

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee  
June 5, 2024  
Minutes

6:00 p.m. CALL TO ORDER – Pam Gould, Chair

Present: Richard Frye Pam Gould, Diane Harper, Todd Lagestee, Carol Landt, Catherine Shornick

Absent: Janice Catrell, Tom Philpot

County representatives present: Jon Scanlon, County Council, and Gary Poole, Senior Master.

BUSINESS MEETING

Agenda: Stands, with minor addition from D. Harper

Minutes: May 1, 2024, Adopted

News from the ferry: Gary Poole reported that drydock work is successfully progressing. The No. 1 engine was replaced, and the Coast Guard is pleased. The ferry should be in the water on the 14<sup>th</sup> for sea trials, with an anticipated return of service on June 15<sup>th</sup>. See the Whatcom County website for complete information.

Jon Scanlon, County Council: Jon chairs the Council’s Public Works and Health Committee and is the alternate to Ben Elenbass as rep to WCFAC. Jon noted he enjoyed riding the passenger ferry to get a taste of drydock (as well, he recently learned much from riding along with a sheriff deputy). Public Works (PW) director Liz Kosa reported an estimated cost increase to \$80M+ for the new vessel and terminals, to which some Council members reacted with questions about alternatives, including a passenger-only ferry. Such a change would be enormous to the community; however, Director Kosa indicated that PW is not going in that direction not only due to lifestyle, but also because PW needs the vehicle ferry to maintain island roads. Council expects a report from KPFF on July 9<sup>th</sup> regarding updated cost projections. Dir. Kosa is working down a list of other options to reduce costs such as other funding models, a county wide ferry district, networking with other counties that run ferries, and reducing level of service. Jon is committed to seeing that work through; he requested that when sending questions or responses to him or any other Council member, to utilize the full Council email so all Council members and staff receive them.

Some discussion occurred regarding who could set up a ferry district. Diane H. reported that the Council could do so, and will provide Jon with info. It’s unlikely any such action would occur before November elections. Jon is happy to talk with Jim Dickensen about his many ideas to save funds, and Diane will provide a list of cost-cutting ideas and recommendations from 2011. Charles Bailey asked if there was some way to mitigate eelgrass issues or find other ways to avoid the dramatic physical, emotional and political impacts of a passenger-only ferry during a lengthy construction period for the terminal. Others pointed to decisions made several years ago that included no mention of eelgrass, exorbitant costs, or a very lengthy drydock; as well, ridership patterns have changed since a larger ferry was decided upon. When combined with climate impacts anticipated on Gooseberry Point in next 20 years, it is important

to consider all possibilities. Jon will talk to PW and looks forward to hearing if and how KPFF can save money while maintaining the grants already awarded.

WCFAC Chair comments: Pam Gould reported hearing about cost estimates up to \$87M, but whether the new ferry comes through or not, the Lummi Island docks have reached the end of their lifespan and need replacing, which will likely necessitate a 4-month car ferry outage. There are several ways the island could lose ferry service including mechanical failure or natural disaster, so the ad hoc access committee is moving ahead with its work with LICA to collect information through a survey and input from islanders; members will be at the Saturday market, a survey is under development, and summer interns will be working on a community health aspects. Plans are underway for an open house and there may be a mailing to be sure all islanders are aware of plans for a lengthy passenger-only ferry and to solicit as much information as possible on issues to address.

### COMMITTEE WORK

Ad hoc committee report, ferry and terminals: Kurt Esveldt reported on meetings with Dir. Kosa and project engineers and planners [see handout]. Information was provided to Dir. Kosa to review standard procedures that would allow for bringing in the Whatcom Chief on weekends in or 12-hour intervals. Updated vessel drawings have not been provided. Kurt hopes WCFAC ad hoc will be part of the ongoing process and that all options and variations will be considered. Some discussion occurred regarding diesel and electric generator systems, design and vessel options, and costs.

Jon S. acknowledged other at least two other enormous cost events for PW and pointed to the need for good oversight; Pam reported that Dir. Kosa said these are likely to impact other projects as well. Some discussion covered the Road Fund, including increased pressure as unincorporated areas diminish.

Meeting day discussion: Committee unanimously approved moving WCFAC meetings to the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month; the next meeting will be July 24<sup>th</sup>.

Term lengths: Diane described current WCFAC term rotations that will result in only three members carrying forward after January 2025. Committee voted unanimously to send letter to Council to adjust all terms so no more than three members leave in a given year to allow for continuity of experience. Jon asked that WCFAC suggest specific language to the Council and include Mandy in communications.

Open House: WCFAC is hoping that the new Assistant Director PW, Laura Frolich, and others will attend a reception on July 24<sup>th</sup> (yet to be verified).

### OPEN SESSION

Bob Anderson voiced the need for genuine communication to encourage creativity; it's important to move forward together with good, direct and honest communication to get things accomplished [see attachment].

Jim Dickensen expressed concern for fuel estimates under the current design. Pam noted that Gary and PW are looking into options.

Cris Colburn asked Jon S. if the Go-Fund-Me effort on the island to support legal action against the county is a conflict of interest for WCFAC. Jon reflected that generally committee members are permitted to donate to whatever causes they wish to, even though it may not always be the wisest choice; the proper avenue may be for the Chair to contact the county prosecutor civil division to clarify.

Upcoming

- July 24, WCFAC meeting and tentative open house

Meeting adjourned 7:37 PM.

Attachments:

- WCFAC 5.1.24 Minutes Approved (note: submitted with attachments 6.11.24 for County site)
- Ferry and terminal ad hoc report June 5, 2024
- Bob Anderson, open session comments

*Zoom recording provided by LICA volunteers Bill Sager, Jesse Powell, and Alan Krum:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKTVeiniThQ>

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Submitted by C. Shornick

June 5, 2024.

On May 20, 2024 Whatcom County Public Works Director Elizabeth Koza provided the following Lummi Island ferry design update for WCFAC.

WCFAC Ad Hoc Subcommittee attending members: Pam Gould, Tom Philpot, Kurt Esveldt

1. The 180' hull and deckhouse design remains as shown in previously provided conceptual ferry drawings.
2. A diesel electric hybrid propulsion system is being designed for the new ferry that can accept additional batteries at a later date for an all electric ferry.
3. Until a PSE transmission upgrade is complete allowing Lummi Island onshore battery charging, onboard diesel driven generators will provide propulsion power for the new ferry.
4. Fuel consumption for the diesel electric hybrid propulsion system will be comparable to current Whatcom Chief fuel use.
5. One conventional marine diesel engine will be included to provide emergency and long distance propulsion power.
6. Whatcom Public Works is aware of potential ferry design concerns raised in the Miller Bay Boat lawsuit with Elliott Bay Design.
7. A brief discussion was held regarding terminal construction timing and barge handling that would assist the Whatcom Chief in providing essential services to Lummi Island during terminal construction.

Topics such as hull modeling and optimization, Gooseberry onshore charging, expected battery life, and project costs were not addressed in the design review or above discussion.

8. Vessel drawings were not provided for this design update.

## **Remarks by Bob Anderson – WCFAC Meeting 6/5/24**

A little over a month ago I expressed my disappointment in the outcome of the ferry code revisions. I believe that disappointment and frustration was shared by this Committee and the community at large. But now it's time to move on, to plan for the future and solve the gnarly problems that lie ahead. My greatest hope is that all parties in the messy and conflicted process we've all been through in the past year will find ways to improve the one thing that seemed to be missing at crucial times – Good, direct, honest communication! I know that WCFAC leaders are working on this; that Council Member Scanlon is doing a lot to bridge some of the divides; and I am hopeful that Public Works leaders are ready for a reset to rebuild the trust that was impaired and at times broken.

I appreciate what the Committee is working on and engaging the community in their efforts so sincerely. We see it in action tonight in the way ad hoc committees have been populated with community members as well as WCFAC representatives. We see that intention to engage us in the planning for an open house and a town hall this summer. We see it in the efforts by WCFAC members to get closer to Public Works in the planning process for the new ferry, whatever it becomes. In a very real way we are all in this together - community, WCFAC, Public Works, County Executive and Council - and we can learn from the past that this active engagement strategy and a sincere commitment to open communications is going to make the road ahead much easier to navigate and for sure more satisfying.

Finally I'd like to say just a few words about the pending litigation, the Peter Earle lawsuit. I realize this is not within the purview of WCFAC and not an agenda item on your work plan. However, I do want to make a few

observations. First I think many of us in the community are grateful that the issues raised in the lawsuit are going to get an airing in a neutral setting, Superior Court. The support from the community has been remarkable with over \$21,000 raised to date from 154 donors ranging from \$15 to \$1,000. This groundswell of support is evidence that Islanders want to get to the bottom of these issues once and for all. Whatever the outcome, which may stretch into the fall, we can hopefully put these significant issues and conflicts behind us. And in the meantime keep our focus on working together on the big issues surrounding the new ferry or some alternative.

I'll just say in closing, that genuine collaboration and communication are really important now. It's an excellent way to encourage innovation and creativity which is sorely needed as we look ahead at issues we have to solve.