

AGENDA

Conservation Easement Program Oversight Committee

Central Conference Room, Planning & Development Services, Northwest Annex

5280 Northwest Dr, Bellingham, WA

Or join by Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83883628481>

Meeting ID: 838 8362 8481

Thursday April 16, 2026

3:00-4:30pm

- 1. Welcome (10 minutes)**
 - a. Introductions
 - b. Public comments
 - c. Review agenda

- 2. Approval of meeting summary for March meeting (5 minutes)**

- 3. Guest Presentation (30 min)**
 - a. San Juan County Conservation Land Bank

- 4. Updates and announcements (5 minutes)**
 - a. Staff announcements
 - b. Other announcements?

- 5. Discussion items/business (25 minutes)**
 - a. CEPOC Funding Memo

- 6. Old or new business (10 minutes)**
 - a. CEP Tour

- 7. Next meeting (5 minutes)**
 - a. Agenda items

Included in the meeting packet:

- Meeting summary from March meeting
- Draft CEPOC Funding Memo

If you require assistance to participate, contact the meeting facilitator, Alexander Harris:
360-922-2318 – aharris@co.whatcom.wa.us

Conservation Easement Program Oversight Committee

Meeting Summary – March 19, 2026

Start Time:	3:00pm
Location:	Online and in-person at Northwest Annex, 5280 Northwest Drive, Bellingham

Attendees – Members	Affiliation	Present
<i>VACANT</i>	Farm Supporting Business	
Dave Kershner	Non-farmer, unincorporated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
JoEll Snyder	Real estate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>VACANT</i>	Farmer	
McKale Jones	Farmer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mike Finger	Farmer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Henry Bierlink	Non-farmer, incorporated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Paul D’Agnolo	Ag Supporting Programs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Alex Jeffers	Easement-holding entity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>

Quorum Present	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
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PDS Staff	Affiliation	Present
Lauren Templeton	CEP Administrator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Alexander Harris	CEP Outreach Coordinator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>

Attendees – Guests	Affiliation	Present
Chris Elder	Coastal Farmland Trust	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Paul Schissler	Former CEPOC member	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>

1. Welcome, Introductions, Public Comments, and Agenda Review

- Dave, CEPOC Vice Chair, asked staff to facilitate the meeting.
- Agenda reviewed and approved.

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Summary

- Paul D. moved to approve the draft meeting summary for the February meeting, Alex J. seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously, with JoEll abstaining.

3. Updates and Announcements

New CEPOC member: JoEll Snyder. JoEll grew up in Whatcom County and has been a realtor for 20 years. JoEll currently serves as the President of the Whatcom Association of Realtors. She grew up on a horse ranch and lives in rural Whatcom County.

CEPOC members then proceeded to introduce themselves.

Staff updates:

Lauren and Alex H. shared details on their 11 projects, 9 of which are actively moving forward. Some highlights:

- Jacoby CE will close in April or May.
- Taylor CE will close soon, due diligence items will come soon (survey and appraisal).
- Sanfi Acres Canyon Creek CE: secured funding through RCO, looking for funding through NRCS. Working with WLT on easement language.
- Sanfi Acres Maple Falls CE: Secured funding through RCO, waiting for FLP funding.
- Koblitz Red Mountain CE – also going to use Forest Legacy Program funding. WA Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) does the due diligence on these projects.
- Koblitz Sumas Mountain CE: smaller property, not a high priority at this time.
- Steensma CE: this project has two parts: farmland preservation across ~75 acres and riparian protections for ~15 acres. Staff are applying for RCO funding for the farmland portion of the easement, and staff are planning to use funds from Ecology's Puget Sound Riparian Systems Lead grant program to fund the riparian portion of the easement.
- Jensen CE: staff applied for grant funding through NRCS ACEP-ALE. This easement probably won't close until 2027 or 2028.
- Hoyt CE: this project will be discussed this later in the meeting)
- Neunzig CE: staff are still figuring out funding path for this one.
- Gehling CE: ecological easement, potentially use funds from DOE.
- Cost estimates for all 11 projects: \$7.6 million. Roughly \$2.8 million of Conservation Futures Funding is needed through 2028. That means that roughly 70% of easement costs will be grant funded. This year is a big year (Steensma, Jacoby, Taylor, Canyon Creek).
- Dave asked why there was back and forth with Jacoby easement. Lauren said the forestry portion of the easement would only be funded through Whatcom County, whereas the ag portion would be funded 50% WC and 50% RCO. This arrangement has created some complexity, but the project is now moving forward.
- Alex H. shared that folks can reach out if they have more questions about specific projects.

Webinar report back

- McKale shared that she and others watched a webinar about San Juan County's Real Estate Excise Tax for conservation. She said it was more inspirational than informational.
- Dave said San Juan County was doing great work with conservation and housing. He said it would be helpful for the CEPOC to hear from realtors in San Juan County about their thoughts on how the Real Estate Excise Tax for conservation (REET 3) interacts with the housing market.
- JoEll said she would like to watch the recording of the webinar, and she said he'd like to connect with San Juan County realtors on this topic.
- Dave said we should ask Lincoln Bormann (Director of the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank) to help us find a realtor to present to CEPOC. Dave said he'd want a realtor to speak to how this program has been an asset in San Juan County, and how realtors explain the tax to clients.

4. Discussion Items

Proposed Legoe Bay easement

- Alex H. provided an update that Skylar McGee (Stewardship Director, Lummi Island Heritage Trust) sent him an email communicating that LIHT has decided not to pursue holding this easement. Alex H. shared that the small size of the parcel was a major factor in the LIHT decision.
- Dave asked if the landowners had reached out to Lummi Nation.
- Alex J. weighed in to say that there might not be enough to show that there's adequate conservation value in the public benefit.
- McKale asked whether there were any other land trusts who could be approached about this easement. Alex H. said WLT and LIHT have opted not to pursue this easement. He said that without a land trust partner, the CEP could not pursue this easement.
- JoEll asked why CEP doesn't monitor our own easements. Lauren weighed in that land trusts are held to strict standards through Land Trust Alliance, and they have a lot of experience.
- Dave asked whether San Juan Preservation Trust could be approached. He said they do hold some easements on the island.
- Alex J. said Lummi Nation could potentially be approached to hold the easement.
- Paul D. said he had concerns that this could be a case of private benefit with public funds. The use of the property is so unique to a particular non-profit, that he said he would not feel comfortable pursuing this easement as proposed. Alex J. said he also had concerns about private benefit here.
- Paul D. put a motion on the table: to defer this project in its current iteration unless there is a determination or consensus amongst other project partners otherwise. Alex seconds. The motion passed unanimously.
- McKale said she was excited about this project, but she agreed this particular property was not ideal to accomplish these goals

Proposed Hoyt Easement

- Lauren shared that this proposed easement could be part of a larger succession planning effort. Currently, a farmer is leasing the properties and has expressed interest in buying the property.
- Alex H. and Lauren estimate there are 6 development rights on the property (2-4 available, depending on how the four houses are accounted for).
- Lauren shared that staff are considering whether to pursue funding from RCO's Farmland Preservation program. She also shared there might be some subdivision and land use work done before the easement is finalized.
- Alex H. said that Coastal Farmland Trust is interested in being a supportive partner. Alex H. had suggested Coastal explore using the Farm PAI program, which is a program designed to give land trusts low interest loans to buy properties that will be protected by an easement, then sold at a reduced price to a beginning or underserved farmer. Alex H. said Coastal has opted not to pursue that opportunity at this time.
- Chris Elder, board member for Coastal Farmland Trust, said that Coastal is still interested, but he'd like CEP staff to pursue the RCO opportunity so there are options down the road.
- Alex H. said according to his preliminary assessment, the property doesn't appear to have been subdivided, which means there may need to be a subdivision that divides the property before the easement is developed.
- Alex J. makes a motion to approve CEP staff to continue working on this project to determine feasibility of funding for the project. Henry second. Passes unanimously.

CEP Funding Memo

- McKale said she worked with Dave and Paul S. (before he termed off CEPOC) to refine the draft of the funding memo.
- CEPOC members then spent time working through the draft of the memo.
- Henry proposed that the draft is cleaned up, then shared with the committee before the next CEPOC meeting.
- McKale volunteered to incorporate these edits then work with Alex H. to send around a fresh copy.
- JoEll said it would be a good idea to have CEP staff present to the Whatcom County Association of Realtors. Alex Jeffers said he would be interested to join a presentation as well.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30pm
