

**Skagit County Conservation Futures Program Advisory Board**  
**DRAFT Meeting Summary**  
May 11, 2021

**Members in Attendance**

Audrey Gravley	Scott DeGraw	Jim Glackin	Andrea Xaver
Keith Morrison	Owen Peth	Margery Hite	

**Members Absent**

None

**Staff and Others in Attendance**

Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services  
Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland  
Dan Berentson, Skagit County Public Works  
Michael See, Skagit County Public works  
Kara Symonds, Skagit County Public Works

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:00 AM

**Member Update**

Scott formally welcomed Audrey to the group. She'll be on the advisory committee now representing Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland.

Andrea shared a neighbor caught a picture of a cougar on her farm. She also reminded the group that there are more people leaving California.

Dan announced the County offered the Agricultural Lands Coordinator position to Sarah Stoner and she accepted the position. She'll be starting in a couple weeks. Sarah was the strongest candidate based on her marketing, land trust, and tilth alliance background.

Sarah will be reaching out to each board member to discuss the program. Kara will cross train on contracts and properties in queue. She'll also be introduced to our civil deputy that facilitates easement transaction and given free rein to develop a strategy to promote program. She'll be starting at the end of the month. Andrea asked for a synopsis of her background.

Scott shared that Bob Suttles has retired. Perhaps he'll keep doing work for the Program as he hasn't relayed that to the County as of yet.

**April Meeting Summary**

Jim made a motion to approve, Andrea seconded, Margery abstained. All were in favor.

## **Existing Easement Update**

Kara shared that there are a few boundary line adjustments amendments in the queue, all involving Nelson properties. In each case they are combining lands that are already protected, but there are examples of BLAs with easements adding unprotected property to protected properties.

The group discussed the reasons why a landowner would want to do a BLA that and the role of the advisory committee. Usually they are cleaning things up, or adding land so they can add buildings or impervious surfaces. The property owners utilize either attorneys or surveyors to draw up the before and after legal descriptions and easement amendments.

The group discussed properties that were protected that added non-protected properties. Kara shared that these were identified in the database as partially encumbered and emphasized that the land is protected by legal description, not by parcel numbers, and those can change and be modified. The group discussed ensuring that we don't cut off access to other farmland through a BLA and also ensure the Program doesn't put up barriers to landowners if they're allowed in the easement terms.

Kai inquired with the group about accessing parcels if they are not wholly visible from the road. The group encouraged him to reach out to the landowners to walk the property if it's not visible. This can be considered part of our outreach as well, in case they have specific questions or additional properties they'd like to consider.

Ultimately, the Program's database and maps should clearly describe what is protected and what is not if there is a BLA.

## **Marketing/Application Process**

Kara send the final brochure proof back to Lithtex so those will be printed shortly. Brochures will go Kai, Scott, PDS, Jim, Andrea, Friends, and SPF.

Dan discussed the Agricultural Yearbook and his experience working with the Herald, they did an online version that is easy to click through, so that template can be utilized in the future. Sarah can also work on the website as well.

Scott discussed a farmland property in Whatcom County that lacked water rights and was ultimately sold for the building right at 30K an acre. Whatcom County has different rules for building in agricultural lands. Margery added that those same pressures are happening here and will continue.

Kara shared her experience in a recent pre-development meeting with Garden Path Fermentation. They were seeking to build a restaurant on farmland and a Conservation Easement which is not allowed under current zoning. The easement terms are that commercial development needs to be consistent with zoning. The agritourism study is specifically studying this issue. EDASC was there to show their support to the business.

The group discussed allocating development pressure under the Growth Management Act, mega mansions, and the changes in the voting dynamic. Low interest rates and rising demand for housing in the area is also leading to development pressure.

Andrea reminded the group of the Ag Reserve zoning that was lost in the mid 1990s. Kara gave the concept of a research project to Hal, which he could give to an intern. The basic premise would be to take the zoning maps of the late eighties and determine what became of the Ag reserve zones, that is, what zoning did it turn into and where.

The group discussed the ongoing pressure to develop farmland, how to lessen the impacts, and how to stay ahead of curve.

### **Property Update/Financial Summary**

Kara went through the properties in the queue and the financial summary. Since Pierson is just about to close, the group would like to see Sarah get involved with the promotion of the closing. Audrey added that SPF has worked on this and they can work collaboratively on the outreach.

The group discussed the need to keep looking at ways to incentive landowners, and may need to look at a formula to determine price, or come up with new protocol to make it work for the participants. Home sites are generally going for upwards of 125K and the program needs to stay competitive on the landscape.

The group discussed the merits of meeting online and meeting in person. The advisory committee meetings will continue online for the time being, but as soon as we're able, it will be good to mix in social event and in person meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 AM