

Minutes of the Lummi Island Ferry Advisory Committee (LIFAC) Meeting

Regular Meeting for January 2021 6:00pm, January 21, 2021 Web platform

CALL TO ORDER

Rhayma Blake called the meeting to order at 6:01pm. She announced that Charles Bailey would be secretary pro tem for this meeting

ROLL CALL

Present: Charles Bailey, Rhayma Blake, Cris Colburn, Jim Dickenson, Patricia Dunn and Judy Olsen.

AWOL: Greg Rice

Also Attending:

WCPW: Rich Hudson - Senior Master, Roland Middleton, Elizabeth Kosa

Whatcom County Council: Todd Donovan

Others: David Kershner, Mike Skehan, Bill Fox, Mike McKenzie, Mary Ross

MOMENT OF SILENCE

OPEN SESSION (Written comments follow minutes when provided)

David Kershner voiced his concern that the proposed across-the-board capital surcharge of \$1 on ferry fares would disproportionately impact low income Islanders and over time reduce the economic diversity of the island. He asked LIFAC to consider this in its recommendation of a fare surcharge to County Council. Mike Skehan concurred.

APPROVAL OF December 9, 2020 MINUTES

Charles Bailey moved approval and Chris Colburn seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

LIFAC INTERNAL BUSINESS

Election of new officers for 2021 will take place at the February meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Update on Operations-Rich Hudson, Senior Master, Whatcom Chief

Rich Hudson congratulated Theo White, who is completing captain's school where he passed all his Coast Guard exams enroute to becoming a Coast Guard credentialed Mariner. Theo will now start a training program on the 'Chief' with an eye to becoming a captain one day. LIFAC joins Rich in congratulating and thanking Theo!

A near miss occurred during loading of the Chief in a recent storm. It is being investigated.

Some time ago, to make on-board payment of fares more convenient, the county added the option of paying by credit card with no service charge. In consequence, the county has incurred over \$18,000 in accumulated service charges. A service fee is already added when a credit card is used to purchase punch cards by mail or at the ferry office. To cover service charges and equalize between mail-in and on-board credit card payments, the county is now adding a \$0.50 service charge to fares paid with a credit card on board the

ferry. In responding to a question from Todd Donovan, Rich confirmed that this change has been incorporated in the unified fee schedule which Council reviews and approves annually.

In response to a request for a sanican at Gooseberry Point, one can be provided at an estimated cost of \$8,000 a year. The funds are not currently budgeted but before the February LIFAC meeting Rich will see if this expenditure can be accommodated.

In response to a request for online access to current weather at the Lummi Island terminal, PWD proposed to King-5 that they place a weather station at the terminal as part of their regional weather data network. King-5 declined but they may be able to provide some more limited weather sensing equipment for the terminal, data from which would be put online.

Update on Replacement Ferry Project - Roland Middleton

Public Works and Kpff are working with the County Executive on a financial plan for obtaining the \$30 million required for the new ferry and terminal modifications. The plan is built on a county application to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) for a BUILD grant of \$20 million and an application for \$10 million to CRAB (County Road Appropriation Board). The county is examining other options in case the BUILD award is less than \$20 million. The financing plan will show annual cash flow for the first 5-10 years and lay out the need for bridging funds from bonding or other sources. Roland indicated we don't need to decide now on the specifics of local financing.

Roland feels positive that the federal government may contribute a significant share of the cost of the new ferry. Although they declined the county's 2020 BUILD application, DOT officials commended the county on the quality of its proposal. They suggested that the county's 2021 application should have a detailed concept design for the vessel and a financing plan.

In December Elliott Bay Design Group delivered a final design concept to PWD which meets the first need (please see below). As for the financing plan, Roland indicated that PWD will have preliminary numbers and a draft plan in February and is on schedule to present a resolution and the financing plan to Council in March. He has also spoken with Rep. Rick Larsen about the project and the need for Congress to increase the overall appropriation for BUILD—let's build infrastructure.

As for CRAB, Jim Karcher, the county engineer, was invited to the CRAB spring meeting to talk about the new vessel. CRAB is ready to ask the legislature to authorize a call for projects. We are in year 2 of the 4 year cycle. Year 2 is when the county asks CRAB at its Spring meeting to issue a call for projects. In Summer CRAB submits accepted projects to the legislature so the new ferry project would come for approval in the CRAB July 2023-2024 biennium.

In sum, PWD will shake every bush, including bridge money for the terminals. The county has historically been very successful with its grant applications

Draft fare surcharge ordinance.

Rhayma observed that the \$1 surcharge is to show we have 'skin in the game.' Roland

asked for more direction since the LIFAC resolution was for \$1 on all fares in all vehicle classes. Charles said that the burden of a higher fare on low income Islanders as David Kershner and Mike Skehan had said in the open session should be taken into account. He suggested that the surcharge could be applied proportionally to needs-based fares.¹ Some discussion ensued on how needs-based fares function. They are 10 trip punch cards available from either the PWD office or on Wednesdays at the Lummi Island terminal. Since needs-based fares are not paid on board, Rich said a nonwhole-dollar increment could be done. Cris urged keeping it simple, especially for the crew. He said it would be best to keep this as one issue, the capital surcharge, and not a consideration of the whole fare schedule. Roland said that it may be that the yield from a surcharge applied to needs-based fares is so negligible that it could be dropped.

Pat Dunn moved we delay a decision on the needs based surcharge until the February meeting. Cris seconded the motion, which received unanimous approval.

Charles recommended adding language from the County Council Resolution cited in the draft to the sixth "Whereas" to read: "WHEREAS, the Action Plan instructs the design and construction of a 34 car vessel with flexibility for future electric conversion and terminal improvements; and,"

Roland will present a revised draft at the February LIFAC meeting.

Todd Donovan thanked everyone and excused himself from the meeting.

Final Concept Design

Liz confirmed that LIFAC's questions on the draft concept design last July and PWD's August responses, "all that we could do," were incorporated into the December 11, 2020 final concept design document. She confirmed that the final concept design is absolutely essential for the BUILD grant application but that it's since it is a concept design, changes can still be made once we get the funding. Liz assured that the design specifications include the capacity to upgrade the vessel to all-electric operation.

Liz noted that the DOT reviewer said we did a fabulous job getting support letters from our Congressional delegation for the 2020 BUILD application. We will need to call on them again for their support this August. Secretary-designate Buttigieg is expected to look at BUILD applications in October.

Jim Dickenson asked if there were material changes in the December concept design and Liz replied no. Jim said that the vessel design is too small. It needs to be designed so it is 4' longer, can be expanded and get better fuel economy. The present vessel hull design is 'draggy.' Otherwise we will need to design and build a brand new boat ten years from now. The real estate market is buoyant and people will continue to move here. He does not want to say no to them.

Jim moved that the designers of the new ferry attend a LIFAC meeting to answer questions from members and the public. The motion did not receive a second.

¹ David Kershner provided this information via the meeting's web platform chat function: A needs-based punch card is \$52 for 10 trips. That is \$130 for 25 trips. The full fare vehicle punch card is \$210 for 25 trips.

Public Awareness

Liz informed LIFAC that it's now time to get the word out to the community. PWD can offer the services of their communications specialist, Marie Duckworth, plus a Kpff budget for outreach. She offered examples of a (virtual) open house to get to know your crew, your ferry and to introduce LIFAC. Marie could develop tri-fold flyers to be distributed on the ferry, at the Islander and post office. Rich said it was possible for the crew to hand out the trifolds to drivers onboard. Judy Olsen suggested a mailer to go to all islanders, reaching those who may use the ferry less frequently. The trifold/mailer would introduce the new vessel and possibly other news such as the new Lummi Island side breakwater. Marie could also do a Q&A about the new ferry on the county website. Liz requested LIFAC to discuss and set dates for outreach activities at its February meeting.

As an example of outreach, Roland invited LIFAC members to attend a (virtual) open house two weeks from now celebrating the replacement of the Jackson Street Bridge in Blaine.

Cris said farewell and wants to remain in contact. He regretted not going to a Jim Dickenson tango party. LIFAC members spoke appreciatively of Cris' many contributions to the Committee.

NEW BUSINESS

Roland reported that Kpff's Cassandra Durkin has had a baby boy! LIFAC sends Cassandra and her family congratulations.

Meeting adjourned at 7:35pm