

Memorandum

From: John D. Gold, Chair, Whatcom County Forestry Advisory Committee

To: Chair Galloway

Date: January 31, 2025

RE: FAC membership terms

Chair Galloway:

You requested a memo regarding Whatcom Forestry Advisory Committee (FAC) deliberations and resolutions over the past few months with respect to committee membership, charter, and possible revisions to its enabling ordinance (Chapter 2.123). As outgoing Chair, I offer this brief summary for you and Councilmembers.

Background: Because nearly all FAC members have a term which expires in January, 2026, FAC has been concerned with maintaining continuity and full participation. I reached out in November to you, as Chair of the Climate Action and Natural Resources Committee, to discuss restructuring of the Committee whereby the designated seats (per existing ordinance, two each representing small landowners, large landowners, contractors, manufacturers, and Whatcom citizens) have defined terms which are staggered such that only 2 or 3 seats rotate each year and the two seats for each interest group rotate on different intervals. This is in contrast to the current system where four year terms track by individual member rather than by seat. We also discussed clarifying the purposes of FAC to reflect the needs of Council. Subsequently Council staff has worked extensively to propose language to maintain consistency between the FAC enabling ordinance and those of other advisory committees. Staff has also prepared a draft ordinance amending Chapter 2.123 (Version 5, Dated January 31).

Context: FAC was created in 2013, under Ordinance 2013-04 proposed by Councilmember Bill Knutzen. At that time Council “desire(d) the input of forestry landowners and others associated with forestry practices prior to making decisions on major land use proposals...” and believed that “the most efficient way” to get such input was “to form an advisory committee comprised of forest landowners and other industry representatives.” This, of course, followed closely on the heels of arguably the five year long public discussion (and litigation) leading to Council approval of the Lake Whatcom Inter-Trust Transfer and Reconveyance. Some on the Council and many in the forest sector were concerned that their voices, and implications of converting productive resource land into a park, lacked a formal avenue into the public square. Chapter 2.123 created that space for Council to receive such input, regardless of whether it was persuasive to Council in forest policy matters subsequently raised.

The current FAC has had vigorous debate about the fundamental question of whether the Committee should be constituted as representing a broad range of interests or whether it should continue to provide the more narrow perspective of landowners and others employed in the forest sector. I think it is fair to say that a majority of current member believe that the Council would receive more valuable input from a focused group of sector participants than from a “balanced” cross section of members interested in forests and forest policy. A minority of current members strongly believe the contrary and that FAC in a different composition could serve as a cauldron from which consensus recommendations might be formed. Some members expressed that Council has the ability to receive other viewpoints from other focused advisory bodies (such as Climate Impact AC, Conservation Easement OC, Open Space AC, Parks and Recreation Commission, and Wildlife AC) as well as from the 22 member Forest Resilience Task Force.

Membership terms: FAC unanimously passed a resolution supporting the staggering of terms and term expiration dates at its November and December meetings. The current iteration by Council staff is consistent with FACs recommendations.

Councilmember participation: FAC passed a unanimous resolution supporting the addition of a non-voting position to be held by an active Councilmember. The current iteration by Council staff is consistent with FACs recommendations.

Qualifications: FAC passed a unanimous resolution recommending that members have a solid background of technical knowledge and professional experience in the practice of forestry: . In a split vote, FAC recommended that the “small forest landowner” positions need not own forestland in Whatcom County if they are County residents. The current iteration by Council staff is not consistent with FACs recommendations.

New positions: FAC passed a unanimous resolution that the two “harvester” positions be retained because they add value to the committee work. In a split vote, FAC passed a resolution recommending that “climate” positions not be added. FAC issued a resolution (7 in favor-3-1) regarding the Galloway proposal to add ex-officio positions representing tribes, land trusts, conservation districts, and USFS stating that *if* ex-officio positions are to be added that these be non-voting members. The current iteration by Council staff is not consistent with FACs recommendations.

Functions: The current iteration by Council staff contains clarifying language about the topics and scope of work FAC is tasked with, formalizes some of the work FAC has undertaken in the recent past, and anticipates work the FAC might perform once the Forest Resilience Task Force sunsets in 2026. As Chair, I support the addition/amendment of this language. However, the FAC as a whole declined to take a position on these matters following some discussion at its December and January meetings.

Respectfully,



John Gold, Chair