

PLIC General Meeting Minutes

October 29, 2014 –The Grange Hall

PLIC President Rhayma Blake called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and welcomed the approximately 33 attendees.

School Update - Beach School Manager Kathy Thurber provided an overview of the young Beach School students commuting from the mainland on the island. She has been using her break times and free passage privileges to chaperone the children. The school district has offered to provide background checks and scheduling for volunteer parents and has requested free passage for the chaperone. Kathy clarified that the new bus driver position would not be accompanying the students on the ferry. A draft of the fare proposal LIFAC is preparing to send to the County Council supports revising the fare ordinance to provide this free passage for one adult twice every school day. Kathy also confirmed that the policy that has parents of 6th graders younger than 12 sign waivers to ride the ferry needs no modification.

Long-range Planning Subcommittee Update – Rich Frye, member of the LIFAC Long-range Planning Subcommittee, invited all who are interested to sign up to share likes, dislikes, and stories of their relationship with the ferry as part of the subcommittee’s planning process. Rich is looking for the broadest participation possible, and most interaction will be by email. The process is expected to take 6-9 months.

Technical Subcommittee Update – Jim Dickinson, chairman of LIFAC’s Technical Subcommittee, reported that he anticipates that Washington State will soon declare their smallest ferry Hiyu surplus. Although it is only 5 years newer than the Whatcom Chief, it has only a fourth of the stop and start cycles on its engine, can carry 34 cars, could easily handle a run to Fairhaven if necessary, and uses about the same amount of fuel as the Chief. Jim estimates there is about 15 years of life in the Hiyu. It has been well maintained but would need an ADA house on the ground level. The state last painted the Hiyu in 2006. Currently, it would “squeak” into the Lummi Island dock, but would require the Gooseberry Point dock to be widened. It could complete two runs per hour compared to the Chief’s three runs. Jim’s committee is evaluating costs involved if the county might consider purchasing it. When asked, Jim thought the Plattsburgh would have met the island’s needs better than the Hiyu. After their analysis of the Hiyu, the subcommittee will evaluate the Whatcom Chief. And finally, visualize what a new ferry might be.

Fare Proposal – LIFAC is preparing a proposal that modifies ferry fares in three categories:

- 1) \$81 for a 25-ride round-trip ticket for passengers
- 2) \$163 for a 25-ride for vehicle and driver
- 3) \$78 for a 10-ride for vehicle and driver

Copies of LIFAC’s newest discussion points were made available with some of the points highlighted, especially the point that this change would be short-term in nature.

Rhayma presented a brief history of the surcharge imposed in 2011 and the task force that was created as a result. Ridership has dropped from levels before the surcharge, but revenues exceed expenses, the ferry fund has been more than replenished, and 2014 ridership is up over the previous year to date.

In the discussion that followed, everyone was in favor of a modification and reduction in fares. Other comments were:

- No suggestions that the single-ride fares should be changed.
- There were however comments that all multi-ride categories need relief, not just the three fare categories specified.
- By the very nature of the \$3 surcharge, all of the lowest fares were hit hardest by the surcharge, especially passengers who experienced a 187% increase in fares. At the same time needs-based passengers were hit even harder with a 441% increase. The impact on needs-based vehicle/drivers was also twice as high as on the regular multi-ride vehicle/drivers.
- The island is losing its diversity and needs-based riders should see relief as well in order to counteract this trend.
- The previous request for the addition of a 10-ride needs-based fare for passengers has yet to be addressed. The current 25-ride needs-based fare of \$92 is sometimes out of reach for those who need it most.
- It is questionable that the County Council will pass a proposal that is so irregular and inconsistent with senior/disabled/needs-based fares being higher than other multi-ride fares.
- The model anticipates an increase in the ticket sales for medium and larger trucks in 2015 as part of its revenue projections. It was questioned whether this was a reasonable assumption.
- It was asked whether the proposal could be delayed until more thought and public process is put into it.
- We want to be able to say we stand behind LIFAC and we can't do that yet. More public process should be included before going forward with this proposal.
- We want to send County Council a "smart" proposal, and this doesn't look like that yet.
- Will people want to stock up on "cheap" cards, knowing prices will increase? Islanders depend on the ferry and need to know what to expect. Radical swings in fares from year to year create a sense of uncertainty.
- LIFAC is indicating that they will review the impact of these lower fares within the year. When fares were significantly reduced back in the 80's, it took much longer to see the effect on ridership. If there is a significant fare reduction like this, shouldn't it be in place for longer than one year?
- But LIFAC is required to submit an annual fare recommendation.

Attendees were asked for a show of hands whether the proposal should proceed as is or be modified. Only two indicated that it should proceed as is.

Mike Kmiecik, Treasurer, reported that PLIC currently has \$2,926.45.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Rhayma Blake
Secretary