

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
DRAFT Meeting Summary
February 8, 2022

Members in Attendance

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

Staff and Others in Attendance

Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Ryan Jepperson, Skagit Conservation District
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:05 AM.

Review Agenda

Agenda approved.

January Meeting Summary

Andrea will call Sarah after the meeting to correct two minor typos. Kai corrected spelling of his last name to Ottesen. Andrea made a motion to approve with corrections, Keith seconded. All were in favor.

Easement Status / Property Updates

Sarah provided updates on the properties in the queue. The queued applicants encompass 573 acres and 13 development rights. The information was presented using a map of the queued properties, showing their location in the region, rather than showing a database list as previously used.

Regarding FLP #228, whose easement is currently on hold due to tenancy issues on the property, Allen asked if there's a provision for farmworker housing. Sarah and Owen's interpretations of this allowance in the easement terms seem to differ, and they will connect separately to clarify.

Kai will continue recording data for impervious surface recording, for monitoring purposes on existing easements. Kai noted that existing baseline documentation varies wildly on easements, from a detailed surveyors report to a screen shot of a property map. A broader discussion ensued about baseline data in general as relates to each easement, and the lack of consistency in specific data points available for each existing protected property.

The group is currently unaware of historical information to explain why some easements have a surveyor report while others do not. Kai suggests we standardize the benchmark for baseline documentation. Kai and Sarah will work together this year to establish consistent baseline data for the program moving forward.

Marketing & Application Process

1-Page Pre-Application Property Review

Sarah shared with the group that she had mailed an interested applicant a copy of the long-form FLP application. The applicant reported over the course of two months that they hadn't yet completed the form. Sarah mailed the applicant the new one-page Property Review form and reported to the group that this form was quickly returned. The Pre-Application Property Review provided the information needed to "get the conversation going." In short, it appears to be a useful new tool for the program.

Skagit Ag Summit & Idaho Ag Roundtable presentations

Sarah will present Farmland Legacy's work at the 2022 Skagit Ag Summit hosted by WSU on February 11, along with County presenters from Planning (agritourism) and Natural Resources (Voluntary Stewardship) and Commissioner Wesen.

The January 18 virtual presentation for the quarterly Idaho Ag Roundtable included an audience of approximately 40 Idaho constituents. Skagit County Farmland Legacy presented one of three models of farmland preservation invited to help inform NGOs and government officials who are considering their options to manage Idaho's rapid rate of growth. FLP represented a long-standing model of success in farmland preservation.

FLP Webpage

Sarah reports that work is in process for an update to the existing FLP webpage. Content will be reformatted to create a separate subpage designed for applicants (with links to application, pre-application property review, etc.) – leaving general program information to the main FLP webpage.

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 reports that the subcommittee members reviewed the easement in its entirety, section by section. From this process, all three subcommittee members arrived at consensus: that each part of the existing easement serves a purpose. As for next steps changes, the subcommittee will write up proposed changes to the easement. The CFAC group will review the proposed changes, and then it will be submitted for legal review. Last step will be for the Board of Commissioners to review for final approval. Owen reports his understanding that their subcommittee and the entire CFAC is indeed an advisory body.

One main reason for this easement 'clean up' is to make the easement less cumbersome. Owen notes that it's most useful to keep referring to the conditions at the beginning of the easement – which states that the purpose of the easement is to make (and keep) the land available for agriculture. Throughout the easement document, this main purpose is continually referenced – that the Intent and Purpose of this easement is to keep this piece of land limited to agricultural use.

The subcommittee's goal is to have a draft of changes by next meeting – March – for review and discussion by the group.

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 their group is pending a set meeting date, now that each of subcommittee member has completed their specific data-gathering. Margery agrees with Owen about valuations—that it’s best to set up a system where the burden of proof is on the other—to prove the appraisal is wrong.

Member Updates

Scott shares that his conversations continue with the “battery people” (who seek property for battery storage around their substation). Scott’s had many conversations with them about eligible land. The battery rep has looked at Scott’s neighbor’s property which has an existing FLP easement on it, and it’s notable that the rep doesn’t believe the easement to be an impediment to pursuing that land for their needs. Scott emphasizes that the work to legally review our FLP easement template is key. The group asks if there has yet been a legal challenge to any of our easements. Andrea, as CFAC’s longest standing member, says not in her recollection. The group concurs that all it will take is someone with a lot of money and legal power to attempt and potentially succeed in ‘undoing’ an existing easement.

The group discussed what they perceive as some of the biggest threats to farmland: developers, expanding city limits, buffers.

Jim shared his thoughts on further developing FLP’s marketing, including writing articles to get our local papers to pick them up or a small display ad rather than or in addition to the existing classified ad. Keith brings up social media as another marketing avenue.

Allen cued up a draft video that Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland is working on. He will work with Sarah for permissions on using the FLP logo, contact information on how to enroll to protect your property, to add as a trailer to the video. Goal is to generate more awareness for FLP and drive more potential applicants to enroll.

Financial Summary

The financial report is refreshed for 2022 with the removal of data and properties closed in 2021. No easements have been closed to-date in 2022.

- Total farmland acres protected in 2021 = 896 acres.
- Total development rights extinguished in 2021 = 17 development rights

This exceeds the running average of 550 acres protected per year, and the average of 10.5 development rights extinguished annually, since the program’s inception in 1996.

Administrative Business

CFAC 2022 Meeting Dates

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 AM