as to why we can't address back-ups or even talk about it. Rachel asked for suggestions of how to address back-ups. A comment or suggestion was offered by an audience member to hire a consultant to come in and analyze actual time the crew has off the boat. Henry commented that the Union does not control the schedule but we still have a contract to comply with regarding the required breaks and dinner, and that Rachel has been working hard to accommodate what the Islanders want and also what is good for the staff. Also, Henry stated that the schedule has been created to accommodate Islander requests made over the years to Public Works. He went on to say that we can provide any desires, but at a cost. Unless there is a willingness to pay the extra cost, we have to work with what we have with the staff we already have in place. Henry does not want to give the wrong impression that the Union creates the schedule, we just need to respect the fact that we have a contract and we need to comply with it.

A question was asked about how long it takes to make a round trip if the boat is full. Rachel responded that the maximum time can be 20-25 minutes, or more depending on the season.

A question was raised as to whether or not the Ferry Committee had been consulted on the changes to the sailing schedule. Rachel responded by saying that Public Works had met with the Committee and given them time to comment. When Public works did not hear from the Committee, they went ahead and posted the proposed changes online on March 1, 2012 for everyone to see.

Commissioner Wesen reminded everyone that we are here looking for feedback on the schedule.

A comment was received that the Guemes Island Store needed to be consulted on schedule changes. Rachel responded by saying that she had already met with Charlotte from the store on the schedule and she will find a way to make it work.

A question was raised as to what the crew thought about the new schedule and Rachel replied that the schedule was drafted by them. Rachel commented that the staff wants the boat to run on-time and they want to provide the best service possible. Henry also commented, to relieve any question about extra time or unseen crew, that the crew is very busy doing other chores such as office duties, dock and vessel maintenance, terminal cleaning, etc., if you don't see them, don't assume they are not idle.

A question was asked as to whether or not Public Works looked at and considered ridership data, especially on Fridays after 5:00 p.m. Rachel responded that yes, ridership data was studied and on Friday nights; it is not only people showing up before the dinner break, but also people showing up after the dinner break due to Seattle traffic or various other reasons.

A question was asked as to who makes the decision on weather related shut downs and what is the procedure to start up again after the shut down. Rachel replied that the decision is made by the Captain who is solely responsible for making the call. She trusts all of her Captain's judgment and knows they will do the right thing that is safest for the situation. She does not question their decisions to cancel runs due to weather; if they have deemed it unsafe to travel, then it is unsafe to travel. A question was raised regarding a long term shut down of 4-5 runs and is there a return to the schedule, or are there runs until everyone is across. Rachel replied that it will depend on the situation, but staff has the flexibility to alter sailing schedules when needed based on each situation. Rachel also commented that we do the best we can with the resources we have to notify people when there is shut down. She encouraged everyone to get signed up for the list serve to receive email notifications and let everyone know how to do that at the ferry website at www.skagitcounty.net/ferry.

A question was received about what the grueling back-to-back runs are that need to be eliminated. Rachel addressed that with that only being a problem on Friday nights, especially during the summer when those

truly are back-to-back runs where late runs were prevalent due to no time to catch up when one sailing departs behind schedule; it is like a domino effect.

Rachel talked about the difference between the non-peak and the peak sailing schedules. She pointed out that Monday through Friday the peak and non-peak sailing schedules are exactly the same. A Saturday change was that if there was an hour in between runs on the non-peak schedule a double would be run, but on the peak schedule a run was added into the schedule. On Sundays during the peak season, Public Works is proposing that the ferry run until 10:00 p.m. pending approval from the Board of Skagit County Commissioners. The peak season fills in gaps between 9:00am and 11:15am on Saturdays. On Sundays, there is a 6:15 p.m., and a 6:45 p.m., an 8:00 p.m., an 8:30 p.m., a 9:15 p.m., and a 10:00 p.m. in order to be consistent with other weekend nights.

A question was raised as to running a holiday schedule the day before the 4th of July holiday due to back up from people crossing the day before after leaving work, when the holiday falls in the middle of the week. Rachel said that she would use that suggestion for July 3rd.

A question was received regarding calculations used to determine costs associated with the modified sailing schedules. Rachel said that the additional runs on Sundays during the peak season (May 20 to September 10) would cost roughly \$8,000. The demand is certainly there for additional runs on Sundays, and Rachel pointed that in order to cover the additional cost, Public Works offered one option of expanding the dates the peak season is in effect from May 20 through September 10 to May 1 through September 30. She also pointed out the rough differences in ridership between April and May and September and October. Increase of ridership between the month of April and May was approximately 3,200, and decrease from September to October was 4,400, which could justify expanding peak season dates. The potential is there for approximately \$17,000 in additional revenue by expanding the peak season dates. Rachel went on to say that local people with passes will pay the same and can ride later on Sundays. People without passes (buying individual tickets), will pay surcharge. Henry asked if everyone would like to have additional runs on Sundays; there were no comments against it.

A question was asked about when the mid-watch would start and end if the peak season was expanded. Rachel added that she did not know exactly what date the mid-watch would start or the exact details of how the shift would be scheduled.

Clarification was requested on the operations and maintenance and variable costs per run. Jim Martin and Rachel presented the spreadsheet used to calculate these costs and an analysis. Jim calculated the number of runs made in the years 2010 & 2011, the number of hours of operation, and the old operating maintenance cost from deficit report, to get a total cost per run addition.

A question was raised as to whether the 10-punch pass was taken into consideration in calculating the additional revenue. Rachel commented that they evaluated the single trip tickets, not any passes.

A question was received regarding whether data from the 2-month ferry outage was factored into the equation. Jim responded by saying that outage happened during non-peak times, so that data was not used.

A question was raised as to whether facts and figures were used for determining the dates for implementation of the mid-watch. Is there threshold related to cost, revenue, usage based on demand or just is it based on labor issues. Rachel responded by saying that it is based on demand; however, we do not have an exact number that we use; further, there are only a certain number of hours budgeted for the mid-watch each year.

There was a question about what happens if ridership drastically declines. Rachel said we will address that as needed.

A question was raised if other means were considered to offset the cost of extending peak hours, and Rachel requested suggestions from the person asking the question.

Another question was asked if the topic has ever been discussed of dropping the last run on weekdays. Rachel responded that it is noted, even though it is not on the current proposal; it may be a topic in the next discussion.

A question was raised if the crew has a certain amount of hours in their contract for showing up, or it is just by the hour of the shift. Rachel responded that the people that work full time have 176-182 guaranteed scheduled hours of work and regular part time have 90 guaranteed hours of work; however, after-hours call-outs are overtime and handled as such.

Ferry Fare Revenue Target Report:

Due to limited time, Rachel moved to the 2012 Ferry Fare Revenue Target Report. Public Works is not recommending a fare increase to take effect in 2012. She is optimistically projecting that the fares are going to meet the revenue target 2012. The 2012 Ferry Fare Revenue Target Report set a target of \$947,251.00. The budgeted fare box revenue for 2012 was \$971,000.00. Rachel discussed what operation and maintenance expenditures are and who determines that. Skagit County has an inter-agency agreement with the WSDOT/Highways and Local Programs where they administer the ferry deficit reimbursement program. The deficit is defined as the total of our operating and maintenance expenditures, less the fare box revenue and the deficit reimbursement and motor vehicle fuel tax revenue.

Other Operational Items:

The ferry haul-out is scheduled for October 8th-October 25th.

Henry commented on the cost of the haul-out. The project was bid twice. On the first bid, the lowest bid was somewhere in the nature of \$367,000.00. All bids were rejected and re-bid again with more flexibility on the timing. The second bid came in around \$230,000.00 for a savings of over \$130,000.00.

Questions and Comments:

- An update on the ticket machine was requested. Rachel apologized for the wait and expressed her frustration for the time we are waiting for implementation. We are working on it and hopefully, it shouldn't be too much longer.
- A question was received on the public process moving forward regarding the recommended changes to the sailing schedule topics. Rachel commented that there will probably not be a Public Hearing unless the Commissioner's decide they want one. The ferry target report will be presented to the Board of Skagit County Commissioners on April 17th at 9:30a.m **RECENTLY UPDATED TO 8:00 A.M.** Commissioner Wesen reminded everyone that we want to hear their comments and no decisions are made until all feedback has been evaluated.
- Public comment period is always at 11:30 a.m. every Tuesday in the Commissioners Hearing Room and everyone is welcome to come in then or send us an e-mail to the Commissioners or Public Works. You are welcome to send in any changes you think need to be made and we will weigh all the different options.
- Ferry Committee chairman commented thanking Public Works for all of the hard work.

Adjournment:

All agenda documents and the power-point presentation will be available at www.skagitcounty.net and www.linetime.org beginning March 23, 2012. Rachel thanked everyone for attending and encouraged that people get comments in by April 17, 2012. Meeting adjourned.