



PLIC Town Hall Meeting Summary

April 12th, 2018

On April 12th, 2018 about 50 members from the Lummi Island and Gooseberry Point communities met at the Lummi Island Beach School to discuss the Whatcom County Ferry System Replacement Project. The purpose of the discussion was to review and comment on the March 14th, 2018 presentation by KPFF Group, a consultant team assisting the Lummi Island Ferry Advisory Committee (LIFAC) and the County, where information was presented about progress made so far on the Ferry System Replacement Project. Materials presented at the March 14th meeting hosted by LIFAC can be found here: <http://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/33310>.

Based on the information at the March 14th meeting, PLIC developed four White Papers on the topics presented: background and historical information; projected population growth and its impact on ferry travel demand; capacity: how big of a boat do we need; and the future Gooseberry Dock Relocation. These papers can be found at www.plicferry.org.

At the April 12th PLIC Town Hall meeting, PLIC President Stu Rich emphasized that we are trying to make sure that community input is taken and passed along to LIFAC and the County at every stage of the project process. Since 2009, there have been over 100 public meetings about the ferry. Stu stated that while we have been discussing this for a while, this particular planning process has a deadline of June 2018 in order to get recommended improvements in the County budget and allow us to proceed to the next phase which is design and environmental. While that sounds like the end of the process, this is the beginning of the planning process and there is still much to be discussed and determined.

After a brief introduction of the topics by Stu and PLIC Secretary Mike Skehan, the community commented on three topic areas: projected population growth and its impact on ferry travel demand; capacity: how big of a boat do we need; and the future Gooseberry Dock Relocation. The discussion is summarized below by topic area.

Topic 1: Population Growth

The following questions guided the discussion: Is a 1% growth in population a reasonable estimate going forward for the next 60 years? What factors do we need to consider about future growth on Lummi Island? How will advances in technology (i.e., vehicles, work, tourism, other) impact growth?

- It seems like ridership is actually decreasing. Mike S. stated that it has actually been rebounding the last 10 years from a high point around 2001 or 2002.
- Are other things considered in the ridership projections in addition to population like special events and summertime peaks?
- We need to consider Whatcom County growth, not just Lummi Island.
- Local realtors should be contacted about future potential population growth. Is there land for sale? This is not Whatcom County and we can only spread out so much and while all the homes are closer to full time occupancy now, if there isn't housing stock, then where would people live?
- Have changing demographics been considered?
- There are really two classes of level of service: off-season and peak season. Has that been considered?
- Beach School has been keeping track of the number of students at the school for several decades and the number of students peak in 20 year cycles. That data shows that we are about halfway through a low student population cycle. This data could be useful in helping to forecast future population growth, especially since the ferry is assumed to last 60 years or three 20 year cycles.
- Is the fresh water supply a limiting factor? Mike S. stated that the limiting factor is buildable lots not water. He cited some research done for Heritage Trust that showed there are approximately 1500 buildable lots on the Island and about ½ have a dwelling or some improvement on them.
- Is future population growth really predictable from past trends? Ferry fares increased from \$4 to \$14 and families chose to leave. The recession in 2008 also impacted people choosing to leave. Having technological improvements like faster internet service and alternative types of transportation will allow more people to move to the Island. Have the impacts of technological improvements been considered in the projections?
- Population is almost irrelevant. Some people don't want to leave the island and having internet allows them to not have to. Look at who is using the ferry, not the people who live here.
- Housing on Lummi Island is more affordable than Bellingham, people are fleeing the cities and baby boomers retiring mean more people are living here full time instead of part time. These factors need to be considered.
- What criteria were used to select the Chief, which replaced two 6 vehicle boats that didn't operate all the time? Are similar criteria being looked at?
- Growth on the Island is not super active and we don't see it growing so much that we would need a bigger ferry.

- Just looking at population is shortsighted, because then we are stuck with summertime surges (Clarification was provided that the consultants used a peak day in summer as the base for the population projections.)
- Population is increasing as more people live here full time. Sixteen years ago the island used to be dark in winter, but now there are a lot more lights. The 1 percent growth rate seems to be right on.
- Half of the buildable lots are vacation homes. What if they all convert to full time residents?
- Growth is difficult to predict. Won't there be improvements in transportation technology and internet that will allow people to not have to use their cars and be able to work from home? We will rely less on cars and have a more thoughtful existence and live within our footprint on the land by doing collective community planning. There is an opportunity to do this on Lummi Island and it should be considered in the population projections.
- We don't want to err in wrong direction. What if 1 percent is too small? What happens if we get more than that? Then we end up right where we are now.

Topic 2: How Big of Boat Do We Need

The following questions guided the discussion: What are the important factors to consider in determining size of the boat (i.e., future growth, costs, safety etc.)? What should the frequency of service be? What are the important tradeoffs between a 20, 28 and 34 vehicle boat (i.e., ferry demand, wait times, operational costs, fare increases, other)?

- How will the vessel size impact operations costs? Although all three vessel options are assumed to have a 3-person crew, last year on summer weekends, an extra crew member was added for a total of 4 crew. How does this effect union rules? (Clarification was provided on this: A full-time crew member is about \$250,000 per year including benefits. The fourth crew member added during the summer was a contract employee not permanent and was not subject to union rules.)
- Is the person selling tickets considered to be a crew and are there union concerns about this? (Clarification was provided on this: if the ticket person is off-boat, then non-union, if on-boat then subject to union rules.)
- The population discussion seemed to be about residents, but peak summer time is about tourism. What is the cost to residents to accommodate visitors? It was pointed out that because visitors tend to pay cash fare and residents use punch cards, visitors tend to pay more and that helps keep our fares lower. Tourism is actually supporting residents.
- Are we limited to these three vessel options or can a passenger ferry or other transportation alternatives be considered like other islands do (e.g., park in a lot and shuttle around).

(Clarification was provided that other options were not part of the consultant study at this time.)

- Have bar-code ferry reservations or other reservation systems been considered? This would use technology to reduce the wait times.
- Have ferry cams been considered? If there is a system in place where a person could tell the ferry is busy, then those that can would be able to choose to make their trip at another time.
- Is the size of the boat related to the amount of fares paid (e.g., does a bigger boat mean higher fares, does it cost more to operate a bigger boat)? There is a distinction between capital costs (funds used to buy the boat, which can include grants) and operating costs, which have to be paid for by fares. A boat that is larger would likely cost more to run, but we don't have that information yet. It will be available at the May meetings.
- If we are conservative on the size of the boat, would that protect our fares? Comments varied on this and included: "add a foot, add a big buck," going larger doesn't seem to buy us much more, won't maintenance costs significantly decrease with a new boat.
- It seems like based on the wait times published White Paper #4, it would be sufficient to have a medium size boat for most of the year and just expect longer wait times during certain times in the summer.
- The largest boat possible should be obtained in case Gooseberry Point becomes an island due to sea level rise and then we can expand our ports of call to places like Bellingham.
- Other things need to be considered when selecting the size of the replacement boat including safety, convenience, and crew (workload).
- Can the docks on both sides accommodate all three vessel options?
- Straight on loading options would speed up the time it takes to load and unload a boat and would reduce direction that is needed from a crew member for a vehicle to load.
- Any alternate or back-up vessels should be compatible with a new or existing dock.
- Based on the information available to date, a straw poll vote on four options for vessel size was taken and the results are shown below:
 - 20-vehicle vessel: 2%
 - 28-vehicle vessel: 14%
 - 34-vehicle vessel: 30%
 - Not enough information to decide at this time: 34%

Topic 3: Gooseberry Dock Relocation and Amenities

The following question guided the discussion: What are the pros and cons of the three options?

- Stu acknowledged and welcomed our Gooseberry Point neighbors and gave them an opportunity to address the meeting. Four of the eight homeowners attended the meeting and their comments are summarized below along with the general discussion. Barbara Craig submitted written comments which are attached:
 - The first that the eight homeowners heard about Option 3 as a Gooseberry Dock relocation option was in December 2017 when they received a letter from Whatcom County informing them that the County would like to buy their house. In February 2018, they received contracts offering each homeowner \$5000 for the first option to purchase their homes over the next 10 years or so. At the LIFAC meeting on April 11, 2018, Roland Middleton clarified that the County is looking for willing buyers and would not use eminent domain to take their homes; however, the homeowners did not feel it was presented as a voluntary option and are very concerned about the future of their homes.
 - It seems like Islanders have been studying this for years and they feel like they have been informed about the potential taking of their homes a few months before a decision is to be made. While they appreciate being invited to participate now, it would have been nicer to have been clued in earlier in the process. It feels like Lummi Islanders feel entitled and it is not fair that in addition to supporting the ferry through the 45% portion of the fares collected that they also have to give up their homes to maintain the Lummi Island ferry level of service.
 - They met with Kirk Vinish, Planning Director, Lummi Nation and he provided some clarification about the Gooseberry Dock relocation options being considered in light of planning work done by the Lummi Nation over the last 10 years for the Marina, including the Gooseberry Point Ferry Dock Relocation Feasibility Study done by Whatcom County Public Works in cooperation with the Lummi Nation in December 2009. It was recommended that these past planning efforts, which identified other sites, be reviewed and reconsidered in light of knowing that they do not want to sell their homes to accommodate a new ferry dock and parking, which can go elsewhere. Other potential sites from the 2009 study include C Street in Bellingham, Fairhaven and Stommish. In addition, technologies that allow parking to be off-site and ferry reservations to be made should also be considered.
 - According to a Gooseberry Point resident, the ideal location for the mainland ferry terminal as far as the Lummi Nation is concerned would be Bellingham and they agree. Contrary to what White Paper #4 says, they were told all the options presented would require a tidal lease, not just Options 1 and 2, so those costs need to be considered.

- There aren't 3 dock relocation options because at least 5 of the 8 homeowners are not willing to sell their homes to accommodate Option 3. Additionally, option 2 will take half of someone's property, where they have lived for 60 years. Additional changes to Finkbonner Road and having lights in the parking lot will impact their small community.
 - Lummi Island is part of their lives too and they like the ferry, but while they are told it is the beginning of the process, it feels like the decisions have been made already. Laying asphalt down where there are houses will be a large environmental impact and disruption to their lives.
- Islanders expressed that we don't want to move people out of their homes and that some of the suggestions should be considered, like an advanced reservation system and alternative off-site parking operated like a cell phone lot at the airport. It seems like there are a number of options that haven't been looked at and should be considered as none of those presented seem satisfactory.
 - Islanders also shared that they were not aware of these Gooseberry Dock options until a month ago either. We have looked at so many options during the lease agreement negotiations that we thought when the marina starts, the ferry couldn't be there, so really Option 1 isn't an option and the lease can be mutually terminated.
 - What is the Gooseberry community supposed to do in the meantime if they want to sell and they have to disclose this or if they want to improve their homes?
 - There seems to be a lot more work to do regarding determining a final option for a relocated dock, including the County and the Lummi Nation having detailed conversations.
 - There is an opportunity to develop a win-win alternative. Other possibilities need to be looked at.
 - Was there discussion about sea level rise when the Gooseberry Point option was developed? All the options will be under water in the future and what will the cost be to relocate the dock then?
 - Lummi Island has a unique transportation system. Our Gooseberry neighbors are supporters of the ferry, but asked that we please don't ask them to sacrifice their homes.

Next Steps

Stu thanked everybody for coming and said that PLIC will be circulating the comments made to LIFAC, the County and the community.

He outlined the May meetings, which is the next opportunity to learn more about costs and results of the consultant's works. Plan to come to the May 8th, 2018 public meeting where the consultants will make a presentation and the PLIC Town Hall meeting the following week on May 16th.

4/12/18 PLIC Town Hall Ferry Meeting, Lummi Island, Barbara Craig

We received a letter in December from Andrew Hester Whatcom County letting us know that the county would like to buy our house. Some of our group met with Andrew Hester, some phoned, I emailed. I emailed him with questions one of which was what if we do not want to sell our homes? His answer (which I have included at the end) informed us if we do not want to sell it they may need to take our house through eminent domain. We were stunned and extremely upset but after some time it seemed so illogical and impractical that we relaxed a bit.

Fifteen page contracts arrived in late February offering us \$5,000 prepayment on an option to buy. Signing them would allow the county hold our houses for five years, renewable to ten years. Now we were sick. We have retained an attorney to look out for our interests should we be forced to sell our home.

Islanders have been studying this for years. We are catching up as fast as we can. It would have been nice if we had been clued into this plan, especially about including our homes, a year or two ago instead of a few months before a decision must be made. Would it have been too much trouble to stop in as you were passing us by while we installed solar panels or re-sided and painted our houses that you knew may be torn down to protect your "level of service"??

Today (4/12) BobbieJo Gregor and I met with Kirk Vinish, Director of the Lummi Planning Department and got the full picture for the first time. He showed us where the dock would go the current location of the store. Our houses are would become parking lots and restrooms, wow. Kirk explained that our homes would not be needed if offsite staging were used. That they would still need half of the Joneses lot and house for utilities. Maryellen and Gordon have lived there for over 65 years, they do not want to be anywhere else. Offering up "fair market value" to them...how could anyone do that?

He explained the process involved in plans for the marina which included environmental impact investigation and studies involved. This included seabed studies that were done by Army Corps of Engineer divers and later repeated by navy divers from San Diego. A lot of careful work has been completed. I was not prepared to be impressed but I sure was. Here is a link for Jack Cox, the engineer that is helping with the marina project. There is a link to the Lummi Project but it does not seem to be working today. <http://www.smithgroupjrr.com/people/jack-cox>

We went through some of the various ideas that have been considered for the ferry dock. Kirk said that he had suggested an off site staging area with a kiosk for purchasing tickets. There could be lanes and a stoplight arrangement. The ferry captain would push a button that would send a signal, the light would turn green and a set number of cars would proceed to the ferry. This idea had been turned down because people from the county did not believe they would work. In fact those systems do work around the world, including some in Washington. If there were a malfunction, the light would flash red and drivers would drive to the ferry as before. A shuttle could be used during drydock work. This option does not seem difficult or complicated to me. Kirk had suggested property near the casino or at Haxton and Kwina Rd. He said that anywhere with power could work. What about the abandoned trailer park at Haxton and Smokehouse?

I am headed to Vancouver Island Sunday and Lopez Island next week. Those rides were reserved online. Couldn't we do that here? Prepaying for tickets would also make life easier for the ferry crew. If I can pay for a movie ticket at the Pickford or Regal Cinema before I leave home and guarantee that there will be a seat for us, most anyone should be able to do it. The technology exists and I have to believe that costs must not be prohibitive if the Pickford can do it.

Kirk told us that the ideal location for the mainland ferry terminal as far as the Lummi Nation is concerned would be Bellingham. Not surprisingly we agree. he also said that Stuart Rich is mistaken on the last page of "White Paper #4" when he states that there not be a need for a tidal lease. Kirk says that there will always be a lease for the tidelands which the tribe will not be swapping.

Kirk emailed us the 58 page 2009 Relocation Feasibility Study. All of those locations came in at higher cost than the current ferry location. They have been set aside. I would like to see them revisited now that an entire new ferry dock and ferry need to be constructed. Current and future leases

It seems to me that some people on the island feel "entitled". Do you really feel that converting a good portion of the small community of Gooseberry Point to parking lots so that you maintain your "level of service" is fair? Do you believe that no changes to your routine can be expected? We know that as taxpayers we help fund 45% of each of your journeys across Hales Pass as well as fund changes in infrastructure. We are not ready to throw in our homes.

Why invest in a dock right around the corner from the existing location when it will cost so much and you have a lease that will be honored through 2046? I understand that the ramp will be realigned to accomodate the new marina. Could that not be a good time to retrofit for a newer ferry? I have seen amazing new boats being tested out in Hales Pass the last week. What will new technology bring by 2040?

Now that this meeting is over and we have spoken our piece I need to add something.

Over the last four months of alternating fear and fury over the thought of losing our home we came to Lummi Island Thursday evening, an hour early for the 6:30 meeting. We took a drive around the island. In the drizzle I saw the same homes I had walked by regularly on a loop around the north half of the island before the last big ferry rate increase made it unaffordable. There were no new expensive huge houses just lots of

cedars and fir trees, plenty of moss, all of it dripping. I saw the same friendly type of folks at the two meetings we attended. There we all were in our dark and worn fleece jackets and jeans. I hadn't spent time considering the fears you must have about the cost and availability of ferry service. What this means for your way of life, your property values and the friends of yours that have left. I apologize for that. I hope that a good solution can be found for ferry service and soon. You were so welcoming and kind to us.

Thank you, Barbara Craig