

**Climate Impact Advisory Committee**  
Approved Meeting Minutes



Date: September 5th, 2019  
Location: RE Store, 2309 Meridian St, Bellingham

| QUORUM              |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Members Present     |   |
| Seth Fleetwood      | X |
| Casey Harman        | X |
| Tim Miller          | X |
| Treva Coe           | X |
| Eric Grossman       | X |
| Ellyn Murphy        | X |
| John Yakawich       | X |
| Sharon Shewmake     | X |
| David Kershner      | X |
| Gabriel Westergreen |   |
| Alex Ramel          | X |
| STAFF Chris Elder   | X |

**Meeting Began at 5:38 PM**

Meeting began with introductions. Alex moved to approved the minutes, approved.

**Public Comment**

Meeting began with public comments:

Wendy Harris spoke first. She was very concerned about the Wildlife impacts from wind energy. She expressed concern about the difficulty to know what the wildlife impacts are due to a wind site because there are a number of different wind energy types. She also pointed out there are no current baseline standards – for example, mapped migration corridors. It is difficult to determine affects of an installation on wildlife if there is no current baseline data.

She requested that the committee ask the county to complete a baseline study of wildlife in the county.

Eddy Ury then welcomed everyone to the Sustainable Living Center and went over some housekeeping items.

**Community Research Project Update**

Ellyn presented a summary of the community research project. She mentioned her appreciation for the leads who provided all the work. The presentation is provided on the county website.

Questions:

Alex had a question on safety and preparedness: Other utilities are doing microgrids, doesn't PSE have some microgrid installation? PSE installed a backup battery system in Glacier. A microgrid should be able to "island" itself when the main grid goes down.

Wendy asked whether the documents and presentation be a public document, Ellyn replied that Chris will put the presentation on the website.

David asked whether we know where in the county the streams are gaining or losing. Ellyn pointed out that its complicated and even changes with the season. WWU has done testing on this subject, and there is also work being done on the Columbia at the Pacific Northwest National Lab for the Columbia River Treaty.

David commented that it would likely be useful to know in order to determine land use.

Farmers are investigating whether to add water to streams during the summer.

Ellyn mentioned that experts still say there is limited knowledge in the Eastern Whatcom County hydrogeology.

Satpal Sidhu commented that there are only about 40 miles of the Nooksack River once the three forks exit their steep mountain watersheds and combine near Deming. During heavy rainfall, river water reaches the ocean in about 4-5 hours. When riverbank storage is exceeded during these rainfall events, surrounding farmland is flooded.

Wendy asked whether the researchers came across hydrology classifications, such as was done at Birch Bay. She also read reports regarding the Lake Whatcom Watershed and has issues with limited topsoil.

Ellyn pointed out that a major issue is the outdated water laws. Those need to be changed. Ellyn mentioned that this issue comes out in the report, but in order to make those changes you need data, which is why several of the strategies suggested in the report promote county-led demonstration projects.

Alex pointed out that water policy can take a lot of time. The committee has a climate change mandate and water is part of the issue, but there are other committees that work on water issues. We have to be careful on how much time we spend on water policy.

Chris informed the committee that the consultant will provide input on climate impacts on water issues so it is likely that this committee will provide recommendations to council and to other advisory committees, but this is new territory. CIAC's mandate from the County Council includes developing climate adaptation strategies and water is and will be one of the greatest challenges facing the county under climate change. Seth noted that water issues may need to be solved at the

state level, but Ellyn said that the county can have a strong influence on water regulations, but needs actual data from demonstration projects to support necessary changes in state water law.

John had a question on the Figure on the Forestry Slide - what was the small print? Ellyn replied that it was an excerpt from the ICLEI study. The forests in Whatcom County remove 4M tons of CO<sub>2</sub>/yr and store 400M tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. Commercial forests in the county primarily produce lumber, which further stores the carbon for multiple decades in buildings and durable wood products (e.g., furniture, not paper).

### **Wind Energy Systems and Permitting in Whatcom County Follow up discussion**

Alex updated the committee on the Wind Energy System permitting. The subcommittee met once and included comments from the CIAC. The committee broke down each requirement and created action items to move forward. Chris sent a list of questions out to the MRSC (Municipal Research and Services Center) to determine what other counties are doing. Currently the subcommittee is continuing research including meeting with different planning commission members. Incidentally good feedback was received from the planning commission on the process going forward. The subcommittee has a lot of homework and will meet again. The process will take at least a couple more months based on how much research needs to be done.

David asked whether there is any interest from developers in developing wind turbines in Whatcom County. Alex responded that based on the PSE presentation the CIAC listened to, Western Washington windfarms have a better match of generation relative to load, so there could be more interest in Whatcom County from developers.

Alex responded to Wendy's concern and reiterated that under SMP you are supposed to show no net loss of ecological function on riparian areas and shorelines, but there is no baseline. The natural resource committee is supposed to come back with consultants soon, and now would be a good time to send a letter encouraging the county to perform an ecological baseline.

Chris mentioned that if we have a better understanding of an ecological baseline condition throughout the county, you could more effectively see or predict the impacts of new development such as a wind farm. A baseline would not replace the need for a wind farm developer to perform a site-specific ecological study, but could help make certain sites obviously off the table. Eric noted that some of the work he will be doing will require baseline studies.

Alex wondered whether a letter is this time critical, and Chris replied that now is the time to make the recommendation since council will be looking at this very soon with the comments back to the consultant.

Treva introduced a motion to draft a letter to council to encourage the establishment of base line studies that incorporate considerations for carbon sequestration and ecological function that support ecological resilience. Motion was approved.

### **Coastal Storm Modeling – COSMOS**

Eric gave a presentation on the Puget Sound Coastal Storm Modeling System (PS-CoSMoS)

### **Update on Climate Action Plan Consultant**

Chris informed the committee that the County selected Cascadia Consulting Group. The contract should be approved at the September Council Meeting.

Alex asked what is Whatcom's participation in the PS-CoSMoS? Both Eric and Chris did not know exactly. Treva asked whether the committee could write a letter in support – Chris replied that the motion had already been passed to write a letter of support, but the committee did not follow through on that motion.

Seth closed with asking Eric what will Whatcom County look like in 50 years on the shoreline? Eric replied that it was not dire, but we could have changes coming.

### **Old/New Business**

The consultant will be here at the next meeting.

**Meeting Adjourned at 7:40 PM.**

Recorded by Casey Harman

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