

Skagit County Conservation Futures Program Advisory Board
Meeting Summary
June 8, 2021

Members in Attendance

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

Members Absent

Keith Morrison

Staff and Others in Attendance

Sarah Stoner, Skagit County Public Works
Kai Ottesen, Belle Bean Services
Allen Rozema, Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland
Dan Berentson, Skagit County Public Works
Kara Symonds, Skagit County Public Works
Ryan Jepperson

Scott called the meeting to order at 7:00 AM

Member Update / Welcome Sarah

The group wished Audrey a very happy birthday!

Sarah was welcomed to the group as the County's new Agricultural Lands Coordinator. She has been reaching out to the board for individual conversations and will continue to connect with individuals. She previously worked for eight years at the City of Burlington, supporting Parks and various departments in marketing and outreach. She also has experience with the Evergreen Land Trust and Tilth Producers of Washington. Through her previous experience, she has connected with farmers in the Skagit and has a deep reverence for the work that farmers do here in the valley. She also has experience volunteering on farms throughout France, grew up overseas, and attending WWU. She publishes regularly in the Skagit Valley Coop. She really enjoys researching farming and farm products. The group thanked Kara for her work on the Program. Kara is excited about Sarah bringing outreach to the next level for the Program.

Andrea shared she has extra paper copies of Resolution 16766 and keeps other copies of the founding documents, including Ordinance 16380. Kara reminded the group they can access contracts, resolutions, and ordinances under the Commissioners' Records search page.

May Meeting Summary

Kara made Andrea's correction to page 3 by identifying that Ag Reserve zoning was lost in the mid-1990s.

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

Existing Easement Update

Kara shared that Ryan's (Norm Nelson Inc) proposed BLA for the Breckenridge property is ongoing. The state indicated they wouldn't want an easement around just a homestead parcel and would seek either finding replacement lands or a buyout from the state's interest. Kara shared that information with Ryan.

The group discussed how the easements were funded historically, and that there are sometimes different third-party beneficiaries, such as the United States of America, State of Washington, and local partners. The group discussed not wanting to make things too cumbersome for applicants and then they might shy away from the program. Moving forward the group discussed keeping the houses out of easements. The group also discussed the so-called 39&1 land division process (Agricultural Land Preservation Code).

Kai shared a story about a young farmer on the landscape that was resistant to the Program concept because he needs a house with his farmland. His frustration was that it served established farmers but blocked out start up farms. Allen has also been contacted about that difficulty as well. He thought this might be a good topic for the Agricultural Advisory Board to discuss new and beginning farmers obtaining a homesite. Owen shared that it's capital intensive to start farming business in the valley and shared a story about a manager of cattle that doesn't own land, but rents as a part of their operation. The group discussed that this is a difficult topic to start making policy on as there is a lot of nuance.

Monitoring Update

Kai shared an update with the group on the 2021 monitoring. Kara will work with Sarah to get a distribution list for the 2021 mailer and that letter will come from Sarah and provide contact information.

Kai brought up FLP 78 and the amendment that allocated the impervious surface. The group discussed the learning curve to define impervious surface as ownership is changing. It is of course better to deal with allocations up front. Kai also pointed out that in early easements there were specific terms about crop management. They are currently doing remote monitoring at this point but getting out for inspections soon.

Marketing/Application Process

Sarah discussed some ideas for marketing and outreach. She's on Day 8 in her role as FLP Coordinator. She has attended the monthly farmland preservation roundtable and the WSU extension breakfast with local agricultural leaders. She was able to bring the new farmland preservation brochures to the meetings and has started handing those out. She's also put together a classified ad in Skagit Valley Herald to run 7 days a week for 90 days under "Agriculture / Miscellaneous."

Sarah shared that the Program started collecting taxes in 1996 which makes this the 25th anniversary celebration. She would like to do press releases and is working on a media list with the County's communications coordinator to get information out about the Program's anniversary. She checked in with commissioners' office and all three are available on July 23 from 3-5 pm so she is working with that office on a celebration.

Sarah is also looking ahead to navigate social media, e.g. does the program need its own page, getting some 'Did you know' type posts going, and how to best utilize the mailing lists created by the County's GIS department. She's also exploring the brick and mortar stores that farmers frequent to get the Program's message out. The group also discussed developing a distribution list for sharing content.

Regarding the brochure, Sarah will send an email out to figure out how many to send where and will keep some to include them in application packets. Scott also requested Sarah's business cards for when he meets with clients. Margery added that CD farm planners meet with a lot of farmers and she'll check in to see if they'd like some as well.

Property Update/Financial Summary

Kara went through the properties in the queue and the financial summary. Owen shared a contact (Mark Thomas) that might be someone to reach out to in the future.

Jim shared that the SLT has a position open.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 AM