

# **AGENDA**

## **Conservation Easement Program Oversight Committee**

**Planning & Development Services – Northwest Annex**

**5280 Northwest Dr, Bellingham, WA 98226**

**Central Conference Room**

**or**

**Join Zoom Meeting:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85943818935?pwd=K2Y0Y2VBRUlPvKkE4WTQvZXRMNytSdz09>

**Passcode: cepoc**

**Friday, September 27, 2024**

**8:30 – 10:00 AM**

- 1. Welcome, introductions, public comments, & agenda review (10 minutes)**
- 2. Approval of previous meeting minutes (5 minutes)**
- 3. Updates and announcements (10 minutes)**
  - Debrief: presentation before Whatcom County Council
  - Debrief: Joint Comp Plan committee with Ag Advisory Committee
  - Update on funding (NRCS, RCO, FLP, Whatcom County budget)
- 4. Discussion items/business (60 minutes)**
  - Farmland Access Forum and related outreach
  - Open Space program and staff capacity
  - Alternative funding sources: REET 3 and Conservation Futures levy lid
  - Meeting in person quarterly
- 5. Next meeting (5 minutes)**
  - October 25, 8:30-10:00 AM- Online and In-Person Option
  - Future agenda items

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Included in the meeting packet (or provided at the meeting):

- July Meeting Minutes

Community members who require special assistance to participate in a committee meeting are asked to contact the meeting facilitator at least 4 business days in advance. Please contact meeting facilitator, Alexander Harris, at 360-778-5979, or [aharris@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:aharris@co.whatcom.wa.us)



**Determination of a Quorum/ Welcome**

We have a Quorum for the meeting.

No changes to the agenda.

**Announcements**

No announcements at this time.

**Approval of Minutes – May**

Dave moved to approve the meeting minutes. Trevor seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Updates Since Previous Meeting**

Lauren said she submitted the RCO applications for the two Sanfi Acres properties. These would provide funding in 2026. We're the only two forestry properties. 90% of the RCO program goes to farmland preservation, only 10% goes to forestry. Council had to approve the submittals of the application, no problem there.

**Discussion Items/Business****1. Review of Existing Applications**

Jacoby: moving this forward, anticipated to be purchased later this year.

Taylor: ecological property on Middle Fork Nooksack. Anticipated to be purchased in 2025

Sanfi Acres - Two properties, RCO funds were applied for, also looking for matching funds through NRCS. Anticipated to be purchased in 2026.

Paul asked about forestry easements, Lauren said next time we can discuss this more.

**2. Review of New Applications:**

Two new applications: Koblitz Red Mountain and Koblitz Sumas. This Koblitz family intends to actively manage these forests using ecological forestry practices – they intend to expand riparian buffers and improve management practices above forest practices rules. Additional goal to turn these properties into demonstration forests for education. The goal is to develop an Ecological Forestry Easement that restricts certain logging practices while still allowing for on-going commercial harvest.

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Koblitz Red Mountain property is the larger property (240 acres located within Rural Forestry land). Estimated cost: \$720,000.

Koblitz Sumas Mountain property is smaller (40 acres located with Rural Forestry land). Goal is to sell 2 development rights, but keep one development right to allow for an educational facility down the road. Estimated cost: \$135,000.

WLT has experience with the Koblitz family. They donated a property on the south end of Lookout Mountain, they donated the property to the City of Bellingham. They're very interested in protecting forestland and pursuing educational opportunities of ecological forestry.

Dave: It would be reasonable for them to retain one development right on the Sumas Mountain property so they could develop a demonstration forest educational center. Perhaps the CE could restrict the development right to be only used for educational purposes.

Paul: It might also make sense to allow for housing on site for a forest steward.

Conversation about scoring criteria. Trevor says it would helpful to go over scoring criteria at some point. Paul mentioned it's good to review the criteria every once in a while. Alex H. mentioned that currently the scoring criteria rewards parcels with major roads and significant parcelization in the vicinity, even though these characteristics make agriculture, forestry, ecosystem processes less viable. Additionally, areas with major roads and significant parcelization likely have better access to services and utilities, which makes them more appropriate for residential use than more rural and remote properties. Revisiting these criteria might be needed. Lauren mentioned that the scoring criteria doesn't usually turn us away from properties – a 40/100 is the minimum threshold to be considered. That being said, if we get more applications, the scoring criteria may become more important.

Alex J said it would be nice to invite the CEPOC members to visit the Koblitz properties – especially since forestry work is new to this program. To date, we've only done two forestry projects so far. Kiera-Duffy and Moores are the only two forestry CEs we've done so far. Lauren agreed.

Lauren said that as the water rights adjudication proceeds, farmers are less likely to encumber their lands through selling development rights, and therefore, it makes sense for the CEP to focus on forestry properties for the short term. Paul said it sounds like the committee agrees staff should pursue both Koblitz properties, committee agrees.

### 3. Comprehensive Plan

Lauren and Alex H. drafted initial comments on what they'd like to see added to the comp plan. Lauren shared the additions with the CEPOC via email. Lauren and

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Alex's comments will be sent to Matt Aamot and others at PDS, who will review then send along to consultants. Then later on, CEPOC can review the updated language and propose amendments.

Lauren read through each of the comments. Trevor mentioned that words like "support methods and strategies that..." are often not acted upon.

Alex H. shared more information about the proposed language about integrating planning processes around farmland preservation, fish recovery, and flood risk reduction, through the process known as "Fish, Farm, Flood." This is an intention planning process used by King County, Snohomish County, and Skagit County, and Whatcom County has begun to apply this approach through its FLIP Floodplains Integrated Planning process (FLIP).

Lauren mentioned the Natural Resource Marketplace framework that was developed several years ago, but has yet to be utilized in county processes.

#### 4. Farmland Access Plan

Lauren presented the draft framework for a new ad hoc committee that would help advise how the CEP handles farmland access work in the future. The "Farmland Access Subcommittee

CEPOC members said they liked the program. Trevor said that one of the three reps of orgs that support ag should be involved in the financing of land access. Paul mentioned that Greg Ebbe would be a great member of the subcommittee – he was one of the instigators of the CEP. Trevor said we should have set up the subcommittee with people who know that county and know the farm community, they could help with potential pushback from the ag community. David asked if there was a shortlist of potential members, they answered yes. Trevor said he deals with a lot of reps from orgs that work on farms, he said he'd prefer actual farmers to sit on this committee. Lauren said we can utilize Viva Farm, Community2Community, and other orgs to help promote this to beginning and/or historically underserved farmers.

CEP staff and CEPOC members throughout additional ideas: Cheryl Thornton, Ellie Steensma, and Whatcom Family Farmers.

CEPOC members agreed: CEP staff can proceed with outreach to fill this committee, then staff will share the list with the CEPOC by email – then CEPOC members can raise red flags if there are any. Alex H. will follow up with Trevor about farmer outreach. Trevor agreed to be CEPOC rep, Alison nominated to be other rep, with Dave as a backup. Alex J will be WLT rep. There will be an email to CEPOC confirming the group.

### 5. Scheduling

Lauren will be gone during our next meeting. Paul suggestion: Keep the meeting on the calendar in case it's needed – closer to the date if there isn't business to conduct, we can announce the cancellation. Lauren said we should cancel with at least 7 days notice.

### 6. Outreach

In Skagit, they send letters to neighbors of CEP participants – Lauren would like to do this. Trevor said we should make sure to get permission of landowner before doing this.

Lauren mentioned that direct face to face outreach seems to be more successful than blanket outreach, although CEP staff plan to continue some of their advertising/marketing strategies. Alex H. has been meeting with a wide variety of organizations with work directly with farmers and small forest landowners to help direct future outreach.

Lauren and Alex will do a quarterly meeting with Skagit and Snohomish County to learn about their purchase/transfer of development rights program, and what they do to

Skagit Farmland Legacy Program has an annual report that is stuffed in newspapers once a year – they have a great map showing all the properties they've protected. We're thinking of doing something similar, showcasing what's happening and what our goals are going forward.

Alex J mentioned that, when an easement closes, we could host an "open house" where CEP landowner invites their neighbors to learn more about the project. WCD might be willing to host, since the county and WLT are not very popular amongst some people. Trevor said WCD has a monthly farm speaker series – he mentioned we should try to leverage WCD's current outreach to promote the CEP.

Alex H will further refine the outreach plan and share updates at a future point with the CEPOC. Trevor says that WCD gets a lot of traction from Facebook ads.

### **Public Comments**

None.

### **Future Agenda Items**

- None at this point

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for August 23, 2024, 8:30-10:00 AM. Lauren will be on vacation, and there aren't any agenda items at this point. The meeting will remain on the books unless the CEPOC determines a meeting is not needed, in which case the meeting will be cancelled.

**Meeting adjourned at 10:00am**

DRAFT