

## **Lummi Island Ferry Advisory Committee (LIFAC)**

February Regular Meeting: 6pm, February 10, 2021 on Zoom platform

### **CALL TO ORDER**

**Rhayma Blake** called the meeting to order at 6:04pm. She welcomed newly appointed committee member **Mike McKenzie**, a Lummi Island resident. (The committee has 5 island residents, the maximum allowable, and 1 off-island representative. One off-island vacancy is open for applications.)

### **ROLL CALL**

*Present:* (Quorum) **Charles Bailey, Rhayma Blake, Mike McKenzie, Judy Olsen.**

Joined in session: **Jim Dickinson, Greg Rice**

*Others Attending:*

*Public Works*—Ferry Sr. Master **Rich Hudson**, Special Programs Mgr. **Roland Middleton**,

*Whatcom County Council Representative*—**Todd Donovan**

*Gallery*— Island residents **Elizabeth Kilanowski, David Kershner, Bill Lee, Mary Ross** (Zoom host), and **Jeff Sikolik** from Bellingham.

### **MOMENT OF SILENCE**

### **OPEN SESSION**

**David Kershner** thanked LIFAC & the County for clarifying information leading to exclusion of needs-based fares in the LIFAC recommendation to County Council for a \$1 ferry-fee surcharge in support of new-ferry funding.

**Jeff Sikolik**, who works at All American Marine in Bellingham, attended by invitation and expressed interest in the vacated off-island LIFAC position.

### **APPROVAL OF JANUARY 2021 MINUTES**

So moved and seconded, motion passed 4-0.

### **LIFAC INTERNAL BUSINESS**

**Election of officers for 2021:** Following individual considerations, **Charles Bailey** moved for acceptance of the full slate of nominations:

**Rhayma Blake** continuing as Chair.

**Charles Bailey** as Vice Chair.

**Mike McKenzie** as Secretary.

**Judy Olsen** seconded. Motion passed, 4-0.

To jump-start a new year's term of the committee, **Rhayma** asked each attendee at the outset to share thoughts on why they volunteer for the committee's mission and what they bring to the initiative. She started by saying that, stemming from her former career in corporate development, she has a keen interest in hearing what people need and to come up with good solutions. She said, "I value having a lot of different perspectives to take into account as we move forward."

**Charles** cited two main reasons: "One, my lifelong concern about public policy and the making thereof. Two, climate change. We need to take advantage of this huge infrastructure investment by the County to go carbon-neutral with the biggest vehicle in its fleet."

**Mike** said, "My main passion is to work with Marie, Liz, Roland, and Richie at County on public information and education, with an obvious concentration on the island. But, also for the county in general and for the Lummi Nation because of the huge impact this has on their neighborhoods and traditions."

**Judy** stated, "I mainly want to continue to help see this new ferry project through and get this job done. And also ask as many questions as I can."

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### *Discussion and forwarding of \$1 Fare Surcharge Recommendation*

An analysis of a Needs-Based Ferry Fares Overview submitted to the committee and County revealed:

- 89 households qualified for these discounted fares in 2020—30 determined by Opportunity Council review of incomes, and 59 based on senior/disabled property tax qualifications determined by the County Assessor's Office.
- This represents a decrease in the Opp-Council grouping from 33 in 2012 (the last time these fares were evaluated), and an increase of 40% in the county-assessed property tax method.
- The total impact of needs-based fares, defined by specific formulas in Whatcom County Code 10.34, affects roughly 20% of island households.

Project manager **Roland Middleton**, after consultation with ferry operations director **Chantelle Hilsinger**, estimated (based on sale of roughly 200-300 needs-based punch cards) the exemption for the \$1 surcharge would cover roughly \$2,000-\$3,000. "That's compared," Roland reported, "to something like \$170,000 collection from regular fares...a very low percentage of total collections."

Based on LIFAC recommendations, Roland would submit a proposal to County Council (March 10) to start collecting the \$1 surcharge. Much discussion ensued over wording of the proposal.

*Most significant:*

(1.) Basic fare structure remains unchanged (“...let’s make that very clear that we’re not touching the fares...”) AND,  
(2.) Specific designation for use of the surcharge. *i.e.:*

- (a.) Collections will go into a separate capital fund for use ONLY with the new ferry purchase;
- (b.) Will have no “sunset” clause, *i.e.*, expiration date. The intent is for Lummi Island residents and visitors to continue to fund all new ferry considerations for an undetermined time.
- (c.) Provides real-time contribution of island residents/property owners and visitors in support of major grant and possible government funding; *i.e.*, gives ferry users “skin in the game” as financial pursuits for the new ferry continue.

**Judy Olsen** raised a question about the discounted fare for post-HS students. The committee voted to exclude that from the surcharge (which would have been nearly a 25% increase compared to roughly 10% on regular fares). Rich estimated anywhere from zero-to-5 of such passes are active and he couldn’t remember even one that sold last year. The committee passed a motion 6-0 to exempt that fare category.

After lengthy discussion, Roland made it clear that he needed action tonight on approving the amended surcharge recommendation. He then could present it to the county’s legal team and have the final draft before the County Council at its first meeting in March, thereby setting up for possible approval at the second Council meeting in March. That would keep everything moving forward toward grant application deadlines this Spring.

Committee approved the document. Knowing that any part of it could change as County legal and County Council look at it, LIFAC asked for one final look at it before it goes to a County Council vote.

*Update on Operations*—**Rich Hudson**, Senior Master, Whatcom Chief

Highlights:

- Theo White passed all of his Coast Guard exams at Captains School, and all of his paperwork for application is in process at the Coast Guard. “That’s been a long road for Theo and we’re really proud of him for being just about done.”
- Dry dock dates: Sept. 11-Oct. 3. “We’ll cast a pretty broad net and get a lot of interest generated in our three-week maintenance period. The Whatcom Chief most likely will be back midday October 3.”  
When asked about talk of moving dry dock to May, Rich said that is under consideration for 2022.
- In addition to the usual dry dock boat and dock maintenance and painting work, there also will be a sandblasting of the Gooseberry Point terminal and a small scope of work for electrical updates for Lummi Island terminal. Sandblasting and painting will take place between Sept. 6-Oct 1.
- PW will build a new breakwater on the Lummi Island dockside between Aug. 1-Oct. 1. It won’t interrupt ferry service, but Rich said “...it’s going to probably be pretty noisy...not like the old days, but a little bit of a nuisance.” In response to a question from Charles, he went into many details about this project, such as steel construction that will greatly decrease waves.
- Structure reinforcement work will take place at Gooseberry Point during September on the shelter and the bridge on the transfer span. Plus, some work will take place on the island-side terminal, including replacement of a navigation beacon.
- A plan is in place to patch and shore up the worn-down asphalt on the transfer span of the island terminal. Then, on the 2022 “wish list” is grinding all of that asphalt down to the wood planking beneath it and putting down new asphalt on top of it. “That would get us through probably another 30 years or so.”
- Roland noted that much more inspection goes into the Gooseberry Point terminal, more than any other County bridge—especially its wind structure. It’s sorely outdated and at some point it’ll become far less expensive to build a new terminal than to retrofit the existing one. And, County continues to work in concert with Lummi Nation on all developments at Gooseberry “...to the mutual benefit of all parties.”

The two main revenue sources remain CRAB and BUILD grants by which County is seeking the bulk of capital funding—about \$30 million. The county application for \$10 million goes through CRAB (County Road Administration Board). County will apply with the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) for the requested \$20M BUILD grant.

CRAB evaluations take place during Summer to submit into legislation the following year. BUILD announcements come in October. Roland said that other sources could surface going forward, especially if the BUILD grant falls short of the request. Example: A transportation infrastructure package proposed by the new Federal administration, or some state sources, etc. He said there would be “no bake sale” (in which he would not participate anyway because he’s on a weight-loss kick 😊) but that a strong, constituent letter-writing campaign would likely become helpful to gain attention and support from both State and U.S. Congress representation.

On another front, Roland said, “I want to mention that we had such great success in the level-of-service that you all worked on for this vessel [*see January minutes on the PW/LIFAC website link*] that Jon Hutchings (Public Works Director) has handed me the task of doing the level-of-service and asset-management program for the entire Department. So, thanks a lot! Seriously, I do appreciate...that the work you've been doing for the last few years is that strong.”

*Update on Request  
for a Sanican at Gooseberry Point—Rich Hudson*

County is balking at the \$8,000 estimate for one year, with pricing driven up by vandalism liabilities. Rich proposed to install the portable toilet on a trial basis, at a cost of perhaps \$2,500 or so, which is not in the budget.

Councilman Todd Donovan pointed out that the County Executive could sign off on that amount without having it go before the council. After much discussion about timing during peak season, Judy suggested that, despite vandalism, the need for this convenience is necessary and that a good window for an evaluation would be from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

Charles Bailey moved that we accept Rich Hudson’s recommendation to fund and place a Sanican at Gooseberry Point from Memorial Day through Labor Day 2021 as a trial period. (It’s already budgeted to be in place during dry dock.) Mike seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

*Update on Local Weather Reporting  
at the Lummi Island Ferry Terminal—Rich Hudson*

As proposed in our January meeting and followed up on by ferry captain **John Mulhern**, *King 5 News* in Seattle declined to assist this initiative. Rich addressed it with Liz Kosa, the assistant director at PW. She agreed to procure a laptop to power the island regional weather station less expensively than *King 5 News* might have provided. Rich will talk to Mulhern, who pioneered the project, and provide him the tools he needs to get that weather station established.

**Elizabeth Kilanowski** in the gallery spoke to the 40-year tradition of keeping weather records from four stations on the island. She asked whether this proposed method would support digitizing the reports at the ferry terminal. Those would go into graphs for the Island Archives. Rich said he didn't know and he would look into it within the budget capacity.

***Open House Presentation  
of Final Concept Design***

At our January meeting, **Public Works Asst. Dir. Liz Kosa** suggested a web-based open house to support Lummi Island public involvement with the new ferry project. It would be modeled after a recent event staged by Public Works at Birch Bay. It featured expert presenters and invited residents into Q&A discussion about details of the Jackson Road Bridge concept.

Rhayma and Judy sat in on the virtual event to observe. Rhayma said she was very impressed, that it was worthwhile because of presentations by several subject matter experts and that they were listening well to participant feedback.

Judy said its success lay in how well it was run, how the moderator stayed on task and moved it along.

Roland spoke of details on how such an event would work well for Lummi Island on the ferry concept, collaborating with consultants KPFF to present specific elements of design. A Q&A session would follow. He reported that 27 participants joined Birch Bay's virtual meeting, and before the meeting 107 turned in a survey about the project.

Re: the timing, Roland said that Public Works staff needs first and foremost to stay on track for April deadlines for funding requests.

Rich said the timing for this community outreach and a public-education program would be best “after the ordinance passed but before we actually Institute that surcharge (late Spring), so people are well-informed about the process and what that surcharge they're paying is going towards.”

Roland said he would likely serve as moderator, and that two others would be needed to operate the event smoothly and efficiently:

- A note-taker for capturing the questions and answers from the audience, and
- A person running the requisite information technology (*e.g.*, muting microphones when appropriate and controlling disruptions, operating slides in visual presentations, etc.).

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

None

Meeting adjourned at 7:57pm