

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes, February 8, 2024

Call to Order, Pam Gould, Chair

Thanks to Michael Godshall for assistance with Zoom technology.

Roll Call

- **Present:** Janice Catrell, Rich Frye, Pam Gould, Diane Harper, Thomas Philpot, Catherine Shornick. **Absent:** Todd Lagestee, Carol Landt
- **Welcomed:** Liz Kosa, Director, and Roland Middleton, Public Works (PW); Jon Scanlon, Whatcom County Council; Gary Poole, Sr. Master.

Flag Salute and Moment of Silence

Business Meeting

- Introduce new WCFAC member, Catherine Shornick
- Election of Secretary, Catherine Shornick
- Agenda, no changes; January 25th minutes amended and approved
- **Liz Kosa**, news of electric ferry and RAISE Grant.
 - Director Kosa described her extensive background in maritime management including a degree in marine engineering and many years as an active merchant marine. She offered deep thanks to WCFAC, acknowledging the necessary commitment to being a conduit to and from the community. Big things coming up include not only codes, fares, and a new vessel and updated terminals, but also long term projects such as automatic ticketing, a passenger code of conduct, and a name and artwork for the new boat.
 - Liz introduced **Kim Boone**, the new administrative support staff. She is strictly limited to 16 hours a week; requests for her help should be sent to both Roland and Kim.
 - The \$25M RAISE grant is complex, and its scope included electrification of the new ferry earlier if possible. The boat will also have diesel backup to allow for potential trips to Bellingham and to avoid exorbitant towing expenses for maintenance. Roland is the contact person for the community; he will be looking to WCFAC and ferry riders for input on practical, operational elements.
 - Liz will be attending the March 5th County Council meeting to request an intercounty loan to cover an upcoming deficit in the Fare Box Reserve. She cited lower Motor Vehicle Tax funds, decreased ridership, fewer ferry deficit funds from State, and increased expenses as contributing to a deficit. Randy Rydell will provide more info at the March WCFAC meeting. This is a proactive action, since cutting service is not an option, and raising fares at this time is out of synch with the agreed process.
- **News from the ferry, Gary Poole, Senior Master.** A standard shutdown is scheduled for February 28th. Dry dock is now scheduled for **April 17th until May 18th**, due to additional repairs that are needed.

Committee Work: *Whatcom County Code Chapter 10.34 Ferry Rates, Proposal*

- **Report from ad hoc Code Amendment Committee** (Rich Frye, Diane Harper, Janice Holmes).
 - Diane and Janice presented preliminary review and analysis of code amendments received from Public Works on February 1, noting that the County has been supporting the ferry for 100 years. Unincorporated property owners carry the burden to support the Road Fund, but this should be reexamined in the future to possibly include incorporated areas. Expenses have been consistent over many years except for Covid and the dolphins. Many thanks went to PW for willingness to update the codes, many of which include housekeeping amendments that are much appreciated. Other changes are policy oriented, where further discussions are needed. [See “WCFAC Code Presentation 2-8-24”] WCFAC expects to hear from the community, discuss, and make a recommendation. Concern was expressed that PW sent three versions of revisions, and sufficient time is necessary for WCFAC and the community to provide the best document possible.
 - Policy issues [see *presentation*] include how to address extraordinary or emergency expenses for an aging system; lease payments; proposed annual earmark of \$150K from Road Fund; and capping the amount of extraordinary expenses the Fare Box should be required to cover. Janice distributed a discussion of lease issues after the presentation; these were provided to PW earlier as well. It’s important to keep fares stable; PW proposals are a good start but need more discussion. WCFAC would like crew advisement on fee nuances that are challenging for riders and crew alike, such as vans vs RVs; Liz clarified that the code referring to hearses is applicable only to after-hours.
 - Written comments are invited and should be sent to WCFAC email, or contact Rich, Janice H., or Diane. A formal work session is scheduled for Feb. 15th at the library, 6 PM. Committee members are asked to notify Chair Pam Gould by Monday, Feb. 12th if they are planning to attend, for planning purposes and Open Meeting rules. The public is invited.
 - Several draft documents were prepared by the ad hoc committee, distributed to WCFAC and PW staff, and will be available at the library and on ourlummiisland.org.
 - Liz acknowledged and heard concerns and appreciated all of the timely and thorough work. She asked that the committee send any specific requests for a possible longer timeline to the County Executive (and cc her), but encouraged WCFAC to be aware of some urgency. She described the specific need for her to use ‘emergency’ in order to expedite necessary work (including permits and continuation of ferry services); she would look to the Council to make changes in lease terms; she will work with FAC on terminology and language; and she will look into whether expenses can be paid over multiple years. Gary will look closer at categorizing fares including van/camper language. Roland pointed out that the uplands lease also includes \$2M at one, five and 15 years (which is approaching) that all come from the Road Fund.

Questions and Comments:

- Rich Fry inquired about a summer surcharge; Liz responded that it is an administrative burden and there may not be enough time to implement by summer. Roland cautioned that it would be important to consider impacts if any to the deficit fund as well. Additional discussion surrounding vehicle equivalent spaces and fares occurred.
- Ralph Steele expressed shock that a loan is needed to rescue the ferry fund. Liz responded that the 55% fund is short, and the Road Fund can only be used toward the 45%. Ralph noted outstanding issues; Liz asked that requests go through WCFAC in order to honor the process. [See questions provided by Ralph Steele]
- Bob Anderson supported request for additional time, with six of eight new FAC members. Issues are complicated; allow time for FAC to learn, engage with community, deliberate and gain confidence in decisions. The two big issues are Covid deficits and the dolphin expenses, since without them an interagency loan would not be necessary. Liz K. responded that County Exec and PW is in support of using ARPA funds; request needs to come through Exec but she will look into timing and amounts.
- Peter Earle questioned why the Fare Box is being charged for 55% of dolphin expenses that were not regular or routine. Liz noted this was PW's understanding of the codes; \$800K was a maintenance item and is why language was proposed to the code since it is currently silent on this issue. PW is not ignoring, but this was 100% not capital expense.
- [Charles Bailey, from Zoom, was cut off due to time.]

Open Session

Kurt Esveldt was hoping for a revised schedule for design bid and construction for ferry terminal and electrical components. Liz will make sure it's available as soon as possible; Roland indicated it's being worked on and hopes detail will be available in April.

Tabled (due to time)

WCFAC Work Program 2024

Meeting adjourned approx. 7:45 PM.

Next Meeting: February 22, 2024

A recording of this meeting is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ-uEltZ9oQ&list=PL8XMZ64kSXEEthem7uTV78bH8QG0pngab&t=4s>

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Respectfully submitted, C. Shornick

Attachments:

Final WCFAC Minutes, January 25, 2024

WCFAC Code Presentation

WCFAC ad hoc Discussion Draft

WCFAC ad hoc Commentary

Lease concerns, Janice Holmes

Comments: Ralph Steele