

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee

Agenda - February 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, Markis Dee Stidham, Steven Thomas, Tess Winds-Johnson, Tom Philpot

FLAG SALUTE, MOMENT OF SILENCE AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

WELCOME

County Council members, committee members and community members
WC Public Works Deputy Director Laura Frolich, Ferry Master Gary Poole and County Council Member Jon Scanlon

BUSINESS MEETING

Accept Agenda
Adopt Minutes January 28, 2026 *

6:10 WHATCOM COUNTY UPDATES

County Council Member Jon Scanlon
Public Works Deputy Director Laura Frolich
Ferry Master Gary Poole

Tom Philpot Overview for 2026

6:30 OLD BUSINESS

Elect members of WCFAC and non-members to two ad hoc committees which will meet monthly and report at WCFAC meetings:

Service Alternatives Planning Work Group - Steven Thomas, Tess Winds-Johnson, Wendi Merritt, Pam Gould, Kurt Esveldt

New Ferry and Docks Group - Tom Philpot, Dave Parker, Kurt Esveldt

Update on RCW 36.54 in the state legislature currently for Counties with Ferries to enact Countywide Ferry Taxing Districts

6:50 NEW BUSINESS

Date confirmation for the March WCFAC meeting in the county building Garden Room for kpff updates

Transportation options presentation by Atul Deshmane

7:10 OPEN SESSION

7:45 ADJOURN

ATTACHMENT: Draft WCFAC Meeting Minutes 1-28-26

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee (WCFAC)

January 28, 2026 Minutes

CALL TO ORDER by Pam Gould at 6:10 PM

Present: Rhayma Blake, Janice Catrell, Terry Diffley, Pam Gould, Thomas Philpot, Markis Dee Stidham, Steve Thomas, Tess Winds-Johnson

Chair-Pam Gould welcomed the board members, Whatcom County Council Member at-Large Position B Jon Scanlon; Whatcom County Public Works Deputy Director Laura Frolich, and attendees.

Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silence.

BUSINESS MEETING

Agenda - Accepted as presented

Minutes, November 19, 2025 Meeting – Adopted as presented.

Updates:

- Jon Scanlon ○ WCFAC Members – Thanked the new WCFAC members for stepping up and also the others who had volunteered to serve.
 - Zoning Change – Highlighted the County Council’s passage of the zone scrub needed to properly authorize kitchen usage at The Gathering Place on Lummi Island at their January 27th meeting.
 - County Council Support – Encouraged WCFAC to invite other County Council members to attend some of our meetings to help familiarize themselves with ferry issues. Pam suggested inviting Boyle and Reinstra in particular.
 - Countywide Ferry Taxing District – Has started advocating for this with other Council members.
 - Additional State Funding - State Senator Shewmake is supporting SB2539 and Representatives Timmons, Ramel, and Lekanoff are supporting HB 2588 which would authorize adding “vehicles” to the legislation that would allow ferry funding through local property taxes and bonds. Be sure to thank them for their support.
- Laura Frolich ○ New Replacement Ferry – Shared that work towards the new ferry will require secure financing, including an established ferry district. The consultants will detail progress towards the final design at either the February or March WCFAC meetings. In answer to David Kershner’s question, it will be a custom build by Elliott Bay Design. The subcontractor for the batteries has not been determined.

In answer to Pam and Markis's questions, it will still look similar to the Sanpoil ferry. Also, our ridership numbers have remained stable over the past three years.

- Dry Dock - Public Works will review 2 bids for dry dock in February and announce the 21-day dry dock outage dates as the bid is finalized. It should be at least 21 days, sometime between 4/11/26 and 5/16/26. The county has retired the vans and will no longer be offering van shuttle service. Mary Ross expressed disappointment.
- Public Disclosure Requests - One-third of the last 200 public disclosure requests received by the county were ferry related so they will be publishing more ferry information on the county website.
- Accident Claims - New protocols in place halved the number of accident claims on the ferry last year.
- 2025 Financial Summary - Will be available in March. Flooding has affected the county road budget line this year.
- 2025 Ridership - In answer to Mary Ross's question, should be available by 2/6/26.
- Crew Contract - In answer to Pam's question, negotiations with the crew continue. The 3-year contract should be agreed upon by the end of 1Q26. Laura does not anticipate a schedule change in 2026.
- Pam Gould
 - Next Steps - Pam shared the "What's Next 2026" presentation (attached) with attendees as she terms off WCFAC. It was noted that the final vessel bid deadline is now fall 2026, not February 2026. Other key dates this year include:
 - Jan. 12-Mar. 13 – State RCW change to allow for a ferry taxing district.
 - Aug. 1 – Deadline for new tax district levy filing. County Council is also considering a sales tax and bonds, but has multiple considerations including sheriff's office, more public defenders, and the jail bond.
 - Plan B - If the taxing district effort is not successful, the new vessel project will be scaled down. The Whatcom Chief is still viable. Jon commented that Jill Boudreau did leave some suggested contingency plans. Laura shared that the state has been reducing what has already been awarded due to tight budgets.

Updates:

- Service Alternatives Planning Work Group (formerly the Island Access Subcommittee) – Plans for necessary terminal improvements call for passenger only ferry service for 3 months between August and October in 2028. Public Works has asked this Island Access Committee to identify needs to be addressed during this outage and report monthly to WCFAC. **Pam Gould, Markis Dee Stidham, Steve Thomas, and Tess Winds-Johnson** all selfnominated. It was noted that **Kurt Esvelt** had also expressed a desire to be involved. **Markis moved and Tom seconded a motion that all be accepted. Passed unanimously.**

- WA Legislature RCW 36.54 Amendment – House Bill 2588 Concerning county ferry district authority and Senate Bill 5839 Concerning county ferry district authority, continue to move through the legislative process.

New Business:

- Nomination of 2026 WCFAC Officers
Tom Philpot - Chair Nominated by Tess. Seconded by Markis.
Terry Diffley - Vice Chair Nominated by Tom. Seconded by Tess.
Rhayma Blake - Secretary Nominated by Pam. Seconded by Steve. **All passed unanimously.**
- 2026 WCFAC Meeting Dates
Markis moved and Tess seconded a motion to **continue to meet on the 4th Wednesday of the month, 6:00-7:45pm**. Laura will confirm that the Garden Level Public Works Conference Room is available for the March and October meetings to be held in Bellingham.

Open Session:

Steve Thomas – Inquired about the size of the new ferry and the number of lanes. Laura shared that the final design is not yet available.

Scott Josiah – A county taxing district sounds essential for ferry funding. Can more about this be shared with Islanders? Jon is working on this issue and Laura will post updates on the county website.

Barbara King – Asked when the taxing district issue would be expected to be part of the County Council agenda. Jon guessed it would be 2Q in conjunction with finalizing the financial plan to meet the federal grant requirements.

Wendi Merritt – Thanked all the WCFAC applicants who offered to serve. Also asked: 1) How long the Fall 2027 outage is expected to run. Laura said a week or less. 2) The 2018 Level of Service (LOS) suggested a larger vessel is needed. Laura said ferry usage decreased during and after COVID and the current design meets the 2.5 boat wait criteria. Pam added that the new design should handle a few more cars than the Whatcom Chief.

Jo Philpot – Asked whether the hull design of the new ferry will handle a trip to Bellingham. Laura confirmed that it would and also the necessary trips to drydock boatyards.

Tom Philpot – Reminded attendees that WCFAC's purpose is to review and make recommendations to the Whatcom County Council and the Executive on issues that affect the ongoing operations and infrastructure of ferry service to Lummi Island.

Susan Hutton – Asked if WCFAC meetings might be held later in the date to accommodate more workers. Being able to join meetings via Zoom would be helpful. Tom agreed, but said to date, WCFAC has not been able to identify the volunteer equipment operator that would be needed. Laura indicated the data security issues and data storage requirements involved are also an obstacle. Perhaps an audio recording could be made and shared.

Pam Gould – Asked if a fare adjustment was anticipated later this year. Laura said one is not anticipated this year, but there are always unanticipated costs and events. The county works on a biennium budget.

Steve Dupont – Asked why the lead time for dry dock planning is so short. Major maintenance is usually planned 6-12 months in advance. Pam agreed that this makes planning medical surgeries and required physical therapy difficult. Laura said that even though it is a 2-year budget, expenditures are typically authorized annually. Pam suggested dry dock happen during the upcoming dock construction in Fall 2027. Dry dock used to start the Wednesday after Labor Day. Could we return to that schedule. Laura wondered whether the schedule might have been changed to spring for calmer weather for the passenger ferry, but said she would explore that option further with the shipyard.

Tom thanked Pam for her service on WCFAC, and also Carol Landt and Catherine Shornick.

Meeting adjourned 7:35 PM

Attachments:

WCFAC November 19, 2025 Minutes - Approved

Submitted by R. Blake-Secretary