



# Food System Committee

Tuesday, July 11th, 2023

4:30-6:00 PM

Zoom and in-person

## Minutes

### **Members Present:**

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

**Others Present:** Laura Ridenour, Troy Lenssen, Ady Hughes, Denaya Snavely, Dillon Honcoop, Derek Long.

**Call to order:** Riley started the meeting at 4:30 pm.

### **Land Acknowledgement**

### **Determination of Quorum**

Quorum

### **Approval of minutes**

Sean motioned, Noelle seconded, all Approved

### **Public Comment**

Members of the public were invited to share about themselves.

### **Review of Farm Bureau and Whatcom Family Farmers suggestions to the food system plan**

Riley reviewed the process with the committee:

- 1) Ali reads off the proposed edit
- 2) Open discussion (anyone (public and committee members) can talk)
- 3) Call for a motion to implement the edit
- 4) Discussion is limited to voting (committee) members
- 5) Call the question and vote

The edits considered were as follows:

**5.4.1** Original language: Develop local programming and technical assistance for farm workers and owners about heat stress and wildfire smoke and the impacts on farmworkers. Recommendation was to

replace “develop” with “consider,” as LNI implemented rules for heat stress and hot weather. The group discussed using a different word that would not convey regulatory oversight. The group also discussed if this section could include other food system workers (like restaurant workers). Ultimately, the group proposed this language: “Support local programming and technical assistance for food and farm workers and owners about the impacts of heat stress and wildfire smoke.” Riley motioned to make this the new action language. Rhys seconded. All approved.

5.4.3 Original language: Support local, essential farm workers’ advocacy for improvements in protections from extreme weather conditions at the state and local levels. Potential improvements include: defining “extreme conditions”, “frequency of rest breaks”, and “pace of work”; providing access to drinking water during heat and smoke; providing access to shade and/or air conditioned spaces during extreme heat; increasing access to heated spaces during extreme cold; and ensuring no-penalty time off allowances for employees who wish to stay home during extreme weather

The recommendation was to strike this language, as this is already being overseen by LNI. Rhys proposed some language they worked on with Sean for introduction: “Ensure the health, safety, and well-being of Whatcom County’s essential food system workforce, and provide additional support and resources during extreme weather events, as well as the enforcement of local, state, and federal laws protecting workers.” The group discussed how both the health department and LNI have definitions of extreme weather events. Sean shared that this would be for all workers, Rob is aligned with this recommendation.

Rhys motioned to approve the language as written. Sean seconded. All approved.

#### **Other changes to the plan**

Riley, as chair, shared that the Committee made it through the edits. He asked if there were any other edits to the plan before moving to approve the whole plan and send it back to the County Council.

Rhys shared that, upon reviewing the actions in the plan and conferring with community groups and the input originally in the plan, there were a couple of suggestions for edits.

The first concerns the already-approved 2.1.6. In the last meeting, the following language was approved: “2.1.6 Work with farmers and land trusts to determine acreage goals and farmland preservation strategies; focus on community farms and forests that are locally owned and managed, are working lands, and benefit the public.”

Rhys suggested breaking this up into two separate actions:

“2.1.6 Work with farmers and land trusts to determine acreage goals and farmland preservation strategies”

“2.1.7 Fund cross-sector collaboration to employ a food system lens for preservation and conservation strategies that results in locally-owned community farms, forests and working lands that benefit the public, restore degraded lands, advance farmland acreage and preservation goals”.

The intention of this is that there were lots of points brought up during public comment and this condensed action buries some of them.

Laura shared that some land trust community forests are in the works (Stewart Mountain). Troy asked what advancing farmland means. Rhys said they pulled this from the forest land model (a 501c2), which tries to make room for other innovative land tenure approaches. Sean said this language is also modeled off of the Nooksack Climate Adaptation Plan and that this isn’t limited to farm land.

Rob shared that when reading this, he is worried about someone taking his farm and turning it into a park. Sean clarified this would keep farms in the local (county) economy. He suggested removing “restore degraded lands, advance farmland acreage, and preservation goals.” Troy asked about “locally owned” and if it means publicly owned. Sean said it could be privately owned and participation would be voluntary. The group discussed how using a food system lens would ensure that an action like this would account for impacts on the food system. Riley motioned to strike the original 2.1.6 and replace it with these actions:

2.1.6:” Work with farmers and land trusts to determine acreage goals and farmland preservation strategies”

2.1.7: “Fund cross-sector collaboration to employ a food system lens for preservation and conservation strategies that result in locally-owned farms, forests, and working lands that benefit the public.”

Rob seconded the motion. All approved, except Rhys-Thorvald, who abstained.

The second action Rhys wanted to discuss was the approved language from 2.3.6 (Create a local water exchange system that coordinates the lease and sale of water rights as they are freed up; prioritize the water rights for local and organic food producers and keep the cost accessible), which was removed at the 5/24 meeting. As Rhys reviewed the notes and talked with the former food system committee member, Krista Rome, about this, they argue this should stay in the plan.

Rob and Dillon believe that the State water law doesn’t allow this. Rob suggested the language say “support the creation of a local water exchange,” which would allow for advocacy. He recommended striking “create” and Rhys agreed with the edit. Sean shared that even if it’s not possible now, the language could allow for something later. Dillon added that this is something that could be supported by export farmers, if it fits in the state’s purview. He said he wants to collaborate to go to the state to make these changes.

Another concern is prioritizing specific producers over others. Rhys said that the language is meant to show equal access to all producers. Riley suggested ending the sentence at “producers.” Sean said he thought local markets meant preventing outside parties from coming in and selling our water. Rob suggested adding in “locally owned operations.” Rhys said the public asked us to prioritize farmers that serve our local food system.

Rhys motioned to approve this language: “Support the creation of a local water exchange system that coordinates the lease and sale of water rights as they are feed up; ensuring equal access and affordable rates for diverse scales of locally-owned operations and producers.” Riley seconded. All approved.

Riley asked if there were other suggested edits to the plan before final approval and reminded the group of some of the narrative changes (presented to the committee in an excel document). No one had any more edits.

Riley motioned for the Food System Plan to be approved and go to the County Council for final approval. Margaret seconded. All present committee members voted to approve.

### **Next steps for Council**

Ali will do the work to get these changes into the updated document. Final vote will go to county council. Emails to the county council are encouraged. Once they approve, we will get to work on implementation. The next council meeting is July 25th. Show up if you can. Ali will send all committee meeting information.

Riley Adjourned the meeting at 5:40 pm.