

**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 - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, September 10, 2024

1:15 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING (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

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 1:16 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

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

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

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2024-587](#) Presentation from Conservation Easement Program (CEP) Oversight Committee and Planning & Development Department staff regarding Conservation Easement Program

The following people spoke:

- Alex Harris, Planning and Development Services Department
- Paul Schissler, Conservation Easement Program Oversight Committee Chair

Schissler read from a presentation (on file) on an overview of the Conservation Easement Program (CEP), working forestland easements, addressing farmland access problems, and where they are with funding. He answered questions about whether the working forestland easements would include public access as with an open space designation, and whether a development unit is the same value in forestry as it is in agriculture. He stated the dollar value would be different but there are homes being built in commercial forest land, so they are trying to discourage that with policy and an incentive. He answered whether they ever look into other County plans to determine if they could have conversations with the landowner and the Parks Department (or other agencies) regarding the possibilities for public access. He stated he believes those conversations occur.

He spoke about farmland access and the Buy, Protect, Sell (BPS) model, and CEP program funding. He answered why there is a big spike in protected acres in 2026 (represented on presentation page 7) and whether it includes Stewart Mountain, and stated it accounts for the four easements in forestland but does not include land acquisitions where the County has used Conservation Futures to buy property.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed the fact that the County is

collecting a lower levy rate than what is allowed for the Conservation Futures Fund and that it may be something to explore, how they are making sure that development rights that have been removed are getting factored in to comprehensive planning and land capacity, the fact that development rights in the program are not transferred and that transferring them might be more beneficial for the county's housing crisis, the problem with selling transferred development rights as long as cities are giving development rights away for free, whether there have been audits of the program to determine if it is reaching its intended goals, whether there are any barriers to access in the program that should be removed or advocated for in State or Federal policy, new or other possible revenue sources for the program, whether the "sell" component of the BPS model results in farmers being able to keep agricultural lands working, and how removing development rights affects the ability to get a conventional loan to purchase those parcels.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Committee Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription