

**Lummi Island Ferry Advisory Committee (LIFAC)**  
*JANUARY Meeting: 6pm, Jan. 12, 2022 on Zoom platform*

**HIGHLIGHTS OF TONIGHT'S MEETING:**

- From Whatcom County Public Works—**Dry dock** in the Spring...**No federal grant** in 2021 for new ferry...**Ferry crew shuffle**...**Mask up**, passengers!
- From Whatcom County Council—Appointment of 3 **new members to LIFAC** and 2 reappointments.
- From LIFAC—A detailed presentation to the County Executive and a formal recommendation to establish a **Shore Power Study** in planning for and anticipation of an electric-powered new ferry.

**CALL TO ORDER**

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

**ROLL CALL**

**(Quorum) Charles Bailey (Vice-Chair), Rhayma Blake (Chair), Jim Dickinson, Mike McKenzie (Secretary), Judy Olsen.** [Two off-island positions are vacant until Feb. 1, 2022 when new appointees begin 3-year terms.]

**Whatcom County Public Works: Rich Hudson,** Ferry Senior Master

**Whatcom County Council: Todd Donovan,** reappointed as representative to LIFAC and newly-elected Chair of the Council.

**Others Attending:**

**Gallery**—**Cris Colburn** [off-island appointment to return to LIFAC after 1 year off], **Lane Coury, Richard Frye** [newly appointed], **William (Reid) Johnson** [newly appointed], **Chris Immer, Nick Kluge, Todd Lagestee** [newly appointed off-island], **David Parker, Dave Perry, Tom Philpot, Tim Robison, Mary Ross** (Zoom host), **Bill Sager, Steve Thomas, Mary Jane Van Hoesen.**

**MOMENT OF SILENCE**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Charles Bailey submitted December minutes for input, including two attachments:

1. His and Rhayma Blake's report on a LIFAC-recommendation to Whatcom County to conduct a Shore Power Study.
2. Comments by Jim Dickinson about the replacement ferry design objections.

Rich Hudson added a December note: Josh Thompson's name was added to the list of a temporary ferry crew. He is an on-call crew member.

*November and December minutes will be submitted to LIFAC members by Jan. 14 for formal approval by email. (NOTE: In mid-January, both sets of minutes were unanimously approved and submitted for publication on the county website.)*

**LIFAC INTERNAL BUSINESS**

Topics [1. New LIFAC introductions; 2. Determine February meeting process (Zoom or hybrid?); 3. Administration of the LIFAC email list serve.]

Rhayma Blake and Charles Bailey attended their last meeting. Their appointed term—a combined 12 years of service—ends Jan. 31. Each spoke of their appreciation of serving consecutive terms and of the multitude of committee and community members, County Council, Public Works and consultants who they have worked with in creating significant progress on numerous ferry issues.

Items of internal business: Introduction of newly appointed members...determination of site for the February meeting...transferring maintenance of the LIFAC Google Groups email list serve

1. Newly appointed members of LIFAC introduced themselves.

**Todd Lagestee:** Moved to Whatcom County from his hometown Corvallis, Oregon to become a firefighter for the City of Bellingham. Until then, he had served in the U.S. Navy as a nuclear operator on submarines. He said his involvement in union activity and in some local political issues spurred his interest in one of the vacated off-island positions.

**Reid Johnson:** He's a six-year island resident with wife Katie (she works for the LI Heritage Trust) and their two preschool age children. Reid has worked on-island 10 years at the Willows Inn, starting in marketing and now the general manager, moving from Waco, Texas where he graduated from Baylor University. They moved to LI after Katie finished a master's degree at Western Washington. Reid said their work with two high-profile organizations and his up-close involvement with ferry transportation for Willows guests and staff and their families make ferry issues "a very important aspect of our life, so I'm looking forward to helping any way that I can."

**Crispin Colburn.** By reapplying after a required 1-year hiatus, he becomes the senior member in LIFAC service; he previously served a partial term and then consecutive 3-year terms, dating back nearly to the beginning of LIFAC. He pointed out the coincidence of both off-island appointees having Oregon roots, as he's from Portland. After a time in Tacoma, he moved to Whatcom County in 1994 and last year he retired from a lengthy career with Whatcom Transit Authority (WTA). Cris said, "I never imagined in 2012 that I'd be back in 2022 with this committee. We've still got to get a new vessel in service that's what brought me back. I'm not going to be able to relax until that (vessel) is commissioned and in service (and) then finding the path to electrification of that ferry for County goals. Meanwhile, we keep supporting Rich (Hudson) and Public Works in keeping the Whatcom Chief safe and reliable. The Chief is a noble old ferry, but it's time for it to move along."

**Judy Olsen:** A long-time resident and former business owner on the island, she was reappointed for a new 3-year term. Judy has a long career history involved in participating and marketing in the salmon fishing industry, including the last several years for Ferndale-based Vital Choice Organic Seafood. She commented, "It was really a treat to have more applicants than positions. Welcome to the folks who made it on and I look forward to working with you and getting this done. That's really why I'm here—to help see this get done."

**Rich Frye:** After moving to Whatcom County in 1975, Rich and his wife Ann Hayes moved to Lummi Island full-time 20 years later. They operate a home-based wine business. Rich is a U.S. Naval Academy alumnus in engineering ('67) and holds a PhD from the University of Rhode Island in marine resource economics. His background includes assistant professor of environmental studies and a research analyst if the Office of Survey Research & Testing at WWU. Rich said in his application his interest is LIFAC centers on, "Every aspect of ferry operations, schedules, and fares sets broad economic conditions for all activities on the island....effects of ferry policy are critical economic drivers of the quality of life...."

2. A motion by Jim Dickinson to stage the February meeting as a hybrid session, *i.e.*, in-person attendance coupled with a Zoom linkup, didn't carry (2-1, Mike and Judy opposed). A revised motion by Judy Olsen to hold that meeting on the Zoom platform passed (3-0). Rhayma Blake and Charles Bailey, both rotating off the committee on Jan. 31, abstained on both motions.

*The motion that carried for Feb. 9, 6 p.m.: "We keep the meeting on Zoom and we agree to abide by the County-dictated mandates for meetings in public during COVID and follow whatever protocols and guidelines the County sets forth after the February meeting."*

Before the votes on the two motions, lengthy discussion centered on three topics:

- Rhayma reported that groundwork is laid and an informal agreement in place with the Lummi Island Community Assn. (LICA) that it will cover \$15/hr rent for The Grange when LIFAC decides to resume in-person attendance. Contacts are Judy Thomas for The Grange and LICA President Greg Hall. Islander Mary Ross has agreed to continue providing Zoom access.
  - The definition and logistical requirements of a hybrid meeting: Zoom capability for non-attending participants would have to be established at a site (such as the Grange, or space in a County building). It would require a means for board members on Zoom to view documents, whiteboard & power point presentations, and to vote on motions when necessary.  
(Jim has proposed a hybrid meeting the last several months based on the capability for more presentation of docs, charts, and other visual information rather than putting them on the computer screen. Mike has supported that position until the Phase 1 implementation this month.)
  - Both Todd Donovan and Rich Hudson revealed that neither of them would likely attend an in-person meeting, as Whatcom County government just this week returned to Phase 1 of COVID restrictions. Offices are closed to employees and the public until at least Jan. 28, 2022. County Council is meeting remotely by Zoom. Since it's a County committee, all 5 committee members concurred that following the County's lead is best practice until at least March, because of uncertainty about lifting restrictions and not enough time to rush into hybrid meeting arrangements between Jan. 28 and Feb. 9.
3. Judy reported on the status of LIFAC's Google Groups email list serve, previously maintained by former committee member Nancy Ging, who has requested LIFAC to take over that duty. Judy has planned to meet with Nancy about how to change administrators of the list.

Rhayma asked, re: expertise and skill sets, whether somebody is "techie enough" to manage the list. Bill Sager from the gallery (non-committee member) volunteered. Rhayma stated, "It is really a timely thing to wrestle to the ground because the Google Groups list will change a lot, especially with officer changes and adding others to the list who want to automatically get notified of any of our meetings." Bill agreed to meet with Judy to implement the process.

## OLD BUSINESS

1. Update on Operations (Rich Hudson, Senior Master, Whatcom Chief): *A long and thorough report covering many topics.*

Rich introduced himself to new LIFAC members and detailed his role:

- In charge of all ferry operations, which includes the entire crew;
- Ferry ops coordinator (ferry schedule & crew work shifts);
- Management of Public Works inter-department activity;
- Year-round management of resources utilized in maintenance of the vessel and the Lummi Island and Gooseberry Point docks;
- Coordinating all aspects of the annual dry dock.

On behalf of Public Works, he attends LIFAC meetings to present updated info on ferry ops and design of the replacement ferry.

He also announced personnel changes on the ferry crew, spurred by the resignation of Kent Dixon resigned as purser, part-time captain and assistant engineer on the Whatcom Chief crew.

Reorganization of the crew:

- Bryan Thurber, in retirement the last few years, returns as an on-call captain.
- Theo White becomes a full-time deckhand.
- Glen Hoekstra becomes a full-time purser.

Rich reported that he schedules three full-time crew members on board for both the early and late shifts. The crew roster consists of:

- **Three full-time captains**—Rich, Gary Poole and John Mulhern;
- **Three full-time pursers**—Glen Hoekstra, Tom Phillips and Janet Rupp;
- **Three full time deckhands**—Doug Cash, Serena Dabney and Theo White;
- **Three full-time relief deckhands**— Gabe Bredy, Greg Davis, and one selected from the **on-call staff**
- **Nine non-benefit employees**—Mike Hammes, Annie Justice, Bob McCaslin, Kelsey McLane, Dan Ohms, Mark Richardson, Morgan Schermer, Josh Thomason and Bryan Thurber.

**ANNUAL MAINTENANCE (aka, dry dock):** His biggest news is that dry dock—actually a pier-side maintenance—will take place in May this year instead of September and last just 15 days maximum. This is in coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard to meet a specified maintenance mandate regarding midship hatches that are in unacceptable condition. He said, “The time period might shrink, but it won’t get longer.” Rich said the contracted passenger-only ferry will operate and they’ll possibly install a temporary ramp on the island side.

*(Rich stated that the long-range plan is to have full-on dry dock in May every year starting in 2023.)*

Rich explained: “The Coast Guard said there’s no way they would let us go a full year (from September 2021 dry dock) with those hatches in their condition and gave us a June 1 deadline to replace them.”

The 2022 outage is scheduled May 6-21. Rich gave day-to-day details of a 3 ½-month public process which started Jan. 6. and leads up to the outage, *e.g.*, Consulting on desired to-do list of maintenance to be performed, legally required bid requests and then contracts for the work, arrangements for the passenger vessel and temporary passenger-loading needs, and more. The

process culminates April 20 upon submission of signed contracts to County Finance Dept.  
**[DOCUMENT 1 ATTACHED]**

Rich cited as positive reasons for staging dry dock in May:

- Better weather and tide conditions.
- Therefore, better conditions for the smaller, passenger-only ferry w/ less chance of unscheduled halting of service.
- Less negative effect on ridership numbers out of peak season.

Jim asked whether the County would ever move toward having all dockside maintenance performed in Bellingham?

Rich replied, "That is definitely something Elizabeth (Kosa, the assistant director of Public Works) and I are working towards. We didn't have the time for this year's. We've reached out to the different shipyards and asked about contracting in Bellingham and we've gotten a positive response." He pointed out that time limitations prevented that for this year and next year when the Coast Guard requirement for total inspection is due, which means coming up out on the dock. "But it could very well be in 2024."

Charles asked Rich for an update on what Charles characterizes as "elder care for an aging ferry," specifically in terms of progress on issues that arose shortly after dry dock in September 2021. (Charles referred attendees to read minutes of Oct-Nov-Dec meetings that detail those issues.) Summarizing Charles' line of questioning, it sought projections of life span and replacement of engines, and seeking reassurances of continued reliable ferry service while moving toward a replacement ferry.

Rich responded: "In the last 5 to 6 years we've basically replaced pretty much every major system on the Whatcom Chief. A ferry boat is basically a hull. Everything that goes in it is just equipment. So, we've taken almost all of the old equipment out and replaced it so that the Chief can continue to provide the service that it that we all rely on."

He then described a very lengthy, very detailed litany of specific examples, such as:

- Technological advancements in steering mechanism and rudder feedback systems, including having backups if they go out as they did last fall.
- Having two new engines in reserve, for quick replacement if ever necessary.
- (In May) Injector replacement, tune-up of all engines and generators.

"We plan to replace the rudder feedback units every year. And we're putting forth a plan to the Marine Safety Center in Washington, D.C. to allow us a backup steering system so that if our primary steering system fails, we can flip a switch and continue service uninterrupted."

**WEATHER IMPACT:** During what Rich termed "really horrible weather" over the last month, the Whatcom Chief didn't experience any total suspensions of service. Service was noticeably slower when as much as 6" inches of snow and compacted ice covered the deck, and the chill factor dropped as low as 11 degrees below zero. The crews remove those elements to ensure safe travel.

One unusual problem arose with freezing of vegetable oil used on overwater hydraulic systems. (That practice is a "strong recommendation" of the Environmental Protection Agency to prevent oil leaks and cleanup expenses.) Rich said, "The oil just didn't hold up in minus-11 wind chill and ferry service became really slow. At one point the crew was

unable for a short time to use the aprons during loading and unloading. But that's the only really tough thing that we experienced."

Rich also revealed details of a Dec. 15 maintenance outage to fix a hydraulic problem on the Gooseberry Point apron, and announced that crew member Dan Ohms, a credentialed paramedic on the Lummi Island Fire District 11 team, trained ferry crew staff in first aid.

**COVID SAFETY:** The County's new directive—Phase 1 protocols—does not affect the ferry schedule. The Whatcom Chief deck crew is masked and operating "very mindful" of safety and health factors. Passenger cabins require masking. Rich asked that passengers in vehicles wear masks during any direct contact with crew members, such as fare collection. He pointed out the difficulties in staffing, and therefore service, that could arise if COVID ran through the ferry crew. Rich outlined the County's protocols: If even one symptom, or testing positive, a person can't come to work for 5 days and re-testing negative. And if negative but still have any symptom that person can't come back.

And on a final note, Rich asked that ferry riders please wear masks in the passenger cabin and any time you interact with ferry crew. County has reinstated Phase I of COVID-19 response, closed all its offices, and required employees to mask up when dealing with the public. COVID-related staff shortages would complicate crew scheduling and perhaps even disrupt the schedule of ferry runs.

**RAISE & CRAB GRANT STATUS:**

LIFAC received word from the County in December that the Public Works/County Council application for a \$20 million federal grant was not selected by U.S. Transportation Department and Secretary Pete Buttigieg. PW's special projects manager, Roland Middleton prior to the decision informed the committee that if the proposal didn't go through, County is committed to reapply this year for the 2023 distribution. And to continue seeking other avenues to fund the building of a replacement ferry.

On behalf of Public Works, Rich reported that the grant proposal submitted to the County Road Administration Board (CRAB) is on the docket for consideration by the state legislature when it convenes Jan. 12. Mike is creating a letter-writing campaign to local representatives in the state House and Senate for posting on the LICA website: [www.OurLummiIsland.org](http://www.OurLummiIsland.org)

Rich said Roland sent word that "everything is on track and if there's a dollar bill out there somewhere Roland is pushing the rock over to find it for a new ferry."

CRAB funds exist for distribution among the state's counties for transportation infrastructure. Whatcom County has applied for \$10 million, which would pay out at a rate of \$500,000 a year for 20 years.

**WEATHER STATION:** Rich reported that Northwest Clean Air Agency of Whatcom County has agreed to reimburse Public Works for the purchase of a \$10,000 weather station selected from research by ferry captain John Mulhern. Todd Donovan, who is LIFAC's representative from the County Council, sits on the board of directors of Northwest Clean Air Agency and has lent support for this important funding.

Public Works committed to providing any space access and power needed to operate the weather station. It will not pay for an \$850 annual service and maintenance fee. The

manufacturer/installer covers any necessary “health and wellness” checks on the equipment and technical support of its data collection and online distribution system.

Rich said he and Mike are “both going to get out and beat the bushes to see if we can find someone willing to provide that \$850-a-year service contract. Mike looked into a possible grant from Lummi Island Community Association, but its by-laws stipulate that its annual grants go only to island non-profits.

The weather station will be installed either (a.) above the LI ferry terminal office, or (b.) atop the blue bridge structure.

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**NEW-FERRY NAMING:** The initiative to reopen suggestions from the public is on hold for the time being, pending outcome of legislative decisions about CRAB grant distribution.

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### **1. EMERGENCY PLANNING UPDATE**

**And**

### **2. SHORE POWER STUDY UPDATE**

Chris Immer, who is Lummi Island Chapel pastor and who has transported stranded individuals in his private boat during service outages, and Mary Ross (our Zoom host and a LICA Board member) have spearheaded an island initiative called the Public Dock Advisory Committee. Chris is Chair, and Mary is liaison from the Lummi Island Community Association (LICA) Board.

The committee is working with Whatcom County Parks & Recreation toward building a public docking area on the island. Chris presented a detailed Power Point account of the steps taken so far. The 11-person volunteer committee has scheduled a “Town Hall Zoom Meeting” for Feb. 6 at 7pm. To register and participate go to: [OurLummiIsland.org](http://OurLummiIsland.org), link to Community and sign up at Event. **[DOCUMENT 2 ATTACHED]**

1. LIFAC Vice-Chair Charles Bailey made a detailed recap of a Jan. 5, 2022 meeting that he and LIFAC Chair Rhayma Blake held with County Executive Satpal Sidhu, Assistant County Executive Tyler Schroeder, and Councilman Donovan who arranged it. Charles distributed the Power Point presentation made on LIFAC’s behalf and he displayed a letter drafted by LIFAC to Executive Sidhu at his request.

It proposes that the County conduct a Shore Power Study in support of the County’s near-future, carbon-free objectives and LIFAC’s vision for making its ferry replacement all-electric. The letter, approved by LIFAC consent, was dated Jan. 13, 2022.

### **[Motion to accept the letter passed 5-0. DOCUMENTS 3 (POWER POINT) and 4 (LETTER TO EXEC. SIDHU) ATTACHED]**

Charles and Rhayma presented background context. This initiative arose from a July 2021 Public Works report on fuel consumption of the ferry and the contracted design group’s projections of fuel consumption by the proposed new ferry. What followed:

- The Council’s Climate Action Plan revealed that the Whatcom Chief is the largest carbon greenhouse-gas emitter in the County vehicle fleet.
- Revelation that the proposed new boat, operating in either diesel or hybrid mode, would emit even more greenhouse gases—which led to the

resolution LIFAC passed in its August 2021 meeting calling for a study of shore power possibilities.

- County Council in a November 9, 2021 session approved the Climate Action Plan that included a target of an 85% reduction in greenhouse-gas emission by 2030.
- Determination that neither the Lummi Island nor the Gooseberry Point dock has sufficient power sources (“the plug”) to connect an electric ferry to the shore power.

Among Charles’s observations of the Jan. 5 meeting w/ County officials: “I was particularly struck with how much our County Executive knew about the ferry—both the big picture and the details. He said, ‘Definitely we want an electric ferry....it's a matter of money and available shore power. Let's find out. Let's get the facts about the shore power.’” LIFAC was asked to formalize the request (displayed letter) to move forward on funding the study.

Councilman Donovan indicated a willingness to get it into the budget process, which starts with the executive bringing a request to the Council. He said Executive Satpal appears supportive for a budget supplemental request. Hence, the letter from LIFAC is addressed to the County Executive rather than the Council. “Fingers crossed,” Todd said. Next step would be seeking a consultant to conduct the study.

Jim Dickinson raised concerns based on a comparison he researched on a similar vessel in the state of Texas’s ferry inventory. (The history of that very specific research, *e.g.*, amount of fuel consumed, *et al*, is attached to the December 2021 minutes.) Among his conclusions: “Don't put the electrical in it. Get a more efficient hull (in design). And when the time comes to put it in and we have the (shore power) feed, then go ahead and put it in. Otherwise, you'll spend a heck of a lot of fuel and money...an estimated \$2 a trip additional in this fuel burner....plus a horrendous amount of carbon and other pollution.”

Rich said that he and Elizabeth Kosa will meet with Jim to address all the questions he has raised about hull design and other design concerns he’s expressed over the last several months’ of LIFAC meetings.

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### **PUBLIC AWARENESS**

Mike will draft an article, with input from committee members, for The Tome (deadline Jan. 14), the Lummi Island newsletter sent electronically to hundreds of islanders and others and to every island address when printed.

Mike also is creating a public letter-writing campaign template for raising awareness of the CRAB grant application with state legislators representing Whatcom County and Lummi Island.

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### **COMMENTS FROM ATTENDEES**

Second-term committee member Judy Olsen said a “massive thanks” to the works and teamwork of departing members Rhayma and Charles, echoed by several others in the Zoom room both from active members on the committee and in the Zoom gallery.

Rhayma (and others) said a thanks to the three new committee members in attendance. “We had an embarrassment of riches in people applying to be on this, which is an

amazing thing about LIFAC,” Rhayma said, also thanking those who applied and not selected.

*From the gallery:* **Mary Jane Van Hoesen** expressed concerns about the proposed public dock but supported getting one, and she welcomed a proposed new weather station, citing problems that arose with the old existing one that is unreliable.

**Stephen Thomas** introduced himself as an islander of 45 years whose career spans designer, builder, contractor, and project manager for numerous places, stating in part, “One (project) was with Alpha Technologies in Bellingham, where I was installing communication power systems around the country. I was thinking of some ideas.”

One addresses the limited parking during the 2-to-3 weeks of dry dock on the mainland. Steven presented a mapped-out plan for a temporary parking zone utilizing the County right-of-way, Haxton Road, and Finkbonner and Ruth Streets.

His other suggestion, considering the recent flooding and future flooding of the Lummi Nation, states that it is in the best interest of Lummi island and the Lummi Nation to file jointly for funding a viable new ferry that would include service to Bellingham when necessary. He submitted printed comments on the two topics: **(DOCUMENT 5 ATTACHED)**.

**Bill Sager**, stating that he’s a new islander of about two years and has been attending LIFAC meetings for the last four months, expressed how interesting he found the County Council process in their meeting the night before when new LIFAC appointees were selected. “I want to formally offer all of my services that I can to assist LIFAC. I have over 35 years of technology experience.”

He commended Mary Ross for hosting the Zoom meetings and raised a concern: “I’ve learned much about hybrid meetings through business and my companies; please don’t underestimate how hard that problem is to solve....to provide the access that we’ve come to enjoy with the remote viewing and participation.”

He referred to a comment by Councilman Donovan, the new chair on the Council, saying they haven’t figured it out either. Bill said he understands the desire of some members to do things face-to-face...“but it’s something that you have to experiment with....”

**Mike Skehan** said he shares Jim’s skepticism of fuel numbers that really need to be looked at. And he spoke of the importance of climate change in making ferry replacement decisions. “I hope the new committee formulation will take this seriously and address it.” He favored the LIFAC letter to the County Executive and “studies that answer questions....”

Other comments included making the Gooseberry dock large enough to handle one of the state’s 64-car ferries at high tide if trips to Bellingham Bay become necessary, citing such trips routinely in the 1990s that were “absolutely miserable...and the new ferry they’ve designed—I don’t think it would handle the abuse of that run; it’ll be pounding all the way over.” Mike said the opportunity “wouldn’t be that big of a stretch to make the Gooseberry dock 65 feet wide” for possible use in winter conditions by one of the state boats that are tied up, idle.

**MEETING ADJOURNED, 7:45 p.m.**

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