

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee

Agenda - March 25, 2026 6pm

The Gathering Place - 3913 Legoe Bay Road, Lummi Island, WA

Note: **Bold** indicates Committee decision expected. Asterisk* indicates attachment

6:00pm CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

Rhayma Blake, Janice Catrell, Terry Diffley, Tom Philpot, Markis Dee Stidham, Steven Thomas

FLAG SALUTE, MOMENT OF SILENCE AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

WELCOME

Committee members and community members

County Council members Barry Buchanan and Ben Elenbaas

Whatcom County Public Works Deputy Director Laura Frolich

Ferry Master Gary Poole

kpff Principal, Special Projects Ed DeBroeck PE, DBIA; and kpff Associate Planner Kelly Lesoing.

BUSINESS MEETING

Accept Agenda

Adopt Minutes February 25, 2026 *

6:10 UPDATES

WCFAC Tom Philpot

County Council Members

Public Works Deputy Director Laura Frolich

Ferry Master Gary Poole

6:30 kpff PRESENTATION

7:00 OLD BUSINESS

Service Alternatives working Group Update

New Ferry and Docks Group

7:10 NEW BUSINESS

Date and location confirmation for the April WCFAC meeting

7:15 OPEN SESSION

7:45 ADJOURN

ATTACHMENT: Draft WCFAC Meeting Minutes 2-25-26

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee Meeting (WCFAC)

February 25, 2026 Minutes

Call to Order by Tom Philpot at 6:05 PM

Present: Janice Catrell, Terry Diffley, Thomas Philpot, Markis Dee Stidham, Steven Thomas.

Chair – Tom Philpot welcomed the board members, Whatcom County Council Member District 5 Ben Elenbaas; Whatcom County Public Works Director Laura Frolich; Ferry Master Gary Poole; Guest Speaker Atul Deshmane; and attendees.

Pledge of Allegiance; Land Acknowledgment; and Moment of Silence

BUSINESS MEETING

Agenda - Accepted as presented.

Minutes January 28 Meeting - Accepted as presented.

March WCFAC Meeting – March 25, 2026 6:00 PM changed to the Gathering Place on Lummi Island, with KPFF in attendance.

6:15 UPDATES:

County Council Member Ben Elenbaas:

- Council Business - Dominated by Comprehensive Plan; Challenges to Birch Bay and Blaine Growth Plans; 0.1% sales tax for public safety
- Ferry Tax District - Many calls and upcoming meetings about possible new Ferry Tax District; feels it would be better if voting decision was made by popular vote, not just Council vote; sees pros and cons for both Rural and City Incorporated voters.
- Water Adjudication - Commented generally on the ‘tangled web’ of the process with various water rights groups and the Dept. Of Ecology.

Ferry Master Gary Poole:

- Dry Dock - Last day of service Fri, April 17 till midnight; no runs on Sat, April 18 until floats are in place; Sunday, April 19, short ferry outage to place pedestrian ramps.
- Ferry Return - Sat. May 9, short outage of passenger boat to pull pedestrian ramps; Anticipated full ferry service early Sunday, May 10.
- Annual Ferry Maintenance - To be done at Lake Union Shipyard, with a lower than expected bid.

- Island Van Service During Drydock – Not provided by the county this year; suggested islanders approach WTA, and that Guemes Island has used Skagit Transit for their ferry outages.
- Island Parking Lot – The lot across the street from the ferry will be cleared out before drydock, and after drydock, parts of that lot will be blocked off to discourage the long term parking of unused rigs.
- Wooden Dolphins - Described the worn conditions of the two wooden dolphins on the island side, and the vulnerability of the dolphins if the ferry is being moored in there during high winds. There is a possibility that there will be some ferry disruptions if the winds are too high, because the ferry can't stay in the slip. Riders are encouraged to sign up with "Newsflash" through the Public Works website for timely updates.

Public Works Director Laura Frolich:

- Ferry Financing - The goal is to set up a 50 yr plan to provide service; they are currently adjusting variables to suggest the levy proposal for a Ferry Taxing District.
- Community Engagement Plan – Public Works is developing a plan with KPFF.
- Ferry Pass Exchange Mistakes - Noted that mistakes with ferry pass exchanges may lead to the county seeking re-payment if riders were undercharged; or county payments back to riders if they were overcharged.
- 2025 Ferry Financial Statement - Anticipates statement to be available for public viewing during the second quarter of 2026.
- Recent Fare Box Revenue - Can see that the most recent ferry fare increases covered expenses for the decrease in ferry ridership in the 4th quarter of 2025, though there were some unplanned costs because of breakages and repairs.
- Ferry Tax District - Her opinion is that if the Ferry Tax District is not approved, the county will forego the \$25 million RAISE grant for the new ferry. Without a new taxing district, the new ferry financing plan is likely inadequate.
- No New Ferry in 2017 - She recalled that in 2017, the county similarly decided against accepting the Tiger Grant, which was initially rewarded to help fund a new ferry.

UPDATES:

Service Alternatives Planning Work Group: Added Markis Dee Stidham to list of posted members, Steven Thomas, Tess Winds-Johnson, Wendi Merritt, Pam Gould, Kurt Esveldt.

- Request for monthly reports from this committee to WCFAC monthly meetings.
- Service Alternatives Planning Work Group has had one meeting thus far:
- Pam Gould: Identified 2 main areas of concern for upcoming 12-week lengthy outage: Sanitation and Fuel. Even the Fire Dept does not have adequate fuel storage to meet

their anticipated needs, and the outage is during high-risk fire season. Not sure if there is an adequate landing site / barge service to re-supply the island.

- Various comments/suggestions made at this WCFAC meeting: Anacortes barges have experience delivering to islands; May be possible to stockpile fuel in rented containers on island; County may be asked to assist in mitigating challenges.

Guest Speaker Atul Deshmane:

- Background and interest in Clean Transportation.
- Suggesting an electric bus infrastructure to transport more people, and fewer cars back and forth to mainland.
- Could be separate buses on island, and mainland, OR a bus that would loop the island, cross the ferry, and proceed to town (to bus stop, and/or park n rides), to limit the amount of getting on and off for passengers.

Open Session:

Bob Anderson - Cited detailed ferry accounting spreadsheet (courtesy of Ralph Steele) showing sizeable budget surpluses projected for 2025 and 2026, suggesting that the recent fare increase was very excessive. Asked that Public Works should take this evidence seriously. Also suggested that the county should pick up some of the costs associated with the 12-week outage.

Laura Frolich response - The county is coming up with a plan detailing the county obligations and island obligations for the 12-week ferry outage. She also stated that it is not in the county mandate to review or validate reports made by non-county employees.

Tom Philpot - Asked about the recent Consent Agreement to accept \$3.5 million that the council voted to approve by a 7-0 vote. Laura F. explained it was a technicality to get actual payment for the money from the state to help pay the KPFF consultants' fee for the preengineering requirements for the RAISE Grant.

Tom Philpot - Expressed the importance of the county hearing what this committee and islanders are saying.

Ben Elenbaas Response - Citizen's research and documentation (such as Ralph Steele's recent spreadsheet) could also be submitted to the Council, as the Charter Review Committee has granted the council the ability to audit.

Terry Diffley - Requested that time is made for deeper explanation of the 2025 Ferry Financial Report, asking the county to describe the details of the line by line accounting of costs, etc.

Laura Frolich Response - It's a good idea, and that can be done. Public Works' intention is to be transparent with data. But, the county does have very specific codes that they must follow in their accounting practices. Further, she is confident that complex calculation systems are effectively utilized by the Finance Data Management Team in the county.

Tom Philpot – Questioned, and suggested careful review of some expenses charged to the fare box, such as the current frequency of dock inspections.

Bob Anderson - Thanked Ben Elenbaas for his attendance, and appreciated his experience and perspective, and asked for his support for approving the new Ferry Taxing District. He further asked what our island community can do to reduce ferry costs, and recalled some islanders questioning the value of continuing the van service during drydock, because few people have utilized it.

Laura Frolich Response – The county was thankful for that suggestion, and that there will be savings of \$20,000 by not having van service. It's impracticable to maintain a van asset owned by the county for 3 weeks of use per year.

Bob Anderson – Asked if reduced ferry labor costs will occur if there is no van service.

Gary Poole Response – There will be a full 3-person deckhand crew for the passenger boat crew during drydock, partly for contractual reasons, and partly to deal with the huge amount of Amazon, FedEx, etc deliveries that require help to get across to the island in an efficient way.

Bob Anderson - Expressed the view that the current ferry funding problem is partly because the county road fund has been underfunded for many years, with no increase in Road Fund Taxes.

Ben Elenbaas Response – He has heard many property tax complaints. Voters realize that WA State taxpayers pay the 6th highest tax rate in our country, and the 3rd highest gas tax. The average voter cares about the total tax money taken out of their pocket, not so much to what fund the tax money goes to.

Tom Philpot thanked all attendees.

Meeting adjourned 7:40 PM

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

**WE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE GATHER ON THE ANCESTRAL
HOMELANDS OF THE LUMMI NATION OF THE COAST SALISH LANGUAGE
GROUP WHO HAVE STEWARDED THIS LAND SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL, AND
WE COMMIT TO THE ONGOING CARE OF OUR SHARED LAND AND
RELATIONSHIPS WITH ITS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.**

HB 2588 - 2025-26

Concerning county ferry district authority.

Sponsors: [Timmons](#), [Ramel](#), [Lekanoff](#)

Bill status-at-a-glance

As of Wednesday, March 18, 2026 01:00 PM

Current version:

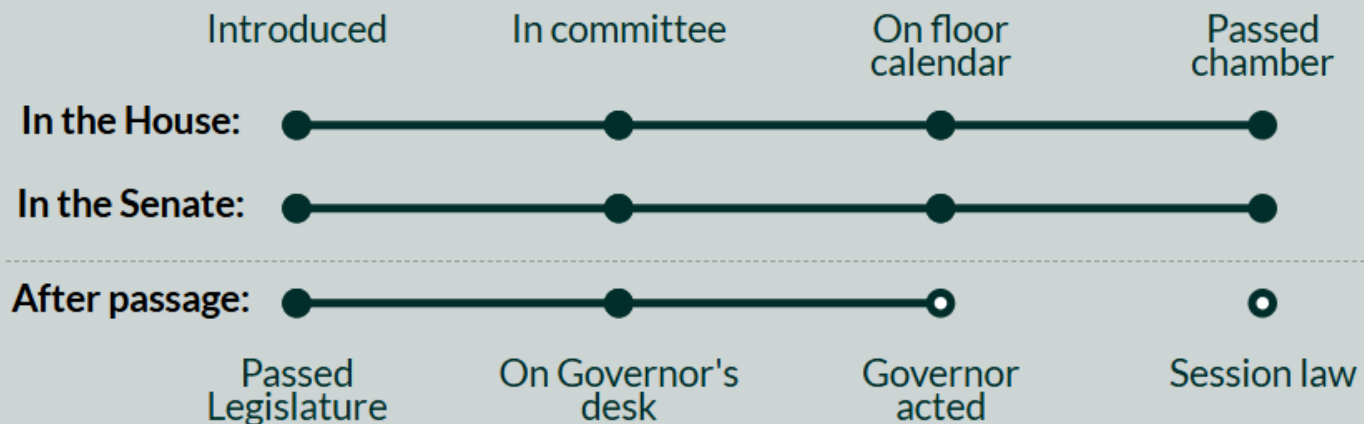
Engrossed - EHB 2588

[\(View 1st engrossed\)](#)

Current status:

Del to Gov

Where is it in the process?





Public Works

[Current Fares](#)

[Multi-Ride Punchcards](#)

[Ferry Schedule](#)

[New Ferry Vessel](#)

[Map & Directions](#)

[Annual Dry Dock](#)

[Tide-Related Weight Restrictions](#)

[Whatcom Chief Fueling Dates](#)

[Gooseberry Point Parking Map](#)

[Ferry Loading Parking Procedures](#)

[Ferry Annual Reports](#)

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[Quarterly Passenger Information](#)

[Lummi Nation 2015 TIGER Grant](#)

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Lummi Island Ferry

Revised Dates: Dry Dock Outage April 25 - May 17

[SCHEDULE](#)

[CURRENT RATES](#)

[MULTI-RIDE PUNCHCARDS](#)

[DRY DOCK OUTAGE](#)

News Flash

Ferry Updates

Ferry Operations Update: Lummi Island Terminal Dolphin Preservation

Whatcom County Public Works is taking steps to preserve the wooden dolphins at the Lummi Island Ferry Terminal. During certain weather conditions, the ferry may temporarily suspend operations to protect the terminal infrastructure.

[Read on...](#)

Update: Whatcom Chief Dry Dock Dates Revised (April 25–May 17)

The dry dock outage dates for the Whatcom Chief have been revised due to a shipyard scheduling conflict. This updated schedule remains within the contract's original bidding window provided to shipyards.

[Read on...](#)

Private Property Parking Restrictions at Gooseberry Point Terminal

[Tweets by WhatcomFerry](#)

Contact Us

Ferry Division

Office hours:
Monday - Friday
8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Phone: 360-778-6200

[Email the Division](#)

322 N Commercial Street
Bellingham, WA, 98225

[X](#) [Follow the Whatcom Chief on X for the latest service announcements!](#)

- Find out how to purchase full-fare multi-ride punch cards [online](#) or by [mail](#).
- Find out how to purchase needs-based punch cards [online](#) or by [mail](#).
- The Ferry Division does not accept cash payments.
- Staff are available via phone or email to assist ferry customers.
- Please do not visit the Civic Center office in Bellingham for ferry tickets, as they are not sold

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Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Committee provides reviews and recommendations to the Whatcom County Council and Executive on issues affecting the ongoing operations and infrastructure of the ferry service to Lummi Island. The review includes proposed changes to ferry operations and fares, an annual review of the ferry fund, demands for and improvements to ferry services, and options for ferry replacement. The Committee also provides a forum for those who depend on the Lummi Island ferry service to voice their ideas and concerns.

General Meeting Info

- The Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee generally meets on the 4th Wednesday of the month, 6-8 p.m.
- Meetings are generally held at The Gathering Place, 3913 Legoe Bay Road, Lummi Island, or at the Whatcom County Public Works Department Office, 322 N. Commercial, Bellingham.
- Meetings are open to the public. Community members who attend may provide public comment on ferry-related issues on Lummi Island.
- Please refer to the meeting agenda for detailed information.

Members

The Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee (WCFAC) has 9 members appointed by the County Council:

- **Terence Diffley**, Islander
- **Rhayma Blake**, Islander
- **Thomas Philpot**, Islander
- **Steven Thomas**, Islander
- **Tess Winds-Johnson**, Islander
- **Janice Catrell**, Off Island
- **Markis Dee Stidham**, Off Island
- **VACANT**, Off-Island Unincorporated, Lummi Nation represented preferred
- **VACANT**, Off-Island Unincorporated
- **Jon Scanlon**, County Councilmember, ad hoc, non-voting

Membership Requirements

9 Members:

- 5 members live or own property on the island.
- 2 members who live in unincorporated Whatcom County.
- 2 members who live anywhere on the mainland (incorporated or unincorporated, priority given to 1 Lummi Nation member when possible)

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OPEN SESSION