

Laurel Watershed Improvement District

Minutes – Regular Meeting – April 8, 2024

Attendees

“(t)” indicates presence via tele-conference, “(p)” indicates proxy vote.

Board – Present	Board – Absent with Notice
Mike Boxx Eric Sundstrom Jon Maberry Leroy Plagerman (t) Rich Appel	

Staff and Consultants	
Name	Organization / Affiliation
Gavin Willis	Ag Water Board
Henry Bierlink	Ag Water Board
Sarah Faubion (t)	AESI
Jay Chennault (t)	AESI
Fred Likkel	Whatcom Family Farmers
Frank Corey (t)	Whatcom Conservation District

Other Guests	
Name	Organization / Affiliation
Chris Elder (t)	Whatcom County Public Works
Alan Chapman (t)	Whatcom Conservation District

Proceedings

Mike called the meeting to order at 10:02 am

1. Consent Agenda

- a. Agenda was reviewed.
- b. Minutes from March 11 meeting were reviewed.
- c. Financial and voucher in the amount of \$4,659.58 was reviewed.
- d. Jon moved to approve the consent agenda. Eric seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

2. Administration

- a. Board members signed a reformatted copy of the previously approved Res. 2024-02.

3. Ag Water Board / Water Supply

- a. Gavin provided an adjudication update. Expect ECY to file the adjudication in late May.
- b. Chris Elder provided an informational update on the County’s goals re: rezoning of farmland.
 - i. What does heightened protection of ag lands look like? Have lost 300 acres in Rural Study Area to Single Family Residential development in the last 15 years. County is considering rezoning R5 and R10 land in farmland to Ag zoning designations to protect it from parcelization and development.

- ii. What sort of compensation could balance out a potential rezone? What is the value for each individual development right? Providing water access in exchange for development rights may also be desirable. Rezoning to AG-20 could remove 2000 development rights from the RSA.
- iii. Board member noted that removing development rights doesn't protect agriculture. Our region is moving in the wrong direction for fiscal sustainability for agriculture. If farming is untenable for economic reasons, landowners would prefer that their land retains as much value as possible.
- iv. County has been paying on average \$46,000 per development right as part of PDR programs. Board member noted that current value of rural development rights is significantly higher than that figure.
- v. Another board member noted that selling off a single development right is more desirable than selling a conservation easement, and also noted appreciation for intent of compensating landowners, rather than forcible downzoning.
- vi. Question from board member on origin on 100,000 acre benchmark. Henry noted that it was an estimate set by County Council and intended to give a goal to shoot for.
- vii. Board member noted that the county currently doesn't have the ability to promise water access in exchange for development rights. Staff noted that a federal Indian water rights settlement may provide a venue for those types of exchanges.

4. Drainage / Habitat / Flood

- a. Fred provided a FLIP update. Frustration on rate of progress seems to have been heard, and things seem to be moving in a positive direction.
 - i. Gavin and Fred also had a good discussion with Nooksack tribal staff on projects in Reach 2.
 - ii. Board member asked if ELJs can be designed to also provide erosion protection on banks.
- b. Frank provided an update on the ditch covering project at Appel Farms. Ditch covering is part of larger Cougar Creek project. Just got the ditch covering design from NRCS. WC R&F is permitting the floodgate etc, Army CoE recommended permitting the ditch covering separately.
 - i. Leroy moved to use the WID permit for the ditch covering project. Jon seconded. Motion carried unanimously.
 - ii. Shooting for late summer/fall to do project.
- c. Buffer program discussion.
 - i. Gavin shared draft letter. Frank should have a flyer ready to accompany the letter soon.
 - ii. Rich moved to send the letter to priority landowners in the WID. Jon seconded. Motion carried unanimously.
 - iii. Henry noted other federal funding that might be available to be more proactive in creating permanent buffer easements.
 - 1. A board member noted that there are a lot of unknowns right now related to that type of program.

5. Water Quality

- a. Cynthia provided a WQ update via email. Counts look good, including improvements at Everson Goshen site, where recent tests were back below 200.
- b. Numbers continue to generally look good across the county.

6. Communications / Education

- a. Close to 400 people attended the water rights info evening.
- b. Might have water rights office hours available as soon as May thanks to funding from county.
 - i. Can get preliminary research done ahead of time if people send in their parcel numbers ahead of time, so that the half hour session is as effective as possible.
 - ii. Waiting on contract approval from the county before moving forward with that.

7. Other Items

- a. Board member mentioned concern of waterfowl. Is there a role for the WIDs to take in help managing?
- b. Gavin provided OPMA training.

8. Next Meeting

- a. Next meeting is scheduled for May 13.

Meeting adjourned at 11:40 am.

Submitted by Gavin Willis, Ag Water Board

Approved by _____

Neil O'Connell