



Food System Committee

Tuesday, April 24, 2024

4:30-6:00 PM

Zoom and in-person

Minutes

Members Present:

Name	Sector	Present
Margaret Gerard	Local Sales Farming	
Nikki Oleson	Processing/Distribution	
Sierra Crook	Food Access	X
Noelle Beecroft	Nutrition/ Public Health	X
Sean Hopps	Labor	X
Trevor Gearhart	Natural Resources	X
Rhys-Thorvald Hansen	Whatcom Food Network	X
Paul Burrill	Fishing	
Rob Dhaliwal	Export Sales Farming	

Others Present: Laura Ridenour, Alan Chapman, Louise Trapp.

Call to order: Rhys-Thorvald started the meeting at 4:45 pm.

Land Acknowledgement

Determination of Quorum

Quorum (at 5:35 pm, when Trevor joined).

Approval of minutes

Trevor motioned to approve, Sean seconded the approval of the April 8th retreat minutes. All approved.

Public Comment

Alan Chapman is on the Agricultural Advisory Committee. He is interested in seeing where the Food System Committee's comments on the Comp Plan update align with the Ag Advisory Committee's comments. He is starting a short term subcommittee to elevate some of the common priorities. He asked if anyone was interested in joining. Sean expressed interest. Alan sent the group a list of the Ag Advisory Committee's comments.

Trevor shared that he is also on the Conservation Easement Oversight Committee, which will provide some connection between two different advisory committees.

Ali presented at the American Planning Association Conference last week on Engaging Diverse Rural Audiences in Food System Planning. This was a panel presentation and her fellow panelists brought some interesting perspectives. She is happy to share more about the conversations she had at the conference.

Retreat Follow Up and Adoption of Structure

The Food System Committee held a retreat on April 8th and discussed establishing task forces around each goal area. Rhys prepared a formal proposal for the task forces, outlining their organizational structure and responsibilities. The Taskforce document will be added to the Food System Committee's website. Ali will create a google form for people interested in joining task forces.

Public Health Advisory Board

Last month, Ali shared that the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB), another advisory committee to the County Council, has a seat available for someone from the Food System Committee. The Food System Committee originated in PHAB. With the growing food system concerns, such as food access, it's important for someone to fill that seat.

Sierra agreed to fill that seat.

Food System Plan Implementation Update

Ali shared her monthly update. The County funding process begins in June and she will keep the group posted.

Ali noted that the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center Kitchen project is complicated and is running into some logistical hurdles. Three farmers markets: Twin Sisters Market, Lynden, and Bellingham, are offering unlimited Market Match this season. Ali has heard a request that farmers markets want to meet to discuss various strategies and funding opportunities. Perhaps they could function like the Whatcom Food Bank Network. This would align with some of the strategies in the Economic chapter of the Food System Plan.

The Committee members provided some updates too.

Noelle reported that FFB has a new Executive Director. She also shared that Whatcom Grown, a debit card program for WIC-eligible families in East County, launched at Crossroads Grocery in East Whatcom. It is funded by NABC and in collaboration with Ali and Cheryl Thornton.

Sierra shared that the Whatcom Food Bank Network is working with the Health Board (County Council) to declare food insecurity as a public health emergency, in order to be eligible for more funds.

Sean shared that he had a meeting about climate smart forests, land acquisitions for land trust and conservation easements.

Regional Food System Partnership Grant

Laura Ridenour provided some background on the Whatcom Food Network and its relationship with the Food System Committee. She shared potential funding sources for the implementation of the food system plan. The USDA's Regional Food System Partnership grant is one option. She will not be applying for this grant this year, but encouraged the committee to apply in future years.

Laura has been interviewing players in food security and is interested in bringing together communication of all of the different players when it comes to funding and what's available.

Sierra asked how the Food System Committee (FSC) can support in the food security conversation. She, Ali, and Noelle will look into what declaring food security as a public health emergency would mean for resources and report back to the FSC. This is aligned with the Goal 4 (Food Access) task force. Sean and

Laura suggested having that task force write a letter of support for the declaration. Laura also suggested including food security in the next budget cycle.

Feasibility/Impact Analysis

Postponed until a later meeting.

Report to Council in June and Community Shareback

Rhys is going to Council on June 18th to provide an update to council. Rhys wants to write a report for the council and the broader community. Ali mentioned that if it is to be included in that council meeting, all materials need to be submitted by May 17th.

Rhys asked how people want to collaborate on this document. Noelle suggested a google doc. Rhys and Ali will send out a document with suggestions to make recommendations for a report and then Ali and Rhys will make a draft and send it out for comment.

Wrap Up

Next meeting is May 28th, 2024 at 4:30. Meeting adjourned at 5:59pm.