

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
January 10, 2023

Members in Attendance

Andrea Xaver	Jim Glackin	Scott DeGraw
Margery Hite	Owen Peth	Trisha Logue (ex-officio)

Members Absent

Audrey Gravley	Keith Morrison
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Staff and Others in Attendance

Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works

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

Review Agenda

Agenda approved.

November 8 Meeting Summary

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

Sarah shared that Hal Hart, Planning & Development Services Director, is no longer with the County. Jack Moore, former Building Official & Floodplain Manager has been promoted to Assistant Director. The group discussed ex-officio status versus nominated member positions on the committee.

Easement Status, Property Updates

The group discussed updates on the six properties currently in queue for agricultural conservation easements. The queued applicants encompass 410 acres and 8 development rights.

The year 2022 closed out with 389 acres of farmland protected. These 389 acres include:

- 227 acres protected in 2022 through the [Ag Lands Preservation Code](#) (0 development rights extinguished through this protective mechanism); and
- 162 acres protected in 2022 through the [Farmland Legacy purchase-of-conservation-easement program](#), which includes five development rights extinguished in 2022.
 - FLP 190 was 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.

The group discussed FLP 175 protected in 2016, currently pending a conversion request with Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). RCO requires a 30-day notice for this easement conversion. Options to avoid a conversion post-easement include using the [Ag Lands Preservation Code](#) for the parcel with an existing home and Farmland Legacy purchase-of-conservation-easement for the parcel with an available development right to extinguish. Owen points out that the deeded lot and lot certification might have required the entire 80 acres to be treated as one unit. Parcels

are only for tax ID purposes; parcel boundaries do not necessarily align with property deeds and lot certification requirements. Trisha suggests that the CFAC members come up with a policy recommendation on how to approach these conversion requests in the future. Sarah and Grace Kane, Public Works Director, would take this recommendation to the Skagit County Board of Commissioners.

Scott reports that Mark Salzer of Bakerview Valuations is now approved for ag appraisals. Mark is working on an initial appraisal for FLP. Expected appraisal completion: end of January 2023. FLP ag appraiser Bob Suttles renewed his two-year contract with the County; the contract renewal is being routed internally for approval.

The group discussed the merits to Skagit agriculture overall of the [Ag Lands Preservation Code](#) (separating homes from farmland) versus the [Farmland Legacy](#) Program (extinguishing the ability to build homes on farmland). Kai offers that for the established farmer, farmland that includes a house in the purchase price ties up additional capital unnecessarily, whereas for the new farmer, a homesite is generally needed on their first farmland property purchase.

Monitoring Report

Kai shared that all property monitoring conducted in year 2022 is complete. The completed monitoring reviews easement compliance for all properties protected under the FLP umbrella from 1997-2021. Kai will report to the advisory committee at the February meeting. Owen requests that Kai include in his overview of the property monitoring, a list of properties not currently being farmed.

Marketing & Application Process

Western Wa Ag Association—Member Seminar

Sarah shared that she and the County's Voluntary Stewardship Coordinator Kate Galambos each presented at the December 2 Member Seminar hosted by the Western Washington Ag Association (WWAA). CFAC member Owen Peth is a board member of WWAA and was present at the seminar.

Recently Protected Properties: Triple-Header

Sarah shared that FLP 167 adjacent to City of Mount Vernon closed November 18, 2022; FLP 169 in Conway closed the last week of December (it was the landowner's request that it close in 2022 for tax purposes), and FLP 247 in Bow was approved and signed by the County Board of Commissioners on December 19, 2022. Escrow and closing funds for FLP 247 are now pending payment from County to title company. Landowner for FLP 247 requested that closing occur in 2023 for tax purposes.

A draft press release will circulate to CFAC members this week for review and input. The release will jointly feature the three recently protected farmland properties. The release will include a link to the three minute [video featuring FLP 167's land and farmer landowner](#) made by Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland (SPF), also featuring Darrin Morrison speaking on behalf of SPF and FLP's work. A link to the [video feature of FLP 169's spinach seed crop operation](#) – "Spinach" – produced by Washington Grown (Season 6, Episode 3) will also be included. Social media posts will follow the press release.

Easement Forum: November 2023

Sarah is in initial discussions with Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland Outreach & Education Manager Rachel Sorrels regarding partnering to put together a free community education forum on agricultural easements and the county's Farmland Legacy process.

FLP Inquiries for Non-Development Right Ag Land

The group discussed purchase of conservation easements on farmland without available development rights (DR). The program protects non-DR farmland through the [Ag Lands Preservation Code](#), which cover all ranges of acreages under and above 40 acres. Members discussed developing a policy recommendation on acceptance criteria for purchase of conservation easements on non-DR farmland. Sarah and Grace Kane would take this policy recommendation to the County Board of Commissioners.

Jim suggested scheduling a meeting outside of CFAC meeting hours rather than forming a sub-committee, with interested CFAC members to work with Sarah on drafting a policy recommendation. Andrea and Jim volunteered; Sarah will contact them to arrange a meeting date and time.

City of Burlington—Agricultural Heritage Credit Program: Application

Sarah shared that she received an application from the City of Burlington Planning Department, for their Agricultural Heritage Credit Program (Determination of Density Bonus). Kim O’Hara at Burlington Planning Department summarized the program for Sarah: “[The Agricultural Heritage Credit program] is basically a Transfer of Development Rights Program. For instance, a developer who wants to obtain additional density purchases Agriculture Heritage credits, in turn paying a set value for each additional density. In this case, they purchased 60 additional density units or credits = \$60,000. The money is given to Farmland Legacy Program to purchase farmland surrounding Burlington.”

Sarah is searching for footprints on previously transferred developments rights through the city’s program. She has requested a copy of the “development right acquisition area map” referenced as Exhibit A in 17.110.020 (B). So far, Sarah is unable to determine what specific unincorporated area of Burlington the development rights are to be transferred from; the [City’s municipal code](#), codified in 2011, states that the County’s Farmland Legacy Program track the development rights from the map’s area; so far, the city has not provided the requested map.

Member Updates

Andrea discussed agritourism policy status. Scott shared that he is meeting with Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland representative this week to discuss agritourism issues.

Financial Summary

The group reviewed the status of the 2022 revenues and expenditures to-date. Total properties closed in 2022 to-date: \$320,000 with one easement (FLP-247) protected in 2022 but paid out in 2023.

Administrative Business

CFAC 2023 Meeting Dates

February 14	June 13	October 10 (tbd)
March 14	July 11	November 14
April 11	August 8 (tbd)	December 12
May 9	September 12	

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 AM