

Minutes of Whatcom County EDI Board Meeting

Hybrid Meeting

June 11, 2024 – 2:30 pm

Board Members present at Meeting:

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive	Guy Occhiogrosso, Chamber of Commerce
Kayla Schott Bresler, Deputy Executive	Kim Lund, City of Bellingham Mayor
Atul Deshmane, PUD#1 Commissioner	Stephen A. Jones, Agricultural Industry
Scott Korthis, City of Lynden Mayor	Aubrey Stargell, Timber Industry
Ken Bell, POB Commissioner	Kevin Hester, City of Nooksack Mayor
Tyler Schroeder, POB EDI Director	

Board Members absent:

David Franklin, At-Large	Barry Buchanan, Whatcom County Council
VACANT, Fishing Industry Representative	

Staff present: Billie Sue Rinn, County Executive Office

Guests present:

Chris Heimgartner, PUD	Jori Burnett, City of Ferndale
Kevin Renz, City of Ferndale	Danielle Ingham, City of Ferndale
Eric Johnston, City of Bellingham	Todd Donovan, representing Whatcom County Council

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Sidhu welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 2:32 pm. 11 board members present, meeting the quorum requirement. Introductions were made and guests were acknowledged and welcomed.

Review of Public Utilities Improvement/EDI fund

Ms. Schott Bresler gave a brief overview and summary of the EDI fund. There is currently a substantial fund balance which is being spent down. Fund balance is appearing larger due to unspent revenue from the triage center, decrease in issuance of loans/grants due to the pandemic, and increased revenues, which may be leveling off. Chair Sidhu stated the intent is to grow the fund and there is a preference for loan requests as the loan repayments attribute to a larger fund balance. Program applications have been heavy on the grant requests over the past few years. Program refresh discussions will happen concurrently to application meetings. **Full board program refresh meetings will be scheduled for late July/early August.**

Review of EDI Program Application from City of Bellingham (Bear Creek Corridor)

Mayor Lund and Eric Johnson explained they are seeking a \$1 Million grant to complete work on the first of two wetland banks the City of Bellingham started working on years ago. The City of Bellingham has already invested \$3 Million into this project. This funding request is for the first of two wetland bank locations and would consist of 15 credits. The intent is to have wetland bank credits from this project ready to sell in 2026/2027 which would be available to all agencies within Whatcom County. Mr. Johnson explained that wetland bank credits can be sold in whole or partial credits and that the cost of the credits can be set by the City based on the current market. The money earned from the sale of these credits would be used to perform maintenance and preserve functionality of this first location, as well as potentially fund/add future credits. In total there will be 80 development credits from all wetland bank projects.

Many board members voiced their support for this project and Mayor Korthuis moved to recommend for approval. Commissioner Bell seconded the motion and a **vote was had and passed unanimously.**

Review of EDI Program Application from City of Lynden (project: Wastewater Treatment Plant Capacity Improvements)

Mayor Korthuis stated the City of Lynden is requesting \$2 Million in funding, one third loan/two thirds grant, to update the sewage treatment plant to increase capacity in west Lynden. Additional housing was previously added to this area and now industry is also coming including a new hotel, carwash, processing/packaging plants. A larger grant request is necessary in order to pre-purchase equipment to keep this project with its existing timeline. Additionally, another 250 acres is being annexed, including industrial land.

Commissioner Bell questioned why this was an EDI request and not a responsibility of the City of Lynden to fund. Mayor Korthuis explained there is no grant money available for these types of projects, just loans.

Mr. Schroeder recognized there is quite a bit of discussion on industrial land in the county and stated he sees west Lynden as an opportunity.

Commissioner Dushman made a motion to recommend the application for approval. Mayor Hester seconded the motion and **the motion passed unanimously.**

Review of EDI Program Application from City of Ferndale (project: Water Treatment Plant Upgrades & Douglas Deep Well)

Mr. Burnett explained that after successful completion of their sewer treatment plant upgrade, the City of Ferndale is requesting \$3 Million, \$2 Million loan/\$1 Million grant, for this package application which includes both water treatment plant upgrades and a second deep water well.

Mr. Burnett stated the upgrades to the water treatment plant include updated/different infrastructure which is required after moving from river to well water. The upgrade will ensure 100% reverse osmosis. The second project, the Douglas Deep Well, is to construct a second deep well which sits below the Nooksack River's water basin.

As stated, both of these projects have been on the City of Ferndale's list for years, however the associated engineering costs were 40% higher than the estimates. City of Ferndale residents' rates have already increased significantly, currently sitting at the highest in the county.

Mayor Korthuis, speaking in favor of the project, stated that with the current water adjudication it will be good to have a new source of water in our community. Chair Sidhu questioned water rights and Mr. Burnett explained they have been working with the WA State Department of Ecology on water rights for this new aquifer.

Commissioner Bell, speaking in favor of the project, questioned at what point is this a city infrastructure obligation. He requested this discussion occur on a bigger scale to help determine the cross over of these projects.

Commissioner Dushman made a motion to recommend the application for approval. Commissioner Bell seconded the motion and a **vote was had and passed unanimously.**

Future Projects – City of Ferndale, Grandview Road Sewer Extension

Mr. Burnett explained the City of Ferndale's plan to submit an EDI Program Application in 2025 to support the extension of sewer up to the Grandview area. This area is the single largest undeveloped area within the Ferndale City limits. The City will be looking at economic benefit of such an extension and doing a study prior to submitting a formal application.

Chair Sidhu stated the City should justify their ask in their application and Mayor Lund stated she was interested in hearing about the conversations with Lummi Nation on this project.

Mr. Stargell questioned what the zoning in that area would be. Mr. Burnett stated it would be zoned as commercial and unincorporated UGA in the County with the possibility of a few thousand homes on the west side. There is a willingness to change the zoning depending on what the market analysis shows. Mr. Stargell cautioned that there is a significant group against industry here in Whatcom County, with Mr. Burnett reiterating the intent of emphasizing traditional jobs in the county with the opening of the CTE wing at the Ferndale High School. Councilmember Donovan stated both the Whatcom County Council and the Executive have been discussing how to find other industrial areas when looking at the comp plan update and that it isn't anticipated anything will be moving out to Cherry Point.

Budget Request for new HATWF Funding

Ms. Schott Bresler briefly discussed the need for a budget amendment for these relatively small loans in the amount of \$250,000. It was questioned how we ensure the funding is going to workforce housing. Ms. Schott Bresler stated it was contingent on the purchase of a house.

Mayor Lund made a motion to approve the budget amendment request. Commissioner Deshmane seconded the motion and a **vote was had and passed unanimously.**

Determining there was no other business to be discussed, Chair Sidhu adjourned the meeting at 4:04 pm.

NEXT MEETING DATE: July/August 2024

Respectfully Submitted,
Billie Sue Rinn, EDI Board Clerk
Whatcom County Executive Office