Skagit County

Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) Microsoft Teams Meeting Minutes

Skagit County Conference Room, 1800 Continental Place, Mount Vernon, WA Wednesday, February 7, 2024

Members Present Representing

Andy Hanson, City of Mount Vernon City of Mount Vernon, Solid Waste

Audrey Taber Department of Ecology, non-voting, on-line

Carolyn Moulton District 1, Citizens

Dale Patrick Environmental Public Health, Skagit County Public Works,

non-voting

Kate Smith Agriculture, *on-line*Leo Jacobs City of Sedro-Woolley

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County Skagit County Public Works/Solid Waste Division,

non-voting

Nick Harbert Waste Management, Hauler, *on-line*Peter Browning Skagit County Commissioner, *non-voting*

Robin Freedman Waste Management, Hauler

Shelly Jensen, City of Anacortes

Torrey Lautenbach Lautenbach Recycling, District 3, Citizens, on-line

Members AbsentRepresentingBrian DempseyCity of BurlingtonScott ThomasTown of La Conner

Todd Reynolds Skagit River Steel & Recycling, Recyclers

Not Represented District 2, Citizens Vacant Town of Lyman Vacant Town of Hamilton Vacant Town of Concrete

<u>Visitors</u> <u>Representing</u>

Andrew Rheaume City of Anacortes, Public Works Director, non-voting

Evan Coughlan FCS Group, Senior Analyst

Grace Kane, Skagit County Public Works Director, County Engineer,

non-voting

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Heather Lopes Skagit County, Environmental Health Lisa Janicki Skagit County Commissioner, non-voting

Matt Hobson FCS Group, Project Manager

Mike See Public Works, Assistant Director, non-voting

Robin Freedman Waste Management, on-line

Ron Wesen Skagit County Commissioner, non-voting

Introductions

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County, requested introductions of all in attendance. Names and business titles were offered by each attendee prior to addressing agenda items.

Call to Order

Ms. Gillaspy, called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. at the Skagit Conference Room, Mount Vernon, Washington.

Public Comments

Ms. Gillaspy, opened the floor for public comments.

There were no Public Comments.

Review and Approve Minutes

Ms. Gillaspy opened the floor to discuss the minutes of December 13, 2023.

Ms. Gillaspy, requested a Motion to Approve the December 13, 2023 minutes as written. A Motion to Approve was made by Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley to approve the minutes as written. The Motion to Approve was seconded by Andy Hanson, City of Mount Vernon City of Mount Vernon. By a vote of the Membership, the Motion was unanimously passed. Ms. Gillaspy, declared the minutes of December 13, 2023 to be approved as written.

Agenda Items

A Solid Waste Advisory Committee meeting, open to the public, is being held on February 7, 2024, for anyone to speak on any topic on the agenda, or items not listed on the agenda:

a. Rate Study Presentation by FCS

Skagit County recently contracted with FCS Group to conduct a Rate Study fo the Solid Waste Division.

We've seen some changes with the new Long-Haul contract with Waste Management. Cost for transport and disposal went up significantly. The purpose of today's meeting is to review the Rate Study, followed by a vote on the proposed Rate Study.

Just a look at the way the process works. It comes before the SWAC and we discuss it. If we move something on for approval, then next it goes before the Solid Waste Governance Board, which is mostly made up of the Mayors of the Cities and Towns in Skagit County. Then after that, there's Public Hearing in from of the Commissioners, and then the Commissioners will have the final vote and say, and then it gets passed by Resolution. This is the first cut of the first big step in the process.

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

I would like to layout a brief layout of the presentation for the day. There will be approximately 45 minutes work of discussion content with inter-dispersed discussion.

FCS Group is a local firm based out of Redmond, WA, working all across the State supporting Public Utilities, Solid Waste, Water, Sewer and Electric Utilities. Matt leads the Solid Waste Business Practice for the FCS Group. His experience in the industry covers working in Solid Waste for 15 years in City and County Governments as a Consultant.

FCS has conducted over 4,000 of these Studies in the past. Today, we will present the key elements on this Study for Skagit County. Some of the Studies have included King County, Grant, Spokane, and Kitsap. This is not unique to Skagit County. Cost rise and there will be a differential there. In terms of the presentation today, we will go through what we consider a standard methodology for setting Public Utility Rates. The three-step process is done sequentially. We use the results of the first to inform the second step, and the second step to inform the third step. The three steps are a Revenue required Analysis.

Insert:

Skagit County Solid Waste Division

Utility Rate Study-FCS Group February 7, 2024

Survey of Regional Tipping Fees

Skagit County had two bids for the Long-Haul contract which were essentially the same increase. There was a difference of \$60,000 which would not likely have changed our projections here.

Since Kitsap County had such a substantial increase, they split it up over three years.

FCS Discussion Questions

We are hoping to get feedback from the group today. How do we address the overall deficiency in the Utilities – a lump sum single action, or over two years? Should the County subsidize the cost of recycling drop-boxes, house-hold hazardous waste, tire disposal and services at Saul and Clear Lake?

Andy Hanson, City of Mount Vernon

Was there a consideration or alternative that started the rate increases in 2025, if not, is there a possibility to have an alternative that looks at that from a financial standpoint?

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

Yes, we can look at that. We can provide a high-level impact. The longer you want to adjust the rates, the steeper the increase will be. Instead of being 27%, it will be 30% plus on January 1, 2025. We would have to go back and see if its financially feasible.

Grace Kane, Skagit County

Could you dive into a little bit about how you mentioned our reserves and the requirement in the RCW that we can't dip below the reserve, and using the reserve to come up with the two options?

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

It is County Policy internal City governments do the same thing and set internal financial policies for reserves. Those are meant as guidelines for well ran utilities. If you drop below your minimum targets s a Utility, we always recommend that you have some type of path to replenish those reserves within 2-3 years. Its not just taking from the reserves, its also making a plan to replenish those. It's something you can explore, but you are drawing from rates in 2024, but you also have to pay that reserve back. Those who work for Cities are well aware that you are taking out bonds revenue and you owe debt on those bonds, and there are debt service requirements which essentially prevent you from going below those bonds. There is the risk that if you take out some new debt in the future, you wouldn't be in a position to actually quality. There are risks in relying too heavily and too often on cash reserves.

There is a graph on Page 19 that shows how the reserves drop down in 2024.

If we withhold any rate adjustment in 2024 to wait until 2025, cash reserves would drop from the current level of \$5 million to about approximately \$1 million. We have to stability that cash and replenish it to see if it's an option.

Andy Hanson, City of Mount Vernon, City of Mount Vernon Is it possible that our rates currently in Mount Vernon are structured on the June increase for the County? Is it feasible to have an increase of June of 2024 and then pushed out to June of 2025, versus having an increase in 6 months and another increase in 6 months? If this goes through, we are looking on an increase in June of 2024, then we're going back to our Counsel and in 6 months having another increase in 2025. If we push this out for a year from 2024 to 2025, we have a window there through June of 2025 or every June of every year.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

I brought that up. We had been on the kinda edge, but I think it was, like he said, using up more of our reserves and pushing it back further. I mean its possible to restructure. It was kind of to get it back on increasing on the calendar year. An increase at the beginning of the year instead of halfway through the year, which we had been doing. The County is currently using up reserves to pay for increased long-haul costs.

Ron Wesen, Skagit County Commissioner

We knew when we opened the bids, it was going to be the 35%, whatever, above the previous contract because everything went up.

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

There is a report and that's going to be my official responsive source, but I want to respond to your questions. If you do not adjust the rate in 2024, you will be drawing from the reserves down to about \$1.5 billion. So, in 2024, would be \$1.5 million in the bank left over. There would be about a 35% increase on January 1, 2025. That means about a \$35 per/ton increase.

Financial Reserves after Rate Adjustments/Slide 21

That means under the July/July adjustment, we actually spend 2 years below our target level reserves. That would mean a 16% for July 1 this year, 16% July 1, 2025. Then we would go to January 1 increase dates after 2 years of July-to-July increases. The big picture of delaying the Rate increase, it's a pretty big hit on your cash reserves this year and it would mean a 35% increase in tipping fees next year if you want to go July to July.

Andrew Rheaume, Anacortes public Works Director

Is there a reason why we target the Summer for the rate increase and then the CPI January1? I am fully supportive of having a full reserve and don't want to burn bridges since I'm new to the County. I'm thinking about the communication to the public and to the Counsel. We did just finish up our Budget about a month and a half ago. I want to make sure we are being thoughtful about communicating to the public. If we communicate bad news that's going to go down in January, we have a lot of lead time to do that. If we are bent to do it every July, that's fine too, that's what the community is used to. In the Budget process, I wasn't made aware of that, so I'd have to go back and do a Budget Amendment as well as communicate with the public. If we keep raising the rent on them every 6 months, it just seems a little, it's a tough communication is what I'm saying.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

This is a large increase, is why we kinda wanted to split it up in 2 increases instead of one large increase. We are looking at 27% or 35%, depending on when we do it. We chose the July 1 date as what I thought we could logically reach through the approval process and what we have to do on our end and also understanding that we didn't want to draw down our reserves too far. It was going to be July and then January and then we would be kind of caught up and we could go forward with the inflationary increase every January. We had been doing June before. That's kinda how the schedule worked out before.

Lisa Janicki, Commissioner

Remind me of the process that I asked about earlier, what did the Cities know and what process were the Cities going through given that this was a public opening and made front page with all the shit-shows when we opened those packs. There was some communications, as I understood, between you and the members of the group seated here or other representatives from the Cities, I didn't think the Cities were totally unaware of where this pricing was going on the tipping fees.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

The Cities, those members that participated in the SWAC, we all saw the increases and realized what a large increase that was to the County. We had discussions about that there was going to be a Rate increase, I just didn't have a number to give them.

Lisa Janicki, Commissioner

Leo, I thought Sedro-Woolley had already started a Counsel process about looking at increasing rates? There is some lead time needed at each City level. Didn't Sedro-Woolley already start the conversation about what was needed, what the refuse collection rates were going to be?

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

Great point Commissioner Janicki. I already knew and did my study that projected this at \$140/ton. I've already done my Study and already warned everyone over there of what's coming and prepared for it one way or another.

Lisa Janicki, Commissioner

So then what's the process, how much lead time does Counsel need to review and approve new Rates and then actually implement them?

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

For us, I run it through our Public Works Committee and the Public Works Director for the County. I'm thinking about 60 days. Whether they like it or not is a whole different story. I will hear a little push-back on it occasionally, but it is what it is.

Lisa Janicki, Commissioner

July and January are proposed dates. I would even say that, given the burn rate for that reserve, even if July became October for us and we just pick up one quarter at new rates and give the Cities time to do public process, that we would still be better off. I really loathe to wait any longer than that. In a world where everything seems uncertain at the Federal level, financially, not knowing what out Stare is going to do with pub-back with certain funding services. There is nothing certain. I would rather bake in some certainty that the Solid Waste Fund will not be dipping into dangerous low reserve levels on tip of that. I know it's the Advisory Board that has to be able to figure that out and to be able to communicate with multiple Mayors and Public Works Departments and constituents. Theres my thought on it. As a finance person, the second question that I asked of Margo earlier was, what about cost reduction? What if we closed the Clear Lake Transfer Station, what does that buy us? Even if we transform or do something different at Clear Lake, that isn't going to save the immediate problem with burning through reserves. Its something we can look at doing. We were talking about re-upping conversations with the City of Sedro-Woolley about better use f both Facilities if something different could be done there. Cost cutting, operations of cost reductions is always of interest to me, but I don't think we're going to make substantial progress without doing this Rate increase sooner than later.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

Like Matt said earlier, it was about a \$3 million dollar disposal increase and we can't cut enough to make up that gap. The Clear Lake site is a small piece of the pie.

Andy Hanson, City of Mount Vernon

I'm for supporting the increase in July of 2024, I understand that. We'll go to our Counsel on the timeline when this is passed and align it with what the Rates are. We'll ask for two parts of that with having an increase in January 2025, we can do that. Looking at the rate spread out over that cost of the year cycle and making it up on the backend of the 6 months versus the front end with that increase. That's how we're doing it. I'm not for us in Mount Vernon, I'm not supporting this. I'm saying how do we spread this out over that period where we make up the 6

months somewhere on the back end or front-end. Somewhere you've got to pull out 6 months' worth of reserve. The second piece of that, not that closing down Clear Lake wouldn't cost you more in illegal dump cost then operating the program that you have. Keeping that Facility open is going to be a variable of how much you're going to spend on illegal dumping throughout the County.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

We're talking about rates here. I think the bigger question is that I see some policy decisions or recommendations from this group that we need to talk about. I know we are given a choice of either A or B today, but there is more. We can move up some of these numbers/dumpers that are lacking in paying for these costs. There are some that are lacking that can be bumped up to 100%, or adjust. Off the top of my head, looking at the Direct To InterModal/Slide 27. If they are at 70%, why can't they be moved up to 100%?

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

Let me clarify. That record scenario, would be if you socialized the cost for self-haulers only, but all other classes go towards cost service. Any rate that's not tied to a self-hauler rate, we could transition those rates towards full cost service.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

Some don't need to be transitioned over a period of time, they can be right now.

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

Yes, you can do that. Instead of taking 5 years, you can do it next year.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

I see. Also, I'm looking at Clear Lake and Transfer Station. I understand that Clear Lake is going to have some illegal dumping, but as these prices are going to go up tremendously like this, there's going to be illegal dumping, no matter what. When we are thinking about this, we need to move some of these up. I think the policy decision we need to make we need to get some of these numbers up. The Street Waste/Slide 27. I'm a big user of that one and I think the City of Mount Vernon as well. That one is only 64%, it needs to be moved up to 100% right now. Those are things that have to be taken into account right at this minute, not over 5 years.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County So, don't space out those increases over 5 years?

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

As much as I appreciate it, those aren't going to be giant cost, in my mind.

Torry Lautenbach, Lautenbach Industries

Would it be possible to get an outline of how you generated those numbers? Like that Direct To InterModal at 76%. I would be curious as to how that calculation worked.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

I did attach to the Meeting Notice a draft report by FCS Group, and that information will be in that draft report.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

I think the self-haulers also, in my opinion, need to be in (line?). Because Andy in Anacortes and Waste Management are already bringing in very easy loads, when you see it. The self-haulers are the ones causing this, they need an equal line share, whether its 100%.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

That sort of gets to the second question of subsidizing. Not across all customer classes but putting those services that the self-haulers are using, that would be the Recycling and the HHW and putting those cost more on the self-haulers cost, which would create a bigger difference between the rates that the Municipalities would pay and the rates that the self-haulers would pay.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley Are you saying that's a bad thing?

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

I'm not saying it's bad at all. I'm saying its kind of the question that we have. I just want to make it clear what we're asking people.

Shelly Jensen, City of Anacortes

Does everyone in the County have access to curb-side garbage pickup?

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

Yes. If you are in non-incorporated county, you're not required to.

Shelly Jensen, City of Anacortes

So, people are not going to be forced to self-haul? Everyone in the farthest reaches can subscribe to the curb-side service. So, the rate varies by distance.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

Waste Management offers garbage service in all of un-incorporated county.

Carolyn Moulton, Lautenbach Recycling

I am curious. If I lived in the farthest point in the county, what would it cost me to self-haul if we raised just for them, versus what it would cost me to subscribe to service and would I illegally dump?

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

That's another study, but that's a great point. I agree, it would be nice to know that.

Carolyn Moulton, Lautenbach Recycling

My initial question is based on is it an undue burden of people to self-haul anyway, and if you charge them more?

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

We kind of want to get away from this being the cheapest option because it cost so much to, it cost a lot to be open for all self-haulers. It's obviously more efficient for people to have all of their garbage collected, easier then to go in and out. But we don't want to take away that option. Some people need to self-haul.

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

Torrey, you asked a question. You started the discussion of Reserves, pages 18-22, that out lines method and has some of the figures for that.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

I don't think it matters where you are in the county, here are the rate are featured on Slide 36.

(?)

I live in the county, was a self-hauler, Margo converted me from self-hauling. I found out from Waste Management that it's the \$39.93 plus recycling, for me its an extra \$10.00-\$12.00/month. So, I'm limiting my impact to the Scale House.

Andy Hanson, City of Mount Vernon

I don't think you're ever going to get rid of self-haulers, so I think that's not an option that you're going to have. However, they'll suit it to spread that cost out to self-haulers is what it is. I think contractors and sometimes self-haulers, I'm talking selfishly from an operation side, tie up the efficiency of the self-haulers. How do we increase that efficiency at the Transfer Station for Municipal Haulers and Waste Management as we're out there operating?

When the rates are here with the white goods and the Direct To InterModal, is that pretty much in line with other counties that do the same operations?

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager Direct To InterModal is unique, it's a case-by-case basis.

Andy Hanson, City of Mount Vernon, City of Mount Vernon There are other counties that do that, right? Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

Yes, there is generally a discount from the transport cost. White Goods compared to Non-Traditional Goods ad Tires. White Goods tend to have a higher cost recovery level.

Andy Hanson, City of Mount Vernon

I think everyone should pay their share that's appropriate to them, with the less traffic that we have in for efficiency at the Transfer Station, as a Municipal Hauler, I'm all for that.

I would also assume that would increase the life of the Transfer Station if there were a decrease of self-haulers coming in over the years.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

From an operational standpoint, you might be able to regulate your staff, not do 7 days a week eventually.

Some of the Operation Costs, were they broken down in some way? I'm kind of curious on our Operational Cost, if they were different. I know its spread throughout many Divisions. If there was a way it was broken down, or did you just get a number?

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

Slide 16

There are at least 200 different account numbers. Each is handled independently, it's a fairly detailed exercise.

b. Vote on proposed rate structure

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

Margo, what are we looking at to get to this? I don't think we are ready to vote on this yet, not the way it is? I think there is some more work to be done.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

Well, ideally, I wanted some kind of approval to be able to move on.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

There's going to be policy decisions here, right? Right? Like, are we going to continue subsidizing all of these?

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

Yah, Yah. I mean, that is one of the questions. Kind of the two, we've tried to kind of clarify. The two discussion questions are, how are we going to handle the

increases? Are we going to spread them out? Is it going to be one large increase, is it going to be two divided over six months? Two over twelve months, is what I heard as well? And then, are we going to also, you've seen all of the cost in the Solid waste as well, are we going to spread those costs across all Divisions, all the rate payers? Or are the self-haulers going to end up paying more proportionately because there's more services that they're using at the Transfer Station. Those are the two questions. I know we just have 5 minutes left in the meeting.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley Do you want a 5-minute decision?

Grace Kane, Skagit County

I understand that there's a lot more questions on trying to understand the math. Is it \$5.00 or \$4.00 or \$9.00 or \$10.00? Obviously, those we would continue to ask Matt/FCS Group to sharpen up those numbers to be transparent with our calculations. To Margo's point, as we do need an advisory philosophy vote from you guys whether its rip out the band-aid on Option B, or are we going to spread it out to two years? There is really not a lot of support I'm hearing from the Commissioners is also being responsible with the Counties way of running the utilities to have it spread out in 5. Or, as you can hear from Commissioner Janicki, we would really like to not continue to draw down the reserves as far down as possible. It really is philosophy. Do you want to rip it out, or spread it as much as we can, which is 2 years? And then the second philosophy question, as Matt worded, how do we want to subsidize this, what is the philosophy on this? Whatever that number is, somebody's going to pay more. And who is that somebody? Is it going to be all customer lasses or self-haul classes? There is only a couple more minutes left. Perhaps we've had some discussion. Give you maybe a minute to just think to yourself a little bit, maybe a minute or two. Then Margo would call, that this meeting is recorded. Margo would call and solicit your vote. Obviously, you have three options. You have vah, nay, or sustain. I don't know if Margo or Mike See have anything to add, but in the meantime, I know before I make a decision like that I would like a moment to myself. So, I'll give you that, unless you have something else to add.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

Yes, I have something to add. So, this is your guys' emergency, so now you're making it our emergency. I really dislike that. (Grace smiling). We need to sit here and think about it. I don't know what kind of million-dollar decisions you make in 5 minutes or less, but that's unacceptable. I think we need to postpone this meeting and go back and think about it a little bit, at least a day or two so we can talk amongst other people.

Grace Kane, Skagit County Ok, that's a feedback.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley

You did this in the last meeting where you hurried us up and I don't appreciate that. We've got people that we represent and that we need to talk to about this.

Grace Kane, Skagit County Noted.

Leo Jacobs, City of Sedro-Woolley Thank you.

Carolyn Moulton, Lautenbach Recycling

Now that we have better more detailed information, I would like to bring this to a Public Works Committee in Anacortes to talk to other people in order to make the best decision possible. Because I'm of two minds of whether we do it all at once or not. Or I like Andy's idea of maybe we do it July to July. Its putting it off a little bit, but it's a little bit easier to present to our constituents who are under some financial stress in some cases. So, I don't know if we do this next week, or we do it in two weeks, or if we convene virtually, but I'm ready to move, but not this second.

Grace Kane, Skagit County That's good feedback. That's why I asked the question.

Andy Hanson, City of Mount Vernon

Good question. It went from 15% to 16% if we're talking about June to July over two years. So, we're talking about 2% over that time period. Again, I'm supportive of what needs to happen and what we need to do. If we have the ability to see it on paper with what you've talked about that was presented to the SWAC Committee, we have the ability to vote as we've done before internally with the SWAC to move forward with it. I think those are the appropriate steps we should do with that without holding up a long period. If we are able to have that in the next couple of days and put a vote out next week, that gives us an opportunity to talk to our Public Works Directors, which I believe we all have. It would move it. I'm not saying push it out til the end of the month. I'm saying, if we have the ability to see that on paper, presented to us, and move forward with those options.

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County

I think it would make sense. We could set up another meeting in a week or two and have the discussions. I want to make sure we have the chance to get it out. Public meetings are recorded. And we'll try to have maybe, well we'll have the options of what we discussed and looking at what those specific rates are going to be, like Leo pointed out, and the policy decisions that need to be made. I'm going to ask that we go back to discuss this. Please let me know if you have any further questions for Matt or myself. And kinda the big question is think about how do we want to structure these increases. Is it going to be 155 July, 15% January or

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however it is. Is it going to be all in January, is it gonna be July, January, all in January, July-July. That's the big question we have now.

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager

If for some reason, when we go to our second meeting, we have great input today. I totally respect giving people time to, yeah, we need to talk to our bosses before we approve something like this. But if we get to the second SWAC meeting and we're not in consensus, but we still need to take a note and move on, can we document in the meeting notes the concerns input so that when it moves through the process at Public Hearing, and the Governance Board and the Commissioners, yes, we had to vote and get this moving forward but here were our concerns so that the Governance Board can see that, is that normally done?

Margo Gillaspy, Skagit County Yes.

Matt Hobson, FCS Group, Project Manager Ok.

Announcements/New Business

Eddie's retirement date is set for March 1, 2024.

<u>Adjourn</u>

Ms. Gillaspy, thanked everyone and called the meeting to an end.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:30 p.m.