

Minutes for PLIC Annual Meeting
January 31, 2012
Lummi Island Grange Hall

To celebrate the retirement from the PLIC Board of President Stuart Rich and Vice President Mark Sexton, the Board provided ice cream, cake and beverages..

Attending: Board Members Mike McKenzie, Rhayma Blake, Joan Moye, & David Wing.
Board Nominees Mike Kmiecik and Mary Ross.

Audience of approximately 25-30.

Board President-elect Mike McKenzie called the meeting to order at 6:41 PM

He corrected the printed agenda to indicate that tonight the membership would elect new board members. New officers will be ratified by the board at its next meeting, Feb. 6.

RECOGNITION OF DEPARTING OFFICERS

Mike McKenzie recognized departing board President Stuart Rich and Vice President Mark Sexton for their outstanding service to the Lummi Island community. They received tokens of appreciation for their hard work to establish PLIC, identifying legal expertise, spearheading the effort to keep the ferry running to Gooseberry Point, and opening an important avenue of communication between the island and government entities at the County, State, and Congressional levels.

ELECTION OF BOARD MEMBERS

Rhayma Blake introduced two new PLIC members, Stu Clark and Carol Chaudiere. Rhayma then introduced Mike Kmiecik and Mary Ross as nominees for open board positions and distributed ballots, with a space also for a write-in

Stu Clark indicated that he would like to be considered for the PLIC board. He introduced himself and spoke about his background. Lisa Wochos nominated Stu from the floor; Steve Thomas seconded, and Mr. Clark's name was added to the ballot.

With the change in the formal ballot, a PLIC member asked if all three could be voted on. Yes: The bylaws allow up to nine board members; there were four before the annual meeting.

David Wing made a motion to use a voice vote rather than paper ballots. It was seconded and passed by unanimous vote. By acclamation, Mike Kmiecik, Mary Ross, and Stu Clark were elected to two-year terms by unanimous vote of the membership.

Mike M. announced that Lisa Wochos has agreed to continue to serve as an ex-officio legal advisor to the PLIC board.

REVIEW OF 2011, PREVIEW OF 2012

David Wing presented a brief summary of PLIC's highlight activities in 2011, followed by objectives for 2012:

- PLIC members organized and implemented letter writing campaigns, petition drives, production and distribution of informational flyers, phone calls, and e-mails to county, state, and federal officials to resolve the impasse between the Lummi Nation and Whatcom County.
- PLIC's Board Members and attorneys developed trust and credibility with Whatcom County council members and other government officials resulting in a signed lease that will allow ferry operations at Gooseberry Point to continue for the next 35 years.
- A PLIC sponsored initiative, the creation and appointment of a Ferry Task Force by the Whatcom County Council recognized the need to give Lummi Island stake holders a voice in developing a more workable fare structure. The Lummi Island Ferry Task force did a huge amount of work and received praise from county council and county officials for it's outstanding final report and recommendations. Many of the Task Force's recommendations are already in the process of being implemented, and others are being studied for future implementation.
- One of the Task Force's recommendations, the establishment of a permanent Lummi Island Ferry Advisory Committee, is on track for a final vote on Feb 14..
- In 2012 PLIC's two foremost major initiatives will be to (a.) support, monitor, and participate in the County's adoption of Ferry Task Force recommendations, and (b.) to lend community backing to the County's establishment of a permanent Ferry Advisory Committee that will give Lummi Islander residents, property owners, and other stakeholders a voice in the county decision-making process regarding ferry issues.
- The prevailing immediate issues going forward re: the ferry are maintaining adequate service levels and adjusting rates to attain affordable financial balance for both Whatcom County and Island residents and other ferry riders.

FERRY TASK FORCE REPORT/UPDATE

Mike McKenzie read a list of Whatcom County/Public Works "actionables" that are scheduled for implementation during the first quarter of 2012 (by March 31). Former Ferry Task Force member Diane Harper explained details and context of those recommendations, pointing out cautionary concerns with some.

1. **Do not renew parking lease at Gooseberry Point.** The lease with Lummi Indian Business Council for the 80-vehicle lot expires April 16. Lummi Nation informed Whatcom County it would not renew the lease. County anticipates creating about 55 public parking spaces on county-owned property at the Gooseberry Point staging area. Jo Philpot inquired if county will continue to provide a security guard on mainland side after that time. Diane answered that she thought they would, but the hours would be cut to reduce operating costs. (The Task Force recommended eliminating security personnel and replacing it with cameras, and an incident-reporting system. Public Works opposes that recommendation.)

2. **Reduce Safety Specialist F.T.E. (Full Time Equivalent)** This has been done. It is being adjusted and recalculated during the coming year, creating an operating cost reduction.
3. **Eliminate extra trip after midnight on Saturdays.** This is under way. It will require union bargaining. Should result in about \$2,500 cost savings. (Ferry crew loves it.)
4. **Contract with Opportunity Council for needs-based fare screening.** This is in process and targeted for completion by March 31.
5. **Free Passage ages 18-Under; discontinue June-Aug student punch cards (all ages).** In process. Will require changes in ferry ordinance. Should be completed by March 31.
6. **Eliminate motorcycle punch cards. Replace Vehicle/Driver 10- and 25-ride punch cards with a 20-punch card.** Draft response created, being reviewed internally by Public Works. Both of these items are being watched closely by PLIC Board and all islanders. If either of these is taken out of context with the entire Task Force fare-restructuring package it could result in an increase in some fare categories.

One platform upon which the Task Force report rests is no fare increases for the highest percentage of riders; Public Works and some County officials have publicly affirmed that. Diane was very clear that the recommendations did not include any fare increases for car and driver rates, pedestrian rates, or motorcycle/bicycle rates. Mike McKenzie reiterated that PLIC would work closely and diligently with County to ensure that the elimination of multiple classes of punch cards to reduce clerical costs would not increase main-user fares. (For example, going to a one-card system of 10 rides, the cost for vehicle/driver should not exceed \$94 [the current highest discounted rate, \$9.40 a trip] and not the existing 10-ride rate; a passenger 10-trip should not exceed \$46, i.e., \$4.60 a trip; a motorcycle cash rate should not exceed the eliminated 10-ride rate, etc.)

7. **Modify accounting practices for ER&R fund changes (ER&R includes fuel for ferry, dry dock repairs, repairs during year, and equipment rental), and**
8. **Examine professional services account practices for ER&R and reclassify budget.** Both items 7 & 8 reflect changes in how accounting is categorized and tracked, transparently, making them easier for the public to monitor. Both of these changes are under review and on track for implementation by March 31.
9. **Transfer cash often and fast to the ferry fund.** In the past transfers were made annually. Now they will be made quarterly, resulting in additional interest income for the ferry fund.
10. **Create and implement a cash-reserve policy.** Draft response has been created and is currently under internal review by county.

Mike M. opened the floor for questions or comments about this report. Responses:

Should we assume that the \$3 surcharges will continue? Answer: Yes, for foreseeable future. We are still paying back the ferry fund deficit from previous years. Not a good time to go ask for a fare reduction. Only reduction would be for children under 18.

Rhayma Blake mentioned that if all of the items Public Works Director Frank Abart has agreed to address this year were implemented, that there could be an estimated \$150,000 savings.

Jim Dickinson expressed concern that loss of the parking lot would cause an increase in car ridership that might artificially inflate or deflate ridership numbers. Need to monitor closely.

Do we know what the trip rate will be for the new 10- or 20-trip punch card? Answer: Not known. Task Force recommended going to a single 20-trip punch card based on assumption of reduced fare. PLIC Board will push for a fare for the single punch card (10 or 20 rides, yet to be determined; Task Force favors 10) at \$94, the same \$9.40 round-trip rate as the current 25-punch card. (The RT fare is \$10.20 on the current 10 punch card.) Changing the system without altering the fare accordingly would result in a fare increase, which both Task Force and County/PW also oppose.

Public Works has all this under consideration, but has not clarified any specific recommendations – neither on going to a 10- or 20-ride card, nor on fare structure. We should know what P.W. is recommending in advance of March 31 planned implementation, which can only occur through Council vote on ordinance change w/ public hearing. PLIC will continue to monitor this closely.

Any word on changes in dry dock parking with loss of parking lot? Answer: The only official comment from Public Works is that dry dock parking could become similarly difficult to last year's anticipated shortage when Lummi Nation said the lot would not be available. The usual parking-up-the-road will be available, approx. 55 spaces. (Turned out that at the last minute they made it available, but many other solutions were identified before that. This year there will be no lot, period, last-minute or otherwise.)

Lummi Island realtor Colleen McCrory recommended very strongly that now that the ferry lease is settled **PLIC should focus its efforts in bringing down the punch-card rates for residents by a dollar or two as soon as possible.** Audience applauded this loudly. As a realtor she is aware of the numbers of people leaving the island and trying to sell their homes due to high costs of commuting. Colleen will put together some facts and figures to support the contention that the ferry surcharge is causing an exodus from the island, thus reduced ridership, thus reduced fare-box revenue, all at significant levels. PLIC Board pledged its support of Colleen's premise in direct communications with County officials.

Do we have any idea of what Lummi Nation wants to do with the parking lot and any chance that they want to operate it as a paid parking lot to benefit them? Mike M. said that Frank Abart has said he has no idea what Lummi Nation wants to do with the lot space, but, in several conversations revisiting possibilities, they said flatly they have no interest in using it to provide public/ferry parking.

How many parking spaces will we actually be losing in April? Diane responded that currently there are about 80 spaces inside the lot. PW Director Abart told Mike M. that the County's plan for parking on property it owns in the staging area would number "around 55,

give or take.” The X-factor is how that area is reconfigured, something Lummi Nation also has requested in order to mitigate traffic and pedestrian safety and flowing concerns.

Jo Philpot suggested that someone on the island should consider coordinating a car or van pool from the island in response to loss of parking spaces on mainland side.

How much money is saved by eliminating the late run on Sat? About \$2,500 per year.

Bob Busch made suggestion to only give free passage to students with a valid student I.D. card. Diane and Jim Dickinson responded about why Task Force made this recommendation (primarily to reduce operations costs on a ridership classification that shows low usage), and Mike M. added some reasons why County was willing to support it (any loss in revenue is offset by operations savings).

Will college students still be able to purchase a student punch card? No. Anyone over 18 will pay the pedestrian cash (\$7) or punch-card fee (\$4.60 RT).

Any word on other proposed service cuts? Not dealing with that currently. The next group of “actionables,” six, are scheduled for implementation by end of third quarter, Sept. 30.

Summer Surcharge on Cash-Only Fares? Task Force proposal assumed that if County adopted its proposal of \$1-to-\$3 surcharge during peak vacation period, it would include a fare reduction on punch-card rates. Otherwise, it goes counter to the consensus of Task Force and County/PW of no rate hikes. This is scheduled for consideration by Sept. 30; it could be enacted for Summer '12, but neither Task Force nor PLIC supports that without passing along the benefit to reduce regular-user fares. Also, the proposed surcharge applies only to cash fares.

Michael Schneider requested that **a discussion of ways we could compensate for loss of parking in April be put on the next PLIC general meeting agenda.** PLIC Board will take the request under advisement at its next board meeting, Feb. 6.

Given some give-and-take of various views of parking, student fares, and other matters, Mike McKenzie reiterated that the PLIC Board’s commitment remains in support of the Task Force recommendations for County implementation. The Task Force spent six months in research and multiple public meetings to arrive at consensus on the island, and the best solutions for both County and Islanders on ferry issues of operating cost reductions, increased revenues, and manageable service levels and fares.

PLIC membership and others rode herd on how it would be counterproductive for the County to cherry-pick the recommendations that are easy to deal with, ignore or bypass context of fare relief, etc. It would equally counterproductive and defeating for our community to try to pick and choose the ones we want passed, or continue to debate their merits. The process (including some public hearings) will allow input.

Diane Harper again pointed out that the overall goal of the entire package recommended by the Task Force was cost savings and control so that ferry rates for residents can come back down to a more affordable level, and to provide adequate service levels that will not “chop our legs off” in the morning and night hours while meeting 55 percent of operating expenses goal from fare box.

FERRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE: STATUS UPDATE

Mike McKenzie provided an update on the status of the Task Force recommendation to form a permanent Ferry Advisory Committee. Carl Weimer and Barbara Brenner drafted a resolution and submitted it to islanders for comment and suggestions for revisions. More than 50 islanders responded with suggestions and concerns. Weimer accepted many, made changes, and the resolution was introduced at the Jan. 24 County Council meeting. It passed 7-0.

The Public Works Committee (Brenner chair; Pete Kremen, Ken Mann members; all remaining four Council members can attend, and Weimer said he would) will review it and make recommendations during its Feb 14. meeting in Council chambers, open to the public. The Council could adopt the resolution at its regular meeting that night.

The application and selection process for committee members is not established, but islanders are encouraged to recommend qualified people for consideration on the Ferry Advisory Committee. As the resolution stood upon introduction, the committee would consist of seven members – five of which must be Lummi Island residents or property owners.

The Board asked for an indication of interest in the audience. Jim Dickinson raised his hand.

The Ferry Advisory Committee is an island-wide initiative (not a PLIC-driven initiative, such as the Task Force was). Bill Lee, a PLIC member and a member of the board of directors of Lummi Island Community Association (LICA), stated that we need the best possible people on the committee because the stakes are high for the future of the island, and the work of the Ferry Task Force set a very high standard for results. There is a sense that Public Works and County Council will wait until the committee is in place before moving forward with action on many Task Force recommendations.

Mike M. opened the floor for questions or comments about this report. Responses:

Stuart Rich posed three questions.

What is the thinking on how topics will be selected and prioritized in the committee’s work? Resolution wording suggests that the committee will determine its own parameters, goals, schedule, et al, but nothing more definite than that.

Are they considering a county council member to act as a liaison to work with the committee? Yes. Carl Weimer has agreed to this.

What is the thinking on how to fund expenses of the ferry advisory committee?

None of the PLIC Board has an answer. Director Abart and Councilman Weimer have told us that in general, funding will come from ferry operating funds. All requests will go through the county executive's office. Stuart expressed that he thinks the success of the committee is dependent upon having adequate funding for its research and meetings. Director Abart has made it clear, repeatedly, that he will not support the committee with attendance by his staff or him, but will provide any and all informational support necessary. The County Executive would have some bearing on all this.

PLIC Board asked whether anyone present has communicated that they would be interested in serving on the committee? Jim Dickinson said he wants to serve on this committee.

ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR FINAL COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Jim Dickinson informed members that he has researched a used ferry on the market that could be an excellent replacement for the Whatcom Chief – the Plattsburg, offered by Lake Champlain, N.Y. He has sent an e-mail announcement to more than 400 people, including media and county government, to encourage the county to investigate and pursue buying it.

Jo Philpot suggested PLIC invite John Gibb of Willows Inn to find out what his ad campaign will be for Lummi Island. (EDITING NOTE: the PLIC Board, through Rhayma Blake, has invited Mr. Gibb to make a presentation at the next community meeting, March 1.)

Reminder from several: Jack Louws will attend the LICA month-end, pot-luck community meeting to introduce himself to the island, learn about the community in general, and cover any and all topics. (To help alleviate any ferry-issue dominance, PLIC Board members have a meeting scheduled with Mr. Louws in Bellingham on Feb. 8 with the intent of covering ferry matters with him, thereby, we hope, encouraging LICA attendees to deal with other topics.)

Next Board Meeting: TBD (Editing Note: Monday, Feb. 6, 9:30 a.m. at the Lummi Island Fire Hall.)

Next Public Meeting: TBD (Editing Note: Wednesday, March 1, 6:30 p.m. at The Grange.)

Treasury Report: Mike Kmiecik, Treasurer-elect, reported that PLIC has \$4,658.65.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Submitted by Mary Ross, Secretary-elect