

Minutes of Whatcom County EDI Board Meeting

April 16, 2019 – 1:15 p.m.

Board Members present at Meeting:

Jack Louws, County Executive	Tyler Schroeder, Deputy Executive
Kelli Linville, Mayor, City of Bellingham	Scott Korthuis, City of Lynden Mayor
Bobby Briscoe, POB Commissioner	Don Goldberg, Associate Development Org.
Aubrey Stargell, Timber Industry	Stephen A. Jones, Agricultural Industry
Jeff McClure, PUD#1	Bonnie Onyon, City of Blaine Mayor
Guy Occhiogrosso, Chamber of Commerce	Jim Kyle, Fishing Industry

Board Members absent:

Rud Browne, Whatcom County Council	David Franklin, At-Large
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Staff present:

Suzanne Mildner, Board Clerk (Executive Office)

Guests present:

Rob Fix, Port of Bellingham	Duncan McLane, WCFD #11
Joe Noonchester, North Whatcom Fire	Doug Chadwick, WC Sheriff's office
Jeff Parks, WC Sheriff's office	John Gargett, WC Sheriff-DEM
Bill Lee, WCFD #11	Jim Peeples, SWFA/WCFCA
Gina Stark, Port of Bellingham	Dave Ralston, SWFA/FARS
Mel Blankers, WCFD #1	John Billester, Lynden Police
Tony Casalt and Cameron Hatcher, Bellingham Housing Authority	
Paul Schissler, Community Planner	

1. Welcome and Introductions

Board Chair, Executive Jack Louws welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. Round table introductions were made of board members and guests.

2. Approval of Minutes of 11-13-18 EDI Board meeting

Chair Louws asked if there were any amendments to the minutes. There being none, he called for a motion. Stephen Jones moved to approve the 11/13/18 minutes; seconded by Tyler Schroeder. The vote was taken and the **motion carried unanimously 12-0.**

3. EDI Fund Review – Status as of 2/28/19

A review of the Rural Sales Tax/EDI Fund was given as of 2/28/19. Executive Louws briefly went over the revenues, expenditures and commitments noted on the spreadsheet. There are currently cash balances of \$2.2 million for capital/county projects, \$1.4 million for agency loans, and \$4.7 million available for agency grants. \$3.3 million is currently committed to local EDI projects. The fund's revenues remain stable and this fund is in good shape, which means there are sufficient funds to allow for allocation to the two projects being reviewed today, if they are approved.

4. Application: Port of Bellingham project for Rural Broadband Construction

Chair Louws introduced Gina Stark, Economic Development Project Manager from Port of Bellingham, and invited her to address the board. Gina showed a power point and started by saying that the State Legislature has created a rural broadband program that allows jurisdictions to participate and access funding through the State Department of Commerce and CERB (Community Economic Revitalization Board). The Port of Bellingham has taken the initiative, with the support of regional stakeholders (fire districts, school districts, businesses and communities) in pursuing a rural broadband fiber project that will create a carrier grade open

access dark fiber network in Whatcom County. Their outreach results have shown that the need for this is critical. Our communities lacking internet/cell connectivity have limited choices in communications, resulting in public health risks, education disparity and economic disadvantages. The project's strategic goals are for a county-wide network for the betterment of education and public health. There are 3 segments proposed in the long term, with Segment 3 providing connectivity to the Skagit network (Phases 2 and 3 will be pursued later). PSE is a partner and will allow for some limited use of their poles, with lease payments. The current project phase for Segment 1 has an estimated construction cost of \$2.03 million, and the project construction location is the Mt. Baker highway east of Bellingham. Current funding sources are CERB (state) funding, Port of Bellingham (both matching \$ and a loan), and EDI funding.

Chair Louws asked what will happen if the CERB funding does not come through. Ms. Stark assured everyone that she has had direct contact with CERB and she is confident the funding is secured. Mr. Fix reiterated this point and said that the CERB funding is contingent upon the EDI funding being approved. This means both funding sources are reliant upon the other being approved. Ms. Stark was also asked whether the Port will be returning to the EDI Board in future with additional funding requests for Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the project. Ms. Stark said there was no plan or expectation that might occur, and they intend to pursue State funding from the legislature as well as additional CERB funding. It is possible they may seek additional EDI loan funding, but not grant monies.

Mayor Linville made a motion to recommend approval to the County Council for the Port of Bellingham's request for a \$750,000 grant from the EDI Program for this project. The motion was seconded by Stephen Jones. Jim Kyle asked when the construction start date is, and Ms. Stark said they are targeting spring of 2020. Chair Louws said that he supports this project and is grateful to the Port for taking it on. He asked if there was any additional discussion, and there being none he called for a vote on the motion. The vote was taken and the **motion carried unanimously 12-0.**

5. Whatcom County Sheriff application for Integrated Public Safety Radio Project

Executive Louws introduced John Gargett, with Division of Emergency Management, to address the board. John presented a power point which summarized the project. This project was started a couple of years ago and has involved an active Project Steering Committee. The current radio system is outdated and failing. There are no standards and there has never been a coordinator to oversee upgrades, repairs, etc. What is most urgently needed is to hire a Radio System Manager and to coordinate the repair of the repeaters at Lummi Island, Mt. Constitution and Post Point (starting with Mt. Constitution). Other roles of the Manager were reviewed, and Jeff Parks commented about the problems that have arisen in the past due to the fact there has been no central management of the system; a lack of technical expertise and oversight. He also said that Whatcom County is far behind our regional partners in radio communications, and cited some examples. Up to now there has been some grant funding allocated to assist with radio systems (Stonegarden grants), but much more is needed.

Jeff McClure asked if this is a one-time request. Mr. Gargett confirmed that it is. Initially the annual salary cost would be paid 50% by EDI funds and 50% out of the general fund. Going forward it will be paid from general fund dollars.

Mayor Linville said this project is absolutely essential. The use of these dollars for staff is a temporary one-time event to allow staff to get this project off the ground. She asked if there are other fund sources identified moving forward? Chair Louws said that possibly the EMS Program,

with the next levy possibly addressing a portion of the requirement. Mayor Linville supports this project so long as the intention is to seek alternative funding down the line.

Mayor Korthuis also asked if the other fund sources listed in the application are secured. Mr. Gargett said no, not yet. Mr. Goldfogel suggests that the Port and County partner to leverage grant dollars from the county on both projects (broadband and radio). Mr. Gargett agreed, and it makes perfect sense as there is identical fiber mapping on Highway 542 beyond Maple Falls.

Jim Kyle commented that while he agrees this is an important project, it seems the least related to “economic development” that he’s ever seen. Guy Occhiogrosso agreed and went on to say he’s concerned about setting a precedent with approving this type of project. Both Chair Louws and Tyler Schroeder spoke to the issue, citing that the law (RCW) governing this fund has been reviewed by legal staff and because the project involves public infrastructure, it checks out. It may not relate to direct economic development, but the intent of the law is to provide public infrastructure as a base to build upon that encourages economic development and improves public safety in the future. The county’s comprehensive plan also addresses this issue.

Jeff McClure commented that this is a one-time expenditure for the project, and in his opinion without this project, there is a negative impact on future economic development. He supports it. Mr. McClure made a motion to recommend approval to the County Council for grant funding from the EDI Program to the Whatcom County Sheriff in the amount of \$515,000.00, of which \$65,000 will be allocated to the salary of the new position being proposed. The motion was seconded by Guy Occhiogrosso. The vote was taken and **the motion carried unanimously 12-0.**

6. Other business - None

Meeting was adjourned at 2:22 p.m.

NEXT MEETING DATE: TBD

Respectfully Submitted,
Suzanne Mildner,
EDI Board Clerk
Whatcom County Executive Office