

AGENDA

Conservation Easement Program Oversight Committee

Planning and 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, April 26, 2024

8:30 – 10:00 AM

1. **Welcome, announcements, public comments, & agenda review (10 minutes)**
2. **Approval of previous meeting minutes (5 minutes)**
3. **Updates since previous meeting (5 minutes)**
4. **Discussion items/business (60 minutes)**
 - Meeting Time Discussion
 - Agricultural Priority Areas & Rural Study Areas
 - Water Availability and CEP Targeting & Outreach Efforts
 - 2024 Outreach Check-In
5. **Public comments (5 minutes)**
6. **Next meeting (5 minutes)**
 - May 24th, 8:30-10:00 AM- Online and In-Person Option
 - Future agenda items
 - New CEP Position
 - Buy-Protect-Sell
 - Appraisal Review

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

- March 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, Lauren Templeton, at 360-778-5956 or ltemplet@whatcomcounty.us.

**CEP Oversight Committee
Meeting Summary
March 22, 2024**

Start Time:	8:30 a.m.
Location:	Online Meeting and In-Person at Northwest Annex, 5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham, WA

Meeting Highlights
There were 8 people in attendance 4 of the 7 voting members; 1 PDS staff member; 1 Ex-Official; and 2 Guests).

Attendees – Members	Affiliation	Present
Moon, Alison	Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Kershner, Dave	Real Estate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Jones, McKale	Producer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mackay-Brown, Heather	Incorporated, Non-farmer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neely, Burr	Unincorporated, Non-Farmer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schissler, Paul	Farm Supporting Business	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Gearhart, Trevor	Producer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Quorum Present	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
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PDS Staff	Affiliation	Present
Lauren Templeton	CEP Administrator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>

Attendees – Ex-Official/Contributing	Affiliation	Present
Alex Jeffers	Whatcom Land Trust	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>

Attendees – Guests	Affiliation	Present
Alex Harris	RE Sources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Henry Bierlink	Ag Water Board	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>

Determination of a Quorum/ Welcome

We have a Quorum for the meeting starting at 8:32.

Public Comments

Alex Harris (RE Sources & farmer) and Henry Bierlink (Ag Water Board) introduce themselves.

Announcements

No announcements at this time.

Approval of Minutes – February

Dave moved to approve the meeting minutes. Alison seconded. **The motion passed with all in favor.**

Updates Since Previous Meeting

Lauren provided an update on the status of the new CEP staff position and code updates for CEPOC membership positions.

Discussion Items/BusinessBuy-Protect-Sell

Lauren provided an overview of Buy-Protect-Sell including how it would be implemented, a timeline, and a review of draft application materials, and then asked for feedback from the committee. Whatcom Land Trust would purchase the property, Whatcom County would remove remaining development rights to reduce land cost, and then Whatcom Land Trust would sell the property to a farmer at a reduced price. Paul asked if any land trust could take on the Whatcom Land Trust role, Lauren confirmed they could.

Lauren discussed the application process and reviewed the application materials. Trevor said we should not require a minimum number of proposals. Trevor asked if we would have a separate committee to review applications and recommended the USDA Farm Loan Program. The committee discussed that it would be helpful to have a separate committee with expertise in farming and farm business planning to review the proposals. Henry said the program could have potential conflict with the existing farm community as farmland is very competitive. Henry said to be sensitive to what properties the program targets and to get input from the ag community. Alex Jeffers clarified the program would target farms that are in transition and threatened by conversion and allow farmers to sell land at market value. Lauren confirmed we will ask for input from the farming community, likely starting with the Ag Water Board and Whatcom Family Farmers.

The committee reviewed the proposal rating criteria. It was clarified that the \$5,000 annual gross income minimum is to demonstrate that the applicant has farm business experience. Trevor mentioned the program should try and avoid people buying properties as hobby farms as that will be in more competition with agriculture in Whatcom County. Alison said the criteria including "local human use" may be limiting for a productive farm and said we should consider the type of farming allowed. It was also clarified that all the criteria do not have to be met, but provide guidance for those reviewing the proposals.

Paul asked about what grant funding we currently have for Buy-Protect-Sell properties. Lauren said we have a total of \$900,000, which can be used for agricultural easements, ecological forestry easements, or buy-protect-sell easements. The NRCS grant only covers half of the easement cost. It was also clarified that the CEP Committee is responsible for developing and implementing the program and would vote on the purchase of the easement. However, the committee would still be involved throughout the process. The committee brainstormed other organizations and people who could be on the applicant review committee.

Application Review

Lauren provided an update on water availability on the AJ Family Farms application. Due to the location and lack of water rights, the committee had concerns about the long-term agricultural viability of the property. Lauren mentioned that the property would not qualify for NRCS funding and would need to apply for RCO funds. The grant deadline for the RCO Farmland Preservation grant is the beginning of May. Lauren said she could still draft a grant application in case we want to discuss it again at the April meeting.

The committee discussed whether they should reevaluate water availability as a requirement for agricultural easements. Henry said there are conversations about merging the water plan with the comprehensive land use plan to focus the 100,000-acre goal within the key agricultural zones in Whatcom County. The committee discussed having a joint meeting with other organizations and County committees to be on the same page for focusing efforts and how water availability plays into the CEP targeting and outreach efforts moving forward.

Business Rules

The committee reviewed the changes to the business rules that Lauren drafted. Dave provided two grammatical changes to the Business Rules. With those changes, Trevor moved to approve the updated Business Rules. Dave seconded.

The motion passed with all in favor.

The committee also discussed moving the meeting to the fourth Monday of the month in the afternoon. Lauren will follow up with absent committee members to see if Monday from 3 – 4:30 works. Later in the evening was also discussed, but not preferred. The committee will vote on a new time at the April meeting.

Public Comments

No public comments.

Future Agenda Items

- Agricultural Priority Areas & Rural Study Areas
- Water Availability and CEP Targeting & Outreach Efforts
- 2024 Outreach Check-In
- New Meeting Time Discussion

Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Friday, April 26th, 2024, 8:30-10:00 AM. This will be a hybrid meeting with an in-person and remote option.

Meeting adjourned at 10:02 AM.

DRAFT