

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

September 2021 Meeting: 6pm, Sept. 8 on Zoom platform

### **CALL TO ORDER**

**Charles Bailey** called the meeting to order at 6pm.

**GUESTS ATTENDING:** Lane & Bruce Coury, Mary Ross, Mary Jane Van Hoesen

### **ROLL CALL**

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

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

### **MOMENT OF SILENCE**

### **OPEN SESSION**

Mary Jane Van Hoesen withheld comment on the recent steering failure on the Whatcom Chief because Sr. Master Rich Hudson had not yet joined the meeting. She raised questions about the safety and maintenance facets of ferry operations, stating that she will meet with Rich Hudson personally. Roland, Mike and Charles reassured her that safety is the No. 1 talking point in the letter-writing/calling campaign to the state's elected delegates and Sec. Buttigieg.

### **APPROVAL OF AUGUST 2021 MINUTES**

So moved and seconded, motion passed 5-0.

### **LIFAC INTERNAL BUSINESS**

Charles invited comment on holding the October meeting by ZOOM or staging a hybrid meeting open to in-person attendance and available via Zoom. Consensus (3-2) wait until the COVID information and protocols are clearer before either hybrid or just an open meeting. This will be addressed month-to-month.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

**Update on replacement ferry project** (Roland Middleton, Public Works Special Programs Manager)

1. ***Re: Status of the LIFAC recommendation to County Council for a shore-power study resolution:*** Roland said he'd talked with PWD Director Jon Hutchings, and had been asked to hold off on discussing the shore power study because of PWD's current workload and time constraints. LIFAC should wait at least until after the November election. Roland suggested it might even be better to have the new County Council in January or February consider the resolution. "LIFAC

has the option of working with Jill or Dana (County Council support persons) and taking the matter forward through Todd Donovan, LIFAC's liaison on the Council, and moving it forward outside of Public Works' involvement."

Charles noted that while LIFAC works in concert with PW, it is an advisory committee to the Council.

2. **CRAB and BUILD Grant status:** The RAISE Grant has moved forward. The letter with almost 200 signatures collected at the Lummi Island Saturday Market is ready to go to Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. Roland called Congresswoman Suzan DelBene's office to ask if she would deliver the letter to him, "...better than just having it sent off in the mail." If she's unresponsive Roland will call Congressman Rick Larsen and ask him to do it on behalf of his former District 1 constituency (which includes Lummi Island). "Rick still stays in contact with us about island issues, even though they're no longer in his district."

Mike pointed out that in District 2 Larsen still represents a considerable Whatcom County constituency that is impacted by the ferry, including Bellingham.

Roland added that many Lummi Islanders work in Rep. Larsen's district "and he's well aware of that...and with the census (possible redistricting) Lummi Island could be shifted back into his district."

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Secretary Buttigieg is expected to make RAISE grant decisions in November.

***(Read attachment #1 for details about RAISE grants.)***

Rhayma asked Roland for clarification on whether the RAISE Grant is part of the federal package in headline news (infrastructure bill).

Roland clarified that it is not; it's already in the base budget of the Department of Transportation. "It's above and beyond all of that infrastructure package where they can play politics and ping-pong back and forth for the next six months. That will not affect our ability to move forward."

He said County already is looking ahead to possible funding from the infrastructure grants. "We're looking through the 1,800-and-some pages of that bill to see where we fit." Roland pointed out it's not an all-eggs-in-one-basket approach and County will continue pursuing other funding possibilities. "There's more money to be had and this ferry improvement project has all of the background that shows need--straight up, ready to go."

Rhayma asked whether it would be helpful or appropriate for LIFAC members to reach out to Rep. DelBene individually. Roland said, "Absolutely, extremely helpful....the more people north of Bothell who call and remind her that collectively the community and Public Works need her participation could only help." Roland recommended calling and

asking her to set a meeting with Sec. Buttigieg to get the (petition) letter to him. Plus, starting a letter campaign to Congressional delegates to reach out to him by mid-November when he has the applications in front of him. Roland added, “The ferry is your lifeline.”

Mike suggested other methods to contact them, too: telephone and social media. Sen. Maria Cantwell’s site has links to “Share Your Thoughts,” “Assistance Needed,” “Constituent Coffee,” and “Scheduling Request.” Mike said, “So we can go that far with (our outreach).”

Roland responded, “Murray is very good. She’s very familiar with the area and Lummi Island, so don’t forget the *whole* delegation, right?”

County officials inferred that the federal grant applied for last year (*then entitled BUILD, see attachment 1*) Roland said, “...In reading between the lines, it was a political decision to deny it rather than a decision based on need....We’re moving forward with confidence.”

Mike listed seven names for letter/telephone campaigns— four in the U.S. Congress (Murray, Cantwell, Larsen & DelBene) and three in the State Legislature (Ericksen, Shewmake, Rule)—and asked whether to engage state legislators re: the CRAB Grant? Roland stated: “Yes, but there’s plenty of time for that because the application isn’t due until the end of the year.”

Roland explained that the CRAB Grant is an established fund that the County seeks to tap into for \$10 million—*i.e.*, \$500,000/year for 20 years. They have completed all prep work, and the application will be submitted soon for the CRAB Board to move it forward to the state legislature in 2022.

“We’d want everyone then to contact the elected officials and ask them to make sure they include this line item in the state budget. KPFF (consultant firm) is working on early drafts. Essentially, it’s the RAISE Grant application modified because we’ve had such great feedback with it and, quite frankly, all the reviewers are so impressed with the level-of-service work that you (LIFAC) did that it’s difficult to say no.”

***(Read attachment #2 for details about CRAB grants.)***

Roland left the meeting, with the comment: “Thanks, everybody. I’m going back to my vacation....”

#### **UPDATE ON FERRY OPERATIONS** (Rich Hudson, Senior Master, Whatcom Chief)

1. ***Re: the steering failure outage of Friday, August 27.*** He detailed the differences in the current, relatively new digital steering system vs. the previous analog system that controls rudder feedback:

- The old system affected each rudder independently;
- The digital system affects both when one goes awry.

***(Read attachment #3 for Rich's full, detailed account of the Aug. 27 outage.)***

Rich was reassuring in citing that all repairs and installations this time around, including a back-up system, would be long-lasting. He concluded, "The new boat is going to do even one better. It's going to have full back-up steering on both ends."

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2. ***SaniCan:*** It's "working well...Staying fairly clean and not being vandalized. People like it." The cost, including hand sanitizer and twice-a-week cleaning, is "a pretty good deal"--about \$390 a month, just under \$5,000 a year." Following a trial period from Memorial Day through Labor Day weekend and dry dock, the portable SaniCan will remain in place.
3. ***Financial report:*** Ridership and fare box recovery appear to be increasing. "But we won't know until all the data gets crunched (in November)." The data includes many variables, such as punch card sales, punch cards used and unused, the surcharge, credit card fees deducted, effects of COVID restrictions on traffic (especially trucks) "when everything came to a halt....all these things played a role. We will get some better optics on it come November."
4. ***Local weather station at the Lummi Island Ferry Terminal:***  
John Mulhern and Mike McKenzie have been working on this. Mark Buford at Northwest Clean Air Agency (its executive director) expressed interest in donating up to \$5,000 provided, however, that we install some air monitoring equipment (costs unknown). It is a nonprofit serving Whatcom, Island, and Skagit Counties. Our County Council LIFAC representative, Todd Donovan, serves on the agency's Advisory Council.

***[A nonprofit created by the 1967 federal Clean Air Act, the NW agency serves Whatcom County as well as Island and Skagit Counties. [Read attachment #4 for full details about this agency.]***

Mike reported on his conversation (*as a volunteer island resident, not representing LIFAC*) with Liz Kosa at Public Works about funding from "sponsor" organizations. e.g., A local air service pays to sponsor, among others, Roche Harbor's weather station report on its website. After checking with the county's legal team, Liz determined that sponsorship is prohibited; however, donations are OK.

Jim spoke of a local farmers' co-op that has a weather station that the island might look into. He said, "It doesn't seem to be very expensive, but I don't know how good it is."

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***Planning for future emergency outage planning (long, multi-faceted, insightful dialogue):***

Rich reported on a better way to facilitate passenger ferry service in the event of a ferry loss of service. Protracted outages are being factored into the build for the new ferry and have been added to the Public Works task list. Consulting firm KPFF is on board, as are the designers for the ferry terminals.

Rich said, "I spoke with James Lee (engineer in Public Works) about what it would look like if we wanted to try to tackle that issue before [the new ferry begins service]. He said it's obviously not possible [because] all of our capital funds for ongoing dock work right now are obligated. But it has started a really great internal conversation that we'll continue to work on about when it's going to happen and what the design is going to look like. There's a lot to be discussed."

Charles asked if it would be a permanent floating dock within the terminal complex, a simpler quicker method for swapping in the foot passenger ferry during emergencies and when the new ferry goes to drydock.

Rich responded affirmatively, most likely [a floating dock] at both terminal facilities. He described the possibility of something that is raised and could be lowered or folded down into the water, thus easily accessible to the County's contracted passenger vessel.

Mike asked about the County's legal obligation in situations like the one on Aug. 27.

- Rich: "There is no written law or obligation. The obligation is to provide the ferry service." He mentioned EMS service, kids going to Beach School, people needing to get to their jobs and medical appointments. Time of day, day of the week, weather, and estimated down time of the ferry all factor into decision-making on emergency outages.

He said that an unwritten understanding is that they've got about 24 hours—a very rare occasion—and reiterated, "There's no letter of the law to follow other than our obligation to provide the service." County has retained a contracted passenger vessel service that, he said, "We can call and say 'Hey, we need you here like right now' and they're obligated to come.

- Rich described the complexities of that scenario with a plan to get the replacement foot passenger ferry service, in one way or another, up and running as soon as possible. "We'd have to weigh and measure the risk vs. reward for everybody if it looks like we can get the ferry fixed in under 24 hours. And let's say it's a Saturday night. Well, then we've got to call everybody back from Public Works on overtime to get the crane ready; to look at the tides; to bring back the bridge crew and the mechanics, and staff up. Then we'd have to launch the floats just like we do for dry dock and get them all set in place. And then the passenger vessel shows up

and begins service. In a situation like that, we're also probably limping the Whatcom Chief to Bellingham or getting it towed by a tugboat."

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### ***DRY DOCK PREPARATIONS***

The conversation transitioned to the fact that the island would have no passenger or vehicle ferry at all from the morning of September 11 (the start of dry dock) until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. That was determined by tide restrictions factoring in with the time and manpower required to get floats in the water and set up safely. All of which, Rich pointed out, "equates to a lot of dollars....So we're looking for a way we can better plan for that in the future."

Jim spoke of a telephone conversation with a friend, Capt. Dave Major, about a possible supplemental backup with his boat that books activities for groups such as tailgater cruises before a football game. Jim reported that he said it could very well be available even though Dave is transitioning to new ownership. Jim said, "I think we need to look at that, because I'm seeing absolute jam-up around dry dock, getting worse and I don't think it's going to change. We don't have time this year, but in another year it might be something really good to look at."

Rich responded: "I am glad you brought up the long lines, Jim. I'm super proud to report on the crew that's on day shift this week something they're going to be doing all week. They made an internal commitment that they would run continuously. This morning they went to work and, starting at 5:40, did 15 trips back-to-back. So that's 30 trips across the water and they took one 15-minute lunch break and about a 5-minute restroom break. Full out, and the line was still really long. At some point. It doesn't matter if you just run the boat totally full-out continuously, especially this time of year, there's still going to be a line."

He added that reports from the ferry line is that no one waited for more than three ferries at the very worst part of the day.

Judy asked Rich to take a request for consideration to Public Works to look at changing their policy for ferry schedules for some time periods prior to dry dock. She proposed a formal policy "for either one week or two weeks or 10 days prior to dry dock that we up the ferry schedule to accommodate ferry ridership and businesses that struggle to come out here to do work and get off the island. I watched some of these poor contractors sit in lines for hours and hours and we all know that cost them a lot of money."

She also proposed additional runs on Wednesday mornings of the monthly ferry maintenance outage when large lines back up. "I think that in those two instances we should look at increasing the ferry schedule to mitigate those line backups."

Jim agreed, saying the ferry is running nearly a full duty cycle now.

Rich said the idea has merit, though an increased level of service also provides an increased stress on the budget. “Also, during the times mentioned, the lines get backed up on both sides. When that's happening, we can only do about two trips an hour.”

He offered “a word of caution” that there could be more significant unintended consequences. County is obligated to meet a union contract and increasing the schedule would require extra ferry operators. “There’s a lot to consider when bringing an extra crew to provide further trips.”

He suggested taking note of the commitment the ferry crew has over-and-above what they’re contracted to do by their bargaining unit. “If that increase is going to get looked at because there's a dissatisfaction of a level of service when it gets busy, that means we would start scrutinizing all of the round-trips all year round and start maybe going right by the letter of the law of the bargaining unit. “That might not be good for us.” He added that he’s happy to help if LIFAC wants to move forward on the idea.

Jim raised a point that the Whatcom Chief is operating at full duty cycle now. “It's an old boat. We're on the verge of exceeding the duty cycle. That’s why I brought the idea of maybe a second replacement or an augmentation boat to help with the duty cycle. Traffic isn’t going to decrease.”

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*COVID Preparedness:* County worked with the Lummi Island Health & Welfare Committee and local and state health organizations to determine policies on the passenger ferry. Many differences were drawn up compared to 2020. The regulations are the same as any other transportation in the state:

One factor was providing essential air flow with open doors. No sneeze barriers on the tables or in the shuttle van help with that, as well as HEPA filter on board the boat. Hand-sanitizing stations remain on the dock and ramps. Masks required, and provided if needed on the passenger vessel and the van.

No limiting of passengers below the allowable 55 maximum (it was limited to 34 last year) because there’s no social distancing mandate applicable. With ridership up, Rich said a goal is to move riders efficiently and avoid congregating on the dock and in construction environments.

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### ***Will dry dock move to Spring?***

Judy mentioned that this came up several LIFAC meetings ago—staging dry dock in May as it was many years ago.

Richie updated that notion: “That's still my intent.” He mentioned a retirement of a key dry dock facilitator October 16 but shouldn’t cause “too much of a hiccup...my answer is

yes, it's something that I'm going to bring up with the assistant director and the director very soon".

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Jim asked whether after the last two years of going "hammer and tongs" in the dock work during dry dock, would it taper off going forward?

Rich responded that all the steel work and all painting projects at both terminals would be done this year and next summer Public Works is planning to install the breakwater on Lummi Island.

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### **PUBLIC AWARENESS**

Mike agreed to write an article for the Tome (deadline Sept. 10) and the LICA website, with assistance from Judy and Charles. The articles will focus on reports by Roland and Rich and the upcoming letter campaign aimed at specific U.S. and State elected officials and Sec. Buttigieg.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Jim told the committee that he'd been in touch with member Greg Rice, who has been absent for most of the year because of personal health matters. Jim said Greg told him he hoped to get back, but at the moment he is unable. "I'm really sad about that," Jim said, "because I really like Greg, he's quite a good person."

The committee members expressed concern, good wishes, and a welcome-back message for Jim to pass along to Greg.

### **ADJOURNMENT:**

Moved, seconded, passed. 7:32pm

*View the entire LIFAC September meeting online [here on YouTube.com](#).*

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### **FOUR ATTACHMENTS TO SEPTEMBER 2021 LIFAC MEETING MINUTES**

1. RAISE grants
2. Details of CRAB
3. Rich Hudson report
4. Clean Air Agency

### **LIFAC September Minutes—Attachment #1**

## **The Federal RAISE Grant Program**

Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg revealed this year that \$1 billion is available for RAISE grants (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity).

The program has distributed nearly \$9 billion since its inception in 2010 as the TIGER grant (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery).

In 2018 it was renamed the BUILD grant (Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development).

These 3 website links offer all details about the history and current state of this federal program:

<https://www.transportation.gov/RAISEgrants>

<https://www.transportation.gov/RAISEgrants/about>

<https://www.transportation.gov/RAISEgrants/2021-raise-application-faqs>

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## **LIFAC September Minutes—Attachment #2**

### **Rich Hudson report on the Aug. 27 ferry outage:**

*Rich Hudson's detailed report on 7-hour unplanned ferry outage is excerpted from the video recording of the meeting (edited only for length, not context):*

"I got phone call around 2-2:10pm from Capt. Kent Dixon that upon approach he'd lost the No. 1 end rudder—the end that faces LI. He said it was non-responsive, "goes hard over and can't move it." (The Whatcom Chief) Sails usually to the starboard.

I called our engineer, Gary Poole, who came down. We looked at everything, ran diagnostics, and it started working. We loaded and started to transport to Gooseberry Point side. At which time, the No. 1 end rudder failed again; no steerage makes it tricky to handle. Capt. Kent made a safe landing and we unloaded traffic. That's when he called me. We were hoping for best (in repairing) and that's when went out of service the first time.

We called regular channels—Marie (Duckworth), our information officer to get messaging out. We reached our Public Works mechanics to get help on the way. Also engineer Poole and assistant engineer Dixon contacted our Hamilton Jet rep, our

technician who handles our steering system and found he actually was on a camping trip with his family. He gave Kent and Gary exactly step-by-step what to do to diagnose.

The PW mechanic showed up and ran diagnostics. Steering started working again. He signaled we're good to go (thumb up). We loaded and left for Lummi Island. Then, on approach both rudders failed over hard. We got into dock by Dixon going into the engine room and manually forcing the hydraulics to handle the way we needed to get in. Game over.

Called Marie again to get latest word out. Got a hold of Hamilton Jet sales person who was on vacation in Hawaii. He sounded an alarm to get an HJ tech on-site with spare parts and his gear. A marine mechanical technician/electrical tech—a resident on island who has his own business (in Bellingham)—agreed to an emergency contract with us went down to ferry.

Poole assisted him in changing a rudder feedback unit (on No. 1 end), the electrical device that commands and relays info from the steering wheel. Got back to Gary to meet the HJ tech. They changed out the other rudder feedback unit (which had gone bad). We got back up and running about 11:15pm.

Typically, we always carry one rudder feedback unit in reserve. With our old (analog) system, those two ends don't talk to each other. In our new digital system (installed during dry dock 2019), the rudders do talk to each other. No. 1 was not installed well and had failed, which polluted the other one on No. 2.

In response, we've added the (island) gentleman with his own business—who wishes to remain anonymous for now—to work for us under contract whenever needed, primarily emergencies. We purchased two new rudder feedback units, so we now have those on hand.

When we receive an invoice for work that night, the techs also will provide a list of recommendations that we can implement in dry dock to insure doesn't happen again.

**Re: INSTALLING FLOATS AT TERMINALS**—A conversation has been going on for a while. There's a lot to be gained from it. In planning, all internal conversations the last few months in preparation for bringing on the new vessel and terminals. Even if we had a way to launch and put floats in water, it would not be available to personal vessels unless they were under contract with Public Works. And, unless they had a 100-ton or six-pack license and were insured to carry passengers.

That would be handy if we had floats and could find way to make it work. Our passenger vessel that we have on contract, we have him on an emergency standby. He could simply rush to the island.

With the Whatcom Chief sitting, here's how that would look: OK, the ferry is broken 4 hours, get a tugboat (to tow the Chief) to Bellingham, (put emergency, temporary docks in place), get the passenger vessel up here and start taking people back and forth. Perhaps. That all comes at a great cost. They can get here really quick and provide service. An unplanned outage, longer than anticipated, when do call it quits and launch floats, that all takes about 12 hours to get up and running, depending on tides.

And liability comes into question.

We want to ensure that if (an unplanned outage) recurs—and the goal is never—it doesn't take as long. We've added an emergency marine contract with a super-talented expert who lives on island, retained as a consultant if we need him in an emergency. He will provide a list of recommendations we can implement during dry dock.

Also, with the two rudder feedback units we bought we'll always have those critical spare parts on hand on the boat. And, we've incorporated into Gary Poole's assignment that every three weeks he inspects everything, changes oil and filters, and added a few things to his inspection sheets.

**Additional comments from Rich:** The last time we had a steering problem, after two technicians worked on it and got it to work, we all thought it would hold up and it didn't. Now, I don't see any more problems on the horizon for a long time to come.

We're also working on plans to later this year install a backup steering system as well as maybe do some things in those steering spaces to help those rudder feedback units survive that harsh environment that they're in.

In an analog system, the rudder feedback units were in those spaces that are not conducive to having electronics in there, you know. It was my understanding when we upgraded to the digital system that those rudder feedback units were essentially waterproof. The literature that I read and some videos I watched showed them functioning with no problem while totally submerged in water.

Well, the issue we've come to determine is that, oh gosh, the boxes themselves are aluminum, the screws that hold the cover plates on are stainless, stainless eats aluminum in that environment. It's just degrading the threads and making them not waterproof so we're working on all that.

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**LIFAC September Minutes—Attachment #3**

**Northwest Clean Air Agency**

Established in each state by the federal Clean Air Act of 1967, the agencies operate as nonprofits funded in various ways, such as institutions they serve directly. The Northwest CAA headquarters in Mount Vernon. *Its website states, "We are responsible for protecting the air in Island, Whatcom, and Skagit counties (and) enforcing federal, state and local air quality regulations...."*

Staffed for 22 positions in various departments and the administration (4), they are accountable to a Board of Directors comprising, by state law, local government representatives and one at-large member. Councilman Todd Donovan represents Whatcom County on the Board.

The Advisory Board of 10 consults with the board on air pollution control. Half of the positions are held by Whatcom Countians: Steven Crockett, Kathryn Hanowell, Mary Harris, Sandy Paris, and former County Councilman Carl Weimer.

All details about the NW Clean Air Agency can be found here:  
<https://nwcleanairwa.gov/about-us/#board>

#### **LIFAC September Minutes—Attachment #4**

##### **Roland Middleton explains the CRAB Grant:**

The County Road Administration Board is in charge of the road fund for everyone in unincorporated Whatcom County. Taxes go into this road fund and it is what pays for the upkeep of all of the road transportation system in our unincorporated areas.

All counties go through CRAB, and we all divvy up the funds back-and-forth on the amount of money that comes back our way. There's special funds set up for the ferry counties—us, Skagit, and Pierce—who operate their own ferry system.

When there are special requests, which is what ours is, the board goes to the state legislature and say that we've had a call for projects and we received this project from Whatcom County.

They're in line there, ready to go, and we're recommending you approve their application for this grant. Then the legislature votes on it and approves it, so it's already part of the road fund. It's already part of our program in the unincorporated county

It's not like of the RAISE federal grant. It's not like any other kind of grant. It's very specific. And it's also the reason why we're very confident it's almost a rubber stamp; we just need to go through all the processes and get it all approved. We're dotting our l's, crossing our t's and dotting our small j's.