

Skagit County Conservation Futures Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
February 14, 2023

Members in Attendance

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

Members Absent

Owen Peth

Staff and Others in Attendance

Grace Kane, Skagit County Public Works
Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works

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

Review Agenda

Agenda approved, with modification noted of Monitoring Update moved to March 2023 meeting.

January 10 Meeting Summary

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

Acceptance Criteria for FLP—Inquiries for Ag Land Non-Development Right

The group discussed purchase of conservation easements on farmland without available development rights (DR). Jim presented an overview of consideration factors relevant to non-DR easements. As background to keep in mind regarding this discussion, historically, Farmland Legacy has been prioritized as a Purchase of Development Right (PDR) program; while its resolution and ordinance are written to define it as a Purchase of Conservation Easement (PACE) program.

Consideration factors: zoning, adjacency to farmland protected, size of parcel. Keith suggested adding soil quality as a fourth criteria, mentioning the primacy of sandy loam. The group discussed also considering current production as a factor, and if so, how to establish parameters for current use.

The group discussed the merits of adapting or using the existing FLP scoring mechanism. Scott inquired about Current Use being part of current scoring. Also discussed was the value of farmland if it's a small parcel (<10 acres) located between existing homes. Some members felt that this type of farmland is unlikely to be productive land. The group discussed appraisals for non-DR applicants, that perhaps only a scoring mechanism would be used, with the easement value connected to the score of the property.

Regarding the merits of two different scoring systems, the group discussed several options: pulling out specific scoring questions (questions specific to the four key consideration factors for non-DR land); and adding an "Other" or "Significant Defining Factors" category.

The group agrees that the existing scoring mechanism could be better defined. There are YES/NO binary scores, and there are ‘threat of conversion’ scores that can be perceived as more subjective with CFAC members agreeing on a 0-10 range after discussion.

The group agreed that subcommittee members Jim and Andrea with the support of Sarah as staff will meet prior to the April CFAC meeting and come back to the group April 11 for continued discussion. The policy recommendation will also need to address non-DR properties with an existing homesite, when considering easements wrapped over residential homes (versus non-DR properties that are open land). Sarah has a list compiled of recent non-DR inquiries. The list includes parcel size, notes from the farmland owner on their interest in protecting and current use of the land.

Easement Status, Property Updates

The group discussed updates on the six properties currently in queue for agricultural conservation easements. The queued applicants encompass 630 acres and 12 development rights.

The group discussed status of FLP-175 currently pending a conversion request with Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). The request is approaching the end of the 30-day public notice required by RCO. A printed public notice ran in Skagit Valley Herald and also posted online on the County website main homepage. To-date, no public comments have been submitted. After February 16, public comments will be submitted to RCO for review by their Executive Director.

Sarah reports that the second appraiser now with an assignment is taking longer than expected due to the challenge of finding easement ‘comp sales.’ Receiving comp sale information from our established appraiser would defeat the purpose of a true independent re-appraisal. Sarah reports that the program’s long-running appraiser is on board to work with Farmland Legacy appraisals priority as assignments in coming four to five years as he approaches retirement. He plans to prepare and train his successor for a smooth handoff.

Marketing & Application Process

Skagit Ag Summit

Sarah shared that the 2023 Skagit Ag Summit was well attended with some 75+ attendees. Presentations included the Voluntary Stewardship Program. Introductions mentioned Farmland Legacy stats & status.

News Release: Triple-Header of Recently Protected Properties

Sarah shared the success of the most recent FLP press release, which featured the three most recently protected properties that closed out 2022. The release went out to local and regional media, plus ag affiliated contacts, and the County’s press release subscriber list (some 6,000+ subscribers).

The news caught attention of KUOW Seattle Public Radio reporter Ruby de Luna. She requested to connect with a Skagit farmer who can also talk about development pressures and how the Legacy program helps mitigate. The [2-minute segment featured CFAC member Keith Morrison on February 8, 2023](#). The segment was also shared via Skagit County Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Skagit Valley Herald environmental reporter [featured the recent farmland preservation news on the paper’s front page](#) on February 10, 2023.

Member Updates

No member updates.

Financial Summary

The group reviewed final 2022 revenues and expenditures. Properties paid and closed in 2022: \$440,000 with one easement (FLP-247) protected in 2022 but – per landowner request - paid out in 2023.

2022 Conservation Futures revenues, which totaled \$1,086,259-, are as follows:

Taxes

Real & Personal Property Tax	\$980,434-
Leasehold Excise Tax	\$7,358-
Timber Excise Tax	\$10,789-

Intergovernmental Revenues

DNR—ALEA	\$1,090-
State Land & Timber Sales	\$13,662-

Miscellaneous Revenues

Investment Interest	\$7,320-
Other Interest Earnings	\$46-
Space Facility Lease LT&DNR	\$526-
Private Contributions	\$65,035-

Administrative

CFAC 2023 Meeting Dates

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 AM