

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

*June 2021 Meeting: 6pm, June 9 on Zoom platform*

### **CALL TO ORDER**

**Rhayma Blake, Chair**, called the meeting to order at 6:02pm

### **ROLL CALL**

(Quorum) **Rhayma Blake; Charles Bailey, Jim Dickinson, Mike McKenzie, Judy Olsen.** (Absent: **Gregory Rice.**)

### **Others Attending:**

*County Council*—**Todd Donovan.**

*Gallery*—**Bill Fox, Tobey King, Mary Ross (Zoom host), and Mike Skehan.**

### **MOMENT OF SILENCE**

### **OPEN SESSION**

**Mike Skehan** re: Sessions about an electric power grid for Lummi Island. Charles (Bailey, LIFAC) covered reliability and why the normal electric grid is no longer good enough. Dave Kershner (LI resident) is getting notes together on sustainability—green energy and balancing acts. Let's see microgrids that foretell the future...that change the way we make, deliver, and use energy. I'm assembling a white paper. (That was made available to LIFAC on July 8 and is attached below.) Searching for target audience— who, where, and how to present in a format useful to Islanders. We would love for an organization to come forward to make this a reality. But we're still in the stage of learning and what works and what doesn't, and how does that apply to Lummi Island.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Moved and accepted minutes of May 14 meeting, 5-0.

### **LIFAC INTERNAL BUSINESS**

Rhayma reported that the County Council office as part of the agenda of the regular at-large County Council meetings will start highlighting volunteer (service) openings available for community members to fill including LIFAC at the first presentation May 20. Rhayma asked Todd Donovan (LIFAC rep on County Council) to give a plug to fill the current vacant spot and help draw several applicants because other terms will expire this year. And she asked how we might get the word out to people who aren't attending or watching the Council meeting live.

Todd said the live video attracts a small audience, but the video is archived on YouTube. He suggested that LIFAC and Council explore possibilities for more external promotion of these openings as a way of reaching out to people concerned about community issues.

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Rhayma Blake suggested as chair that in the near term LIFAC continue monthly meetings on Zoom and she expressed gratitude for islander Mary Ross's availability and willingness to host it. Rhayma said she believes it's easier and possibly gets more islanders involved and easier for Public Works and County Council representatives to join on a consistent basis. She said several people gave her feedback from our last recorded session (by Mary) that islander Bill Fox posted on Next Door Lummi Island and YouTube.

Others preferred resuming in-person meetings pursuant to state regulations re: masking and vaccinations. Jim Dickinson commented that when new business and issues arise, in-person is best because "you can't really learn how to work effectively together remotely. It doesn't have the same chemistry at all." Mike McKenzie stated, "There's nothing better than in person."

Other reasons for opposition to continued Zoom meetings included difficulty in making presentations, particularly graphics, *e.g.*, drawings and pictures on shared screen (which overrides seeing the entirety of the participating group), plus technical issues. Rhayma said that any visuals to share can be emailed to her for pre-loading and screen-sharing. She stated that the July meeting will take place by Zoom and further discussion about the process will be part of the agenda.

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

We didn't have the usual Ferry Operations and Replacement Ferry updates as nobody from Public Works attended. Senior Ferry Master Rich Hudson called to say that he was unexpectedly laid up with a health issue. Project Manager Roland Middleton was on vacation and Public Works Ass't Director Liz Kosa was not available.

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The Sanican was installed at Gooseberry Point and Rich reported by phone that it checked out as clean, free of damage, and "so far, so good."

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Mike McKenzie met with ferry captain John Mulhern about the proposed weather station for Lummi Island. They are researching details about the item that John has recommended and Mike is seeking possibilities for funding (the cost approaches \$10k). Mike said, "Rich and Liz expressed concern about how it would be paid for, and that's where I stepped in to take a shot at funding it if we go that direction."

He reported that one possibility is sponsorship and another is grants. John found two similar weather station/webcam sites as precedent. One is Roche Harbor where a stationary ad for Kenmore Air appears in the upper right-hand corner of the site. Mike called and found out that Kenmore Air sponsors that and other similar sites on an annual contract; they advertise with places they fly to.

Island residents Elizabeth Kilanowski and Mike Skehan each sent LIFAC emails suggesting that we take a look into less-expensive weather station alternatives, including one that costs \$500 that five islanders have purchased on an individual basis.

Mike McKenzie said, “It's apples and oranges...” but that he and John are looking thoroughly into all the options. Elizabeth said she had an experience in the past with the device she wrote to LIFAC about, several years ago at Lake Whatcom, stating that “it was sufficient (for measuring rainfall) and lasted for decades”.

Ferry captains would appreciate having very localized weather input. The station that's on the island now is worn out. “Past its prime,” as John put it. He said it served well but it didn't record data. John looked into alternatives that would last for a very long time and record all kinds of data, accessible in real time from any device by anybody online. He pointed out that it's been basically rainfall measurement over the last 50 years, but this station will record lightning, wind, tide, etc., and would be amazing for our microclimate that's constantly changing and impacts the entire area and, in fact, the entire United States.

Charles asked about the camera option. Mike said that it's an additional cost, but worthwhile for monitoring ferry runs. It would not show the ferry line off the dock landing, but three existing cameras capture the line as far back as The Islander on the website [OurLummiIsland.org](http://OurLummiIsland.org).

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Rhayma said she was jumping ahead on the agenda because County Councilman Todd Donovan had to leave early, and she asked him about the possibility of a Council resolution re: technical aspects of going all-electric sooner vs. later on with the replacement ferry. “That would have County Council on board with that in going to Public Works and asking them to work on that actively now,” Rhayma said, adding it would open up possibilities to take advantage of more grant opportunities.

She also asked Todd if he had thoughts about next steps for LIFAC to take on public awareness of the replacement ferry project.

Todd clarified that Rhayma was suggesting that in addition to the existing pre-design work where we stick with the hybrid, but then we have some design work done for a quicker swap to potential electric. He said he would go forward on both of Rhayma's questions. (A great deal of discussion followed about bringing a power grid to Lummi Island that would sufficiently serve an all-electric replacement ferry, and the grant funding that might be available and would take years to obtain—thus the importance of starting the conversation now with formal backing from County Council.

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The capital surcharge (\$1 on most fares) implementation went smoothly. Mike stated that

proactive public messaging beforehand supported the smooth transition and that “LIFAC should continue the impetus of proactive messaging on basically everything we do.”

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**Other topics:**

- Significant dry dock work in the Public Works’ plans. (Details appear on the ferry website at <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/550/Annual-Dry-Dock>.)
- New ferry deckhands began shifts as needed for standby backup, especially this summer—a tribute to the ferry crew and Public Works to recruit outstanding candidates. **Rich Hudson** reported that the crew “is such a good crew to work with right now and it's a team that people want to be a part of, so that's huge.” With attrition, any of them could move up to full-time “so we've got a deeper bench than we had previously.”
- With budgeting issues, County wants to keep the ferry as full as possible through the summer months and keep it moving as smoothly as possible, so Rich has assigned an extra deckhand on the runs.
- Much further discussion about moving forward on electric power initiatives and various possible alternatives with the replacement ferry and its convertibility.
- **Jim Dickinson stated several concerns** he has with the replacement ferry as currently designed, and he submitted a report of those concerns:
  1. No expectation of more usable shore power as Coal Fired Power-plants are retired. N.W. Power Planning Council predicts a 30% chance of brownouts within 2 years.
  2. New vessel’s hull is not as efficient as older V Hull designs such as that in HIYU and old Steel Electrics, or as modified V Hull design of the Whatcom Chief. Ferry slips have the depth of 12 feet at low water which would allow a deeper hull with larger more efficient propellers.
  3. Proposed Diesel Engines for New Vessel are too small, will be working quite hard resulting in less engine longevity and more frequent rebuilds.
  4. As all energy comes from diesel fuel, the losses in conversion to electricity will use more fuel and result in more pollution. Provide for spaces and adaptability of the new vessel (and) build it without parts that will save money in building and use this until technology catches up, prices decrease, and they will result in less pollution and fuel use.
  5. Covid abruptly changed the ridership patterns, (therefore) the use of public mass transportation is diminishing. Private vehicle use is going up to avoid possible exposure to the coronavirus.
  6. New Vessel needs to be expandable to provide a less-expensive increase of its capacity for future growth. 34-car ferry is needed now.
  7. Island is growing in population. Approximately 300 vested building lots are currently available, plus County is now allowing up to 2 Auxiliary Dwelling Units per lot, where applicable, resulting in 2-4 more people per lot.

**NEW BUSINESS:  
NAME THE FERRY!**

Mike reported on next steps toward a public meeting, as requested by Public Works, to display the new ferry information and to give the ferry a name. “The first big thing I wrote down,” Mike said, “is that we no longer call the naming a contest.” The concern is any implication about or inference that can be drawn that the name would result from any source other than Whatcom County administration. It’s essential to make that clear, and while soliciting public suggestions for a name is excellent for getting people aware and involved, there would be no “winner” in this fun initiative.

Judy and Mike are checking all aspects of vulnerability to us in staging this initiative. Mike will report on it again at the July meeting—when, where, and how the initiative will be announced and the particulars on how it would work. Also, all legalities that might crop up. Example: If we use the County’s website to collect names, what might be the ramifications of that?

Mike said he has compiled a long list of ways to solicit suggestions, both on paper and online, and has identified some prizes that could be considered in the execution of the naming initiative—“about 40 possible prize donations”. The Islander Store and the Island Saturday Market have been mentioned as places to submit names. Mike said his plan includes forming a panel that would narrow the best choices down to submit to County for consideration—perhaps a LIFAC member, 1-2 County Council member(s), the ferry crew, and numerous Public Works and other County admin persons.

The possibility came up of tying the naming initiative to the public meeting requested by Public Works. The biggest upside is the awareness factor of summer-only residents and property owners and other visitors, especially Whatcom County residents.

In conclusion, re: the naming of the ferry, LIFAC is an advisory committee and will in that context merely suggest some names. County officials will make the decision on what to name the ferry.

### **Public Awareness**

Discussion took place, and will continue in more detail at the July meeting, about the nature and purpose of a public meeting to be held this summer on the island.

The component parts in PW staff’s vision for the public presentation:

- Host and presentation
- Date, time, venue
- In-Person
- Handouts

Judy will prepare an article for The Tome; deadline Friday, June 12.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Moved and passed 5-0.

Meeting adjourned 7:35pm