

**Whatcom County
Council Climate Action and Natural Resources Committee**

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010**



Committee Minutes - Final

**Tuesday, February 20, 2024
9:50 AM
Hybrid Meeting**

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 10:50 A.M. (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON,
SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil,
OR CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Todd Donovan
Kaylee Galloway
Mark Stremler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Committee Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 9:50 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Todd Donovan, Kaylee Galloway, and Mark Stremler

Also Present: Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Ben Elenbaas, and Jon Scanlon

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2024-069](#) Update from Whatcom Conservation District on the Community Wildfire Resilience Program

The following people read from a presentation (on file) about fire resiliency and fire risk management services in Whatcom County.

- Brandy Reed, Whatcom Conservation District
- Aneka Sweeney, Whatcom Conservation District

Reed spoke about some of the climate resilience priorities that the district has in its strategic plan and how the wildfire risk reduction program fits within that framework. She stated all the priority actions in the plan work toward the outcome they are trying to achieve, which is to reduce wildfire-associated losses in the Wildland Urban Interface. To reach that outcome, the Conservation District is in the community doing presentations, conducting risk assessments, implementing fuels-reduction projects, and helping out in larger policy discussions.

Sweeney spoke about what the overall picture looks like on the ground in Whatcom County and stated it is important because we are seeing an increasing risk of wildfires in western Washington. She described the four main pillars of their work, which are empowering landowners, supporting communities, evaluating wildfire risk, and engaging with partners. She stated they have funding across Skagit and Whatcom Counties to support about one FTE in producing all that work, but they just got a grant from the Washington State Conservation Commission to support capacity-building. They are excited to amplify their efforts in the next year.

They answered questions about community engagement and outreach, and whether they would be able to do more community projects if they scaled

up and had more FTE. They stated district services are generally free, spoke about how they market their program, and spoke about how they might scale up the program. They answered whether they have data on where fires are happening and what has caused them in the last ten years. They stated risks of ignition go up when development is being done in a forested landscape and the fire ecology is more intense here than in the eastern part of the state, meaning fires are more catastrophic. Climate is also changing, which creates a higher risk. The protocol is to work with people to help them create resilient spaces on their landscapes.

Byrd spoke about the importance of prevention and investing in these types of programs.

Scanlon asked what kind of policy recommendations they might have for the Council.

Clare Fogelson, City of Bellingham, spoke about the source of two recent wildfires in Bellingham and about the City of Bellingham's work with the Conservation District with properties in the watershed and other residences within the city limits. He stated they would be open to some type of joint contract or at least in making sure that any process or contract with the Conservation District focused on the county would match up to what they are doing in the city. He stated, as far as policy goes, the city has looked at building codes and development restrictions but they are not sure where they are going to go with that.

Donovan asked how this could be scaled up in the Wildland Urban Interface.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Strategic Initiatives Special Programs Manager, stated they will talk to staff in Public Works and with the City and get back to Council with ideas.

Galloway stated exploring potential opportunities for joint contracts and scaling up these efforts in vulnerable communities in Whatcom County seems like an incredible investment.

Sweeney stated Whatcom County does not currently have a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) which could allow FEMA funds, for example, to come to the community in the event of a catastrophe.

Galloway asked whether there is any work in progress on updating our hazard mitigation plan in conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan to

incorporate wildfire resilience, and Scanlon stated he would be interested in whether there are any State or Federal funding opportunities for getting something like that done.

Sweeney stated funding opportunities have been available and they can focus on scoping what that might look like this next year.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2024-140](#) Resolution authorizing Whatcom County Conservation Easement Program Administrator and Whatcom County Executive to proceed with the acquisition of a conservation easement on the Jacoby application

Paul Schissler, Conservation Easement Program Oversight Committee member, spoke about new members appointed to the committee, new County staff, and funding for a second person. He stated they are not making progress fast enough and the Conservation Futures revenue is not enough. The program has done a good job of finding matching funds, but they need to scale it up and try to do more land protection with non-local money (ideally).

Lauren Templeton, Planning and Development Services Department, read from a presentation (on file) giving an update of the Conservation Easement Program, its recent acquisitions, a program summary, the ranked applicant list, and the proposed resolution to proceed with the acquisition of one easement.

Donovan moved that the Resolution be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

Templeton answered whether we have sufficient funds in the Conservation Futures Fund account and stated we do. She answered what we get annually from the Conservation Futures Fund, and how many development rights we have removed. She stated we have removed 208.

Elenbaas spoke about the use of tax dollars to remove places where people could live, and making sure we accommodate for that when planning for densities in the future. He cautioned that future generations might be able to use the value of a development right to secure funding to run a farm, but removing the development right might destroy the ability to farm that land in the future.

Galloway asked whether they are coordinating these conservation efforts with the Comprehensive Plan as we are thinking about growth, and Templeton stated not currently.

Donovan asked where Conservation Futures Funds are going for other conservation purposes besides farmland development rights preservation, and Templeton stated they are being used within other Whatcom County programs and departments. They still only used funds for approximately 100 acres of forestry land, so it is not a huge amount of the fund cost.

Schissler stated it would be helpful to review the uses of the Conservation Futures Fund over the last three to five years because there is quite a variety of projects and that is stretching the money pretty thin.

Galloway stated we authorized the use of banked capacity for this fund, and statutorily, we are not collecting the most that we can, so there may be interest for Council to think about this as a revenue source for these conservation programs to keep working farms and forests from being developed. She believes that it would require a ballot measure if they were to take the Revised Code of Washington (RCW)-allotted rates.

Donovan's motion that the Resolution be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Donovan, Galloway, and Stremmler

Nay: 0

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:48

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Kaylee Galloway-via email 2/23/2024

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Committee Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

SIGNED COPY ON FILE