

LUMMI ISLAND FERRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes

Wednesday, October 13, 2021, 6:00 PM

Web platform

CALL TO ORDER

ROLL CALL

LIFAC members: Charles Bailey, Rhayma Blake, Jim Dickinson, Mike McKenzie, Judy Olsen

Whatcom County Public Works: Rich Hudson, Roland Middleton

Whatcom County Council: Todd Donovan

Attendees: Cris Colburn, Mary Ross, Lane & Bruce Coury, Mary Jane Van Hoesen, Bill Lee, Colleen McCrory

MOMENT OF SILENCE

OPEN SESSION

Mary Ross: Requests a rapid deployment option during unscheduled ferry outages. Skagit County (See Attachment #1 at the end of the minutes)

MJ (Mary Jane) Van Hoesen: Requests a meeting with Rich Hudson to share suggestions on ferry maintenance process and planning improvements.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

9/8/21 Regular meeting. Postponed.

LIFAC INTERNAL BUSINESS

1. Upcoming vacancies – Important to reach out, particularly to younger people, for continued diversity of thoughts, opinions, and expertise. Rich commented that ferry crew members could also be considered without it being a conflict of interest. Todd commented that ours is one of the more engaged county committees.
2. Hybrid vs. In-person meeting format – MJ commented that a Zoom option is helpful for those who cannot drive after dark. Mary suggested applying for a LICA grant to pay for renting the Grange for meetings. Charles suggested revisiting the issue again next month. **Charles moved that LIFAC continue to use Zoom for another month or until physical space becomes available and a hybrid option becomes practical. Judy seconded. Jim commented that it is easier to show documents in an in-person format. The motion passed with Jim and Mike opposing.**

OLD BUSINESS

1. Update on Operations (Rich Hudson, Senior Master, Whatcom Chief)

a. Drydock Recap

All the prescribed work called out in the 2021 dry dock contract performed by Foss Shipyard was accomplished. We did add one work item since we were having the rudders off, all the shafts out, and both reduction gears sent off to be rebuilt. We took that opportunity to follow the guidance from the shipyard and have Columbia Sentinel come in to improve the accuracy of alignment for our propulsion shafts.

The ferry is now running smoother than it ever has, eliminating those vibrations that have been plaguing us. The Number 2 engine actually was sitting an entire 3/4 of an inch too low. That was why coming back from dry dock was delayed a bit.

Also, with a goal to be fiscally responsible in how we do our maintenance, we have decided to align ourselves with the Coast Guard scheduled inspections but only haul out every other year instead of every year. We need a Certificate of Inspection (COI) every 5 years with the Coast Guard.

There are safety inspections every year, so there will still be a yearly maintenance period, and every other year the boat will be hauled entirely out of the water with only pier-side maintenance those alternate years. The next pier-side maintenance will be in the spring to get an engine tuneup, etc. Our hatch seals failed one of the Coast Guard's tests, although those hatches have been maintained with silicone, but those hatches must be replaced by June 1, 2022.

We're planning for dry dock next year to occur in May. The length of each dry dock will depend on what is being recommended for maintenance that year. Dry dock should be a week or 10 days long with the ferry back before Memorial Day weekend. For the 2023 dry dock, we may need to replace our main engines, and that takes a lot of time. We reached out to other shipyards and vessel operators to see if there's a cost difference with spring vs. fall dry dock and we've been assured that there isn't.

We also discovered that Drew Schmidt, who owns the Salish Sea and provides our passenger vessel service, would greatly prefer spring over fall just because it's so much easier on his vessel since the weather (wind and waves) is typically much better. And spring doesn't have nearly the impact on safety. Drew has offered us the exact same rate regardless of whether we change to spring but it will be a benefit to him.

Judy commented that during this dry dock there was very little communications coming from the county on the weekend when the delay was happening. Rich said that has been so noted and addressed.

Colleen McCrory commented that she had run a poll on Lummi Island Nextdoor with 248 people responding; 65% preferred a spring dry dock over fall.

Jim commented that he had never seen traffic on the island as bad as during this year's preparation for dry dock in September. The number of people on the island is growing. We may see a bump in fare-box recovery and use of the ferry if it is moved to spring.

b. SaniCan at Gooseberry Point

It got some heavy use during dry dock. There's a budget supplemental request that Randy Rydel is forwarding to the County Council for funds to keep the SaniCan for the duration of this year.

c. Local Weather at the Lummi Island Ferry Terminal

Northwest Clean Air was proposing to donate \$5,000 towards the project assuming they could also have some equipment included as part of the project. Mike commented that the total estimated cost is \$10,000 and he has learned that county legal says Whatcom County can only provide the space and installation, not the equipment. A weather station must be fully funded through a grant. Todd said he is on the Northwest Clean Air board and the \$5,000 was indeed approved. Mike confirmed that John Mulhern is the lead on the project, and Rich will ask John for an update on the project for the next LIFAC meeting.

d. Emergency Outage Planning

Rhayma shared that the public dock project is an initiative referred to in Mary's Public Comment and that it is being addressed by LICA. Rich confirmed that Public Works is pursuing a floating dock that can easily be lowered and retracted for emergencies and vessel maintenance. This is in the plans of the ferry modernization project.

In the meantime, we continue to have a contract with a passenger vessel that can come at a moment's notice. However, takes some time to get the floats into the water. Depending on the tide and the height of the tide we can have passenger vessel service going within about 6-8 hours. You need at least a plus-4 tide height to get those floats into the water at Gooseberry Point.

Charles commented that Mary's comments in Open Session refer to unplanned outages. Rich added that recent outages have been caused by problems with the rudder feedback system. He said that the cabling to those systems has been refreshed, which should correct that. Any single-vehicle ferry system like ours is going to have unplanned outages and breakdowns. How quickly problems get diagnosed dictates the correct response.

Rhayma thanked Rich for his response, but also encouraged Mary and LICA's Public Dock Advisory Committee to find creative approaches to address needs which have surfaced in these unplanned outages. LIFAC will work to be part of positive solutions as they come forward.

Mike asked about vaccination requirements and status of the ferry crew. Rich does not ask the medical history of anybody on the crew but believes 99% of the crew is fully vaccinated. The recent reports of 120 state ferry route stoppages due to vaccination requirements should not be a concern with our county ferry crew's status. Roland commented that the ferry crew is fully staffed, but other parts of Whatcom County Public Works are short-staffed, including engineers, drivers, snow-plow crew, etc. For example, there are just 27 people available for those 52 snow-plow shifts. He suggested we all have supplies ready in anticipation of snow conditions.

Rich excused himself from the rest of the meeting.

2. Update on Replacement Ferry Project (Roland Middleton, Special Programs Mgr.)

a. Status of LIFAC resolution to Council for shore power study

Roland said the Public Works Director and the Whatcom County Deputy Executive requested that Charles meet with the Deputy Executive to [talk about the other efforts that are going on and learn how this study would fit in](#) at a county level regarding [growing electric power needs and climate change](#). Roland has been directed to not take the LIFAC resolution to the County Council [right now, until it can be coordinated with a group of these other things](#). [So the answer is not "no," but let's do this so everything goes together well](#). Roland recommended that Charles meet with Tyler Schroeder.

Todd confirmed that it sounds premature to send it to the [Council before these consultations](#) but offered to be involved. Rhayma also offered to be involved.

Todd confirmed that meetings with the Executive's office have been both in-person and via Zoom. Roland commented that the Garden Room in the Public

Works building is now available for meetings. Roland will let the Executive's office know that Todd will also be involved.

Charles asked Roland to propose some possible meeting times before the next LIFAC meeting. Todd anticipates questions from the County Council about why current shore power is insufficient to run the new ferry as all-electric and why would a micro-grid be only on the Lummi Island side with power not just sent through the existing underwater cables from the mainland. Charles confirmed that those are some of the questions the study that LIFAC proposed in its resolution passed in August is designed to answer.

b. CRAB and RAISE Grants status

Roland reported speaking with Steve Johnson of the CRAB board. Roland has been asked to prepare a brief on our funding request to be used by lobbyists in Olympia. He anticipates sending the grant application in by the second week of November. KPFF is finalizing the application which calls for \$10 million, paid out with \$500,000 every year for 20 years.

The RAISE grant was previously known as a BUILD grant. (See September minutes for a history of these U.S. Dept. of Transportation grants.) The letter islanders signed at the August event at the island's Saturday Market went out to Transportation Secretary Buttigieg and Rep. Del Bene's office, as well as Rep. Larsen's office. Roland tried to contact Rep. Del Bene's office over a 3-week period and took the matter to the County Executive's office for help. Del Bene's office then called Roland saying to send her office the letter again and they will make note of it.

Rep. Larsen's staff member involved with transportation in Washington D.C. called Roland at home. The staff member was aware of the issue and requested a copy of the letter [signed by Islanders](#) to also share with Rep. Larsen and Buttigieg's staff. There is a chance that redistricting might put Lummi Island in Larsen's district, perhaps a reason for his interest in the project. Larsen has invited Buttigieg to visit our area. The hope would be for Buttigieg to make that visit before he makes a decision on the RAISE grants next month. LIFAC [members have also signed and](#) sent a separate letter to Buttigieg [advocating for the RAISE grant and](#) inviting him to visit the island. Two other staff members from Larsen's office have called Roland since then and he has directed them to the info on our website so they are well versed.

Roland is feeling positive about chances for our application being funded. The Association of Counties is also aware of the ask. Roland will be sending the letter

to both U.S. Senators the first part of November so they are aware of “the ask” as well. Mike would like to get a copy of the LIFAC invitation letter to Buttigieg in Larsen’s hands as well and asked for contact info. Roland will get Mike that info on Friday or invited Mike to send him the letter for him to send through channels. Mike confirmed that the original LIFAC letter to Buttigieg was sent Air Mail Special Delivery on October 12. Mike also shared that LICA’s website OurLummiIsland.org has created a dedicated page for all news that LIFAC wants to report. Mike is working to provide a. template letter to U.S. Congressional delegates to be available on the site.

Jim shared that Bill Fox used the Freedom of Information Act to secure information about the Texas State ferries in Galveston. The response included a complete set of drawings. Jim and Bill found that the hull design of the Texas ferries and our proposed replacement ferry are almost identical. Their diesel boat burned 180 gallons a day while working an 18-hour day, about 10 gallons an hour. And their one or two new ferries that were diesel-electric burned 27 gallons an hour, same hull, same design as ours. Jim is very strongly doubting the numbers provided by Elliott Bay Design about our replacement ferry. Rhayma asked if Jim could pull these findings together in a report before the next LIFAC meeting. Jim plans to ask two County Council members to review his findings. Roland confirmed that the information should be shared with Liz Kosa and he will advise her that it is coming. He assured Jim that Liz is not partial to Elliott Bay over other firms.

3. Replacement Ferry Naming Next Steps (Mike McKenzie)

Mike suggests that LIFAC gather suggestions from five sources: us, the public, the ferry crew, Public Works, and the County Council. LIFAC would review and forward their recommendations to the County Council and Executive’s office.

Charles suggested that when we get to a short list that Roland share that informally with Lummi Nation as well. Roland suggested that LIFAC send that final short list to Lena Tso, THPO Cultural Resources and cc: Roland so he can follow up. This would be nation to nation. Mike commented that he has tried to set up a meeting with Lena.

Todd commented that County Council does not typically vote on what we name bridges. Roland replied that the Executive had already said it would be a Council decision.

Charles suggested adding the Beach School as a source. Rhayma encouraged Mike to have another round of public suggestions as well. Roland confirmed there

is no deadline for suggesting a name, but it is a positive step to take as part of Coast Guard certification, etc. Charles encouraged Mike to use the LICA website for the next round of public suggestions. Todd said Mike could send him the request for County Council suggestions although he is reluctant to name things before they are fully funded.

4. Public Awareness

Topic Deadline – October 15

Judy will take the lead on this month's submission.

NEW BUSINESS

Roland shared that Islander Jerry Brown has sent an extensive letter suggesting reconsideration of the ferry fare surcharge and proposes a new formula. Roland will scan and share. Mike said he had seen the letter and suggests Jerry does not have the right context. The surcharge demonstrates that Islanders have “skin in the game” in regards to replacement ferry funding. Roland will scan the letter and forward it for further discussion. Jerry had approached Roland at the August Saturday Market booth.

ADJOURN

7:48

A video of this meeting is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41tBvWYwLYw&t=5s>

Attachment #1

Mary Ross

Presented at LIFAC Meeting 10/12/21

- Whatcom County's current ferry outage plan does not allow for a rapid deployment of a back up passenger only service , Current plan requires lots of \$ and time to install temporary docks for the currently contracted passenger only ferry to be able to transport people back and forth from the mainland to the island. I estimate that the minimum time required to provide back up passenger only service would be close to 24 hours. I need to verify this with our

Captain Rich Hudson. I am going to investigate getting an estimate of the monetary **cost to do this plus cost of passenger vessel contract**

- As a committee assignment I spoke with Captain Rachael Rowe Ferry Operations Division Manager Skagit County Public Works this morning Oct 13, 2021 to gather some information on what their back up vessel deployment time frame was. She said that of course it is variable due to type of outage but their system shoots for a two to three hour time frame before passenger only service is implemented.
- Planned ferry outages for dry dock or monthly inspections are inconvenient but with notice islanders can usually adjust schedules. During Dry dock there is about a 6 hour window with no ferry service at both ends of dry dock where temporary floats are installed, and then removed. During the monthly inspections there is no ferry service for 5 hours from 10 AM to 3PM Usually on a Wednesday but not always. No passenger only service is even considered for a planned outage because our passenger only
- Besides the planned outages as the ferry infrastructure ages in spite of all the scheduled inspections and maintenance shutdowns. There have also been an increasing number of randomly needed shut downs for maintenance on other repairs of the dock mechanisms besides random shut downs for ferry mechanical issues.
- There are costs involved every time the ferry system shuts down for scheduled or unscheduled reasons. The ferry system loses revenue, Islanders have to make alternate arrangements to get to work, to get their children to school or to return to their home afterwards. Appointments for mainland services like Dentists, Doctors, School, Work, Airline Flights, pet care, a theatre or concert or sporting event with non refundable tickets even a meal at a restaurant that you have had reservations for months might be missed.

- Many of these things might be able to be rescheduled but in some cases everyone just loses out and pays penalties for cancellation or changes. When my husband Jim and I were caught in the July 31 outage when I was planning to drive him to the emergency room our anticipated expenses were gas and a car & driver and a pedestrian punch. Plus medical. As it turned out an aid car ride on the other side to the hospital and a taxi ride home from the hospital were a little over \$1,000. I also had 5 guests at my home that afternoon that needed to get back to their Bellingham hotels because they had flights booked out of Sea Tac Sunday morning. Thankfully all of them were able to get off the island in a couple of private boats. For one of them who was mobility impaired climbing down the rock rip rap was not an option. As it was, getting rowed out in a rubber dinghy then onto a moored boat off Isle Aire Beach was quite a challenge. If private boaters acting as good Samaritans had not been available that day the costs of missed flights for those 5 friends would have amounted to around \$2,000 more. I know for a fact that if a private boater had not been able to transport Jim to the other side and we would have had to wait for the ferry to be repaired his urgent need to get to the ER would have escalated to life threatening and probably would have then resulted in helicopter evac.
- The Whatcom County ferry system needs a better back up plan to move all its customers in event of prolonged planned or unplanned outages now and in planning for the future.
- I would like LIFAC to help the county realize and remember that the ferry is not a pleasure boat It is a bridge or lifeline between the mainland and Lummi Island. We need either a better back up plan. Or we need cooperation not adversarial relationship to work together with county and island community to solve this problem.