

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, March 22, 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)**
 - Buy-Protect-Sell Update
 - Agricultural Application Discussion
 - Request Approval to Proceed
 - Business Rules Review
 - Grant Submittal Schedule
- 5. Public comments (5 minutes)**
- 6. Next meeting (5 minutes)**
 - April 26th, 8:30-10:00 AM- Online and In-Person Option
 - Future agenda items
 - New CEP Position
 - Outreach Check-In

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

- February 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.

Determination of a Quorum/ Welcome

We have a Quorum for the meeting starting at 8:31.

Public Comments

No public comments at this time.

Announcements

No announcements at this time.

Approval of Minutes – January

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

Updates Since Previous Meeting

Lauren provided an update on the status of the new CEP position.

Discussion Items/BusinessIntroduction of CEPOC Members

To introduce and familiarize the new committee members, all members and affiliates provided an overview of their professional background and reason for joining the CEPOC committee.

Dave moved to appoint Paul Schissler Chair. Trevor moved to appoint Dave Kershner Vice Chair. Alison seconded. **The motions passed with all in favor.**

Paul provided an overview of the replacement of Heather's position. Lauren provided an update that she sent a letter notifying her that we are replacing the position. Paul thanked Heather for the work she completed for the CEPOC and Whatcom County and specifically discussed the Natural Resources Marketplace research and program development Heather completed. It was unanimously agreed that Heather would be welcomed back to the committee when available. Burr moved to approve the letter recommending the removal of Heather from the committee. Trevor seconded. **The motion was passed all in favor.**

2023 Annual Review

Lauren provided a month-by-month review of highlights of the Conservation Easement Program in the past year. Highlights from the review include the Farmland Access Steering Committee, approval of a second FTE in 2024, the transition to a new CEP Administrator, acquisition of three agricultural easements, the closure of the NRCS RCPP 1680 grant, awarded the RCPP 2725 and RCO Jacoby

Property grants, 2023 outreach overview, and development of the Buy-Protect-Sell program.

Other discussions included looking at additional program funding including lifting the Conservation Futures Fund levy lid and REET 3. These would both be ballot measures and would require broader county coordination. Lauren also mentioned that Becky started a Farmland Access Steering Committee in January, but it has been put on hold since she left the position. Other types of easements, such as affirmative agricultural easements, were discussed as other options for the program. Paul mentioned there have been discussions on how we could provide additional payments for easement holders. Trevor said WSU is developing the STAR program that ranks environmental practices on agricultural land and will provide alternative incentives, such as reduced crop insurance rates, to landowners.

Lauren provided an overview of the appraisal presentation by Bob Suttles. Paul said he would like a follow-up meeting to discuss other appraisal issues such as annual payments versus one-time payments, easements to purchase at agricultural value, and retroactive appraisals. Lauren also discussed updating the CEP GIS data to create a database that can be used for project management tracking and select data to be posted publicly.

2024 Work Plan

Lauren then provided a general work plan for 2024 which included an overview of the new position, review of current applicants, grant planning, outreach, and committee member involvement. Paul said previous committee members met with the Council or the County Executive for specific goals but did not have regular meetings. Burr supported having regular check-ins to provide status updates. Burr recommended meeting twice a year. Lauren recommended cross-committee collaboration, by having two members from each committee meet to see how the committee's goals overlap. Lauren also mentioned having a joint meeting with the Skagit Farmland Legacy Program Committee.

Lauren provided an overview of the Buy-Protect-Sell status. Lauren recommended a sub-committee to review and finalize the BPS application materials. Paul asked about the general size requirements for these properties, which are generally smaller acreage but should not be limited if larger acreage is available. Trevor recommended potentially developing a Kulshan Community Land Trust model for farmland.

Lauren also asked for outreach recommendations. Dave recommended sponsoring a state planning seminar geared towards farmers with an attorney available for questions. Trevor said American Farmland Trust has a program.

Lauren provided an overview of the current applications and three new applicants and requested approval from the Committee to move forward with the agricultural property application. Lauren confirmed clustering would be required for development on the agricultural application property. The committee asked for

more information about the water shares and if unused water shares would be forfeited after the adjudication before approval of the application.

Business Rules

Lauren said we need to review the CEP Business Rules every year. Lauren will provide a draft with recommended changes at the next meeting. PDS is trying to create consistency within the PDS committee's business rules.

Public Comments

No public comments.

Future Agenda Items

- Buy-Protect Sell Update
 - Request Approval of BPS Application Materials
- Agricultural Application Discussion
 - Request Approval
- Business Rules Review

Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Friday, March 22, 2024, 8:30-10:00 AM. This will be a hybrid meeting with an in-person and remote option.

Meeting adjourned at 9:58 AM.