

# Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee

February 8, 2024, 6 p.m.

***Bold** text indicates Committee decision expected. Asterisk\* indicates attachment.*

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

## ROLL CALL

- |                  |                 |                              |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| · Janice Catrell | · Diane Harper  | · Thomas Philpot             |
| · Richard Frye   | · Todd Lagestee | · Catherine Shornick         |
| · Pam Gould      | · Carol Landt   | · <i>Uninc area position</i> |

## FLAG SALUTE & MOMENT OF SILENCE

## BUSINESS MEETING:

- Welcome to new member Catherine Shornick, Director Kosa & Council members
- **Election of Secretary**
- **Adoption of Minutes\***; **review Agenda**
- Introduction of Elizabeth Kosa, Director of Public Works, with news about the new Electric Ferry and RAISE Grant
- Gary Poole, Senior Master, news from the ferry

## **6:25** COMMITTEE WORK: Whatcom County Code Chapter 10.34 Ferry Rates, Proposal\*

- Report from the ad hoc Code Amendment Committee (Rich Frye, Diane Harper, Janice Holmes)
- Code amendments rationale (Director Kosa)
- Questions/comments from Committee and attendees, specific to Code
- **Discussion and decision by WCFAC on further work needed**

**7:10** OPEN SESSION: Attendees, then, if possible, Zoom attendees

## **7:25** COMMITTEE SCHEDULE:

- Introduction of DRAFT 2024 Work Program for WCFAC\*

## **7:40** ADJOURN

Informal conversations among attendees, WCFAC, and County representatives  
*(7:45 off-island attendees leave for 8 PM ferry)*

**Location: The Gathering Place – 3913 Legoe Bay Road, Lummi Island WA**

Or join LICA Hosted Zoom meeting: Meeting ID:865 5204 0378 Passcode:020403  
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86552040378?pwd=wypOHnRzCVQrprcwVqKVO3NyPLr5OJ.1>

One tap mobile telephone +12532050468,,86552040378#,,,,\*020403# US  
or find your local number: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86552040378?pwd=wypOHnRzCVQrprcwVqKVO3NyPLr5OJ.1>

**Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee**  
Meeting Minutes, January 25, 2024

Call to Order, Pam Gould, Chair

Many thanks to Bill Sager for technical support; Bill is also the new LICA President

Roll Call

- **Present:** Janice Catrell, Jim Dickinson, Rich Frye, Pam Gould, Diane Harper, Todd Lagestee, Carol Landt, Thomas Philpot. **Absent:** Fabian Mendoza
- **Also present:** Gary Poole, Sr. Master, and Roland Middleton, Public Works (PW). Attendees heartily applauded in gratitude for the ferry crew's outstanding work during recent extreme weather events.

Flag Salute and Moment of Silence

Business Meeting

- Report on response by County Executive and Public Works to information requests:
  - Roland to report on information and dates.
  - Liz Kosa, Director of PW, to attend WCFAC on February 8<sup>th</sup> to discuss proposed code changes developed by PW and the County Executive, scheduled for release on Feb. 1. Kosa will discuss what proposals mean for ferry fares and functions.
  - KPFF will coordinate on dates for a community Town Hall and a WCFAC meeting to discuss plans and timelines for the electric ferry and docks.
- Review and changes to printed agenda: none.
- Review *Whatcom County Code Chapter 2.145* (att. 1). This code governs WCFAC, including its purpose and function. Pam highlighted the increase to nine members, with a quorum of five required regardless of any vacant seats; OPMA requirements, to which WCFAC will adhere (all WCFAC members completed OPMA training); and the ability to form ad hoc committees, with a minimum of two WCFAC members.
- Committee reviewed *County Expectations of Boards and Commissions* (att. 2). Motion made that officers--WCFAC chair, vice chair and secretary--be authorized to arrange and publicize meetings and communicate with county officials about requests for information and presentations (Diane moved; Carol seconded; all approved).
- Meeting minutes from December 4, 2023, approved as posted on the Council website.
- WCFAC thanked Jim Dickinson for many years of service. Motion made to preserve the *Whatcom County Ferry History* developed by Jim by archiving it in the document section on the County website (Tom moved; Rich seconded; all approved).
- News from the ferry, Gary Poole, Senior Master. Gary noted the ferry crew's extraordinary work during the coldest weather event in recent history and encouraged people to share their thanks directly with the crew. A routine

maintenance shutdown is scheduled for Wednesday, February 28, and dry dock is tentatively scheduled for the last weekend of April to May 20.

### Open Session

*On site:* Mike Skehan encouraged thinking about the electric ferry and how it's fed by electric power. New PSE and county sponsored studies have been completed on availability and cost of getting power; the issue is upgrading the grid. He encouraged a thorough look at the Guemes ferry, and establishing a standing ad hoc committee to study and communicate on how the electric ferry will work.

*Zoom attendees:* David Kershner underscored Mike's advisement.

### Committee Work: *Whatcom County Code Chapter 10.34 Ferry Rates*

- Presentation on *Ferry Funding and How Ferry Fares are Determined by Whatcom County Code 10.34*, by Diane Harper and Janice Holmes. [See PowerPoint presentation of record] Code amendments do impact the way in which ferry fares are set, therefore Diane and Janice closely reviewed fare history, noting that some code adjustments can be clarifying in nature or actual policy changes, both of which WCFAC will examine. ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds have not yet been allocated to offset the negative impacts of the pandemic on fare revenue. The dolphin repairs were a historical anomaly in routine maintenance expenses but point to the importance of determining what should be included in Total Operational Expenses (TOE). As well, costs are increasing; however, questions remain as to what happens to cumulative revenue. Moving forward, it must be defined as to whether or not operational costs only include regular and routine expenditures.

### Questions and Comments:

- Average expenses were approximately \$30K annually until the \$800K dolphin repair; the goal is (and has been) stability. Consider minimum and maximum accumulations for revenue, perhaps three- to five-year windows. Information was requested of PW but not received regarding any large expenses paid out of other funds, since it's impossible to see specific expenses run through ERR fund (WCFAC is waiting on 2010 to 2020 data).
- Ralph Steele questioned the PW decision to move \$2M from the ferry fund to the road fund when significant policy changes were made in May 2023; he reiterated it's prudent to have a minimum of six months of reserve.
- Bob Anderson thanked Diane and Janice for clear explanations and options provided. Covid and the dolphins caused huge deficits, but he hopes for constructive, open conversations at high levels to resolve.

WCFAC formed an ad hoc committee to look at code changes scheduled for release on Feb. 1, and prepare a presentation to WCFAC on February 8. Diane and Rich will serve on the codes ad hoc. Janice Holmes will join as a community member; other interested people should contact Pam in the next few days.

## Committee Work Program Schedule

- PW Schedule, Roland Middleton
  - Pam thanked Roland for providing large scale copies of the new electric ferry and docks, which will be kept at the library. Roland noted the image is not entirely accurate, but drawings include a side profile, deck, pilot house, an emergency passenger only float, schematic queuing, and eelgrass survey. The full eelgrass report is on the county website.
  - Roland reported that the new administrative support for the ferry has been delayed but is designed to provide up to 70 hours per month including virtual set-ups and administrative/clerical tasks. WCFAC should ask for what it needs administratively (position is paid out of operating).
  - Roland reviewed timeline to release proposed code changes February 1; PW Director Kosa attends February 8 WCFAC meeting; decision needed from WCFAC February 22, since PW needs to submit recommendations to County Council (CC) on March 5<sup>th</sup>. The WCFAC Communications Plan allows two weeks for final recommendations to voting and won't review recommendations until the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Roland and Pam will discuss with County Executive's office. Committee of the Whole is on March 19<sup>th</sup>, which may allow some additional time, for April 9<sup>th</sup> CC final hearing and vote.
  - KPFF (consulting group for ferry design) is available to attend April 11 WCFAC meeting to discuss Terminal Action Construction Plan including background, regulatory and construction issues, costs, etc., and to set stage for open house and brainstorming on impacts regarding a ferry outage. Roland suggested some dates but asked that care be taken to avoid conflicts with other large community events. WCFAC, LICA, and PW will coordinate on suggested town hall dates asap.
  - Roland reported that PW was just notified that a full environmental assessment is required, which could impact the planned start date of summer 2026 for the terminals. PW is looking at incentives to speed things along.
  - Jim D. will share an alternate idea for avoiding pile driver platform (and therefore the necessity for a long outage) with Roland.

Next Meeting: February 8, 2024

Meeting adjourned approx. 7:45 PM.

A recording of this meeting is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9FKymzplmA>

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Respectfully submitted, C. Shornick

# Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee Work Program for 2024

February 8, 2024

## - Feb. 22nd meeting:

- Discussion and final draft of WCFAC Recommendation to County Council and County Executive on WCC Chapter 10.34 amendments.
- Introduction to Ferry Finances Part 2 presentation in preparation for March 14 meeting
- Form an ad hoc "Electric Ferry and Docks" committee to review information and compile questions for consultants and PW to address on design, costs, and decision points
- Propose forming a joint ad hoc committee with Lummi Island Community Association on "Island Access" to accumulate information for Public Works regarding island access during construction and changeover to new electric ferry

## - March 14th meeting:

- Vote on final draft of WCFAC Recommendation to County Council and County Executive on WCC Chapter 10.34 amendments. Decision on attending March 19<sup>th</sup> Council discussion.
- 2023 Update on Ferry Finances from Randy Rydel, Financial Services Manager, Public Works Department; questions and comments and discussion
- Report back from the Electric Ferry and Docks ad hoc committee on recommended questions for April 11<sup>th</sup> meeting
- LICA Members of Island Access ad hoc committee identified, possible report back on recommended questions for April 11<sup>th</sup> meeting

## - April 11th meeting: Public Works and KPFF consultants

### *Preliminary list of topics:*

- Design of new electric ferry, issues, and timeline on decision points and service start
- Power provision, Issues, and timeline on decision points
- New terminals design, issues and constraints, and timeline on decision points
- Projected periods when the ferry service to the mainland will be disrupted
- Finances:
  - Projected costs and sources of funding of capital expenses;
  - Projected fare loss and source of make-up funding during limited ferry operation;
  - Projected cost and funding for households who for job or medical reasons must move off island during periods of limited access;
  - Projected income loss for ferry crew and island businesses and make-up funding
  - Projected future operating costs and impact on fares.

## - May 9th meeting: *(during drydock)*

- Presentation on Ferry Finances and Ferry Fares.
- Form an ad hoc Ferry Fares committee to look at fare structure and fares
- Report back from ad hoc Electric Ferry committee, discussion of ferry project issues and next steps; may include recommendations to County Council and Executive
- Report back from LICA/WCFAC ad hoc committee, discussion of access issues and next steps; may include recommendations to County Council and Executive

**- June Town Hall co-sponsored by LICA/special WCFAC meeting:**

Hold Town Hall in partnership with Lummi Island Community Association (LICA) where consultants and Public Works present the WC Electric Ferry project to the community.

Proposed topics:

- Whatcom County Electric Ferry design and power
- New terminals design and constraints
- Limitations on island access during construction
- Finances: costs and funding (capital costs, lack of ferry service costs, operation costs)

**- June 13th meeting:**

- Follow-up to Town Hall from ad hoc Electric Ferry and Docks committee, next steps
- Follow-up to Town Hall from LICA/WCFAC ad hoc Island Access committee, next steps

**- July 11th meeting:**

- Mid-Year report from Public Works on ferry revenue and expenses and budget for 2025
- Report back from ad hoc fare committee on revised fare structure and amounts

**- August 8th meeting:**

- Presentation on draft recommended fare structure and fares by WCFAC
- Tentative Town Hall on fares, co-sponsored with LICA

**- September 12<sup>th</sup> meeting:**

- Ad hoc Fare Committee final draft recommendation to County Council and Executive
- Ad hoc committee report and draft recommendations on Electric Ferry and Docks,
- Joint ad hoc committee report and draft recommendations on Island Access

**- Tentative for Oct. 10<sup>th</sup> meeting:**

- WCFAC adopts recommendations to County Council and Executive on Fares
- Possibly develop final drafts on recommendations on Electric Ferry and Docks, and final drafts on recommendations on Island Access

**- Tentative Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> meeting:**

- Possible adoption of recommendations on Electric Ferry and Docks
- Possible adoption of recommendations on Island Access
- Report from PW on expected ferry budget and timetable on ferry decisions in 2025 and 2026 (biennium adoption by County Council end of November)
- Draft Work program for 2025

**- Tentative Dec. 12<sup>th</sup> meeting:** cancel

**- Tentative Jan. 9<sup>th</sup> meeting:**

- Farewell to departing WCFAC members; welcome to new members (effective Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>)
- Review of Expectations;
- Review of past year WCFAC activity and adoption of 2025 work program