

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee
July 24, 2024
Minutes

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

Present: Richard Frye, Pam Gould, Diane Harper, Carol Landt, Tom Philpot, Catherine Shornick

Absent: Janice Catrell, Todd Lagestee

County representatives present: Jon Scanlon, County Council (Zoom)

BUSINESS MEETING

Agenda: Stands, with minor addition from D. Harper

Minutes: June 5, 2024, Adopted

Jon Scanlon, County Council: Jon S. reported on the report made to the Council of the Whole (COTW) on July 23rd by Public Works (PW) Director Liz Kosa and consultants KPFF, regarding three options for moving ahead with ferry replacement. Big gaps remain for taxpayers, whether they move forward with a new electric ferry in one or two phases or replace the ferry with a new but equivalent size diesel vessel. Funding options to explore include pursuing a bond, a ferry district, and/or state funds. If the latter remains possible (after elections in Nov.), the one-phase electric option is the most cost-effective. Council called for work sessions with PW to develop options and details. Jon would like to hear from Lummi Islanders over the next few months, especially in regard to anything PW and Council is missing. It's possible that some of the work sessions will be public, and WCFAC could potentially participate.

WCFAC Report on July 23rd Council of the Whole Meeting: Several members attended the COTW presentation. Diane Harper underscored that Council must commit to a financial plan by July 2025 or the RAISE grant is lost. If a larger ferry is not part of the plan, approx. \$11M is still needed for rebuilding the island-side terminal. County engineers should be asked if a smaller electric ferry could be accommodated by the existing size terminal.

OPEN SESSION

Jim Dickinson commented that the whole project should be started over. Two ferries have been designed and scrapped. The idea is to make things work better and the three options are all bad—more fuel, pollution, and outage time. It's best to get a ferry for 10 years or so and work out the rest properly.

Dave Parker posed two questions for PW and CC: could KPFF verify that a change to LOS (level of service) would forfeit the RAISE grant; and where would the \$11M for docks come from without the grant? There should be an alternative funding source.

Charles Bailey noted that seven years ago, a 34-car, net-zero emissions ferry was adopted. We don't want to lose the RAISE grant, but it's necessary to examine other scenarios; break out the costs through a ferry district, bonds, fares, taxes—none have been analyzed over the vessel lifetime. An electric ferry is preferable, but what is affordable?

Bob Anderson proposed a fourth option of purchasing a reconditioned diesel vessel to use for ten or so years, which would allow for a shorter outage and time to understand the lease renewal, PSE charging capacity, sea level rise, etc. (Statement read in abstentia, see attached)

Mary Ross listened to the COTW meeting and was taken back by the suggestion for a 15-car ferry, which would not be equivalent: it would be too small and inadequate and take us backwards. While a 34-car ferry is too big, something like a 26-car ferry would be more appropriate. It would be sad to lose the RAISE grant.

COMMITTEE WORK

Diane Harper: costs of implementing fare change, and annual ferry operation reports: While we are thankful for the ability to trade in cards, costs to do so are concerning. *Motion was made to formally ask PW, through the County Executive, to produce a report on accumulated costs of the most recent fare change, acknowledging that it will be an interim report in September.* Motion passed unanimously. Discussion surrounded past practices and cost (including labor) to fare box for exchanges.

Diane would also like to request an abbreviated report for 2022 (2021 was the last one) with a summary of revenues, history of expenses, ferry fund balance history, and an accounting page. Motion tabled until August meeting.

ad hoc Access Committee, update: Work somewhat on hold for summer and waiting on vessel determination. One way or another, a four- to six-month vessel ferry outage will occur.

ad hoc Ferry and Terminals Committee, update: The KPFF/PW presentation to COTW included much new information to digest. It looks as if a variation of what has already been planned will occur, based on finances. We can't lose the RAISE grant, but what is a single phase, and at what cost? What is the cost of a deferred option? We need a financial person to analyze, and the opportunity to sit down with PW. It's important to try to get PW to focus on PSE: what does each boat need, and what is PSE's capacity? Whatcom County has not applied for state carbon funds, so if they are not repealed in November those funds are important. Jon Scanlon appreciated the creative thinking. He is not worried about CRAB funds if the smaller ferry is chosen, and will ask Liz Kosa for a one-hour meeting with PW for the ad hoc committee to understand more about the phases proposed. Cantwell and Larson could also be helpful since they want the inflation reduction funds to work.

Some discussion took place as to how a county ferry district could be established, whether by vote or by councilmanic action. Jon is waiting to see if children's fund is repealed in November, then he is willing to work on ferry district; but he suggested WCFAC start having meetings with Council members.

Rich Frye commented that when discussing the RAISE grant it would be reasonable to cite the marine construction and repair index that indicates dramatic cost increases, since it is specific to these circumstances; that demand management should be considered (parking and vehicle use); and he would like to see a 24- to 26- electric ferry built in Bellingham.

Staffing update: This is Kim Boon's last night, since she is resigning.

Upcoming

- August 28, WCFAC meeting, Zoom only: Public Works Assistant Director Laura Frolich, new ferry systems manager

Meeting adjourned.

Attachments:

- WCFAC 6.5.24 Minutes Final (note: submitted with attachments earlier for County posting)
- Bob Anderson comments
- Harper, financial info request

Zoom recording provided by island volunteer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwvEIJ8Pqs&t=8s>

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Submitted by C. Shornick