

# Whatcom County Ferry-Advisory Committee

## **Agenda- January 28, 2026 6 p.m.**

The Gathering Place – 3913 Legoe Bay Rd, Lummi Island, WA

**Bold** text indicates Committee decision expected. Asterisk\* indicates attachment

6:00 p.m. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

Rhayma Blake, Janice Catrell, Terry Diffley (new member), Pam Gould (outgoing), Thomas Philpot, Markis Dee Stidham, Steve Thomas (new Member), Tess Winds-Johnson

FLAG SALUTE and MOMENT OF SILENCE

WELCOME

- Committee members both current & new and community members
- WC Public Works Deputy Director Laura Frolich, Ferry Master-Gary Poole, County Council Member-Jon Scanlon

BUSINESS MEETING

- **Accept Agenda**
- **Adopt Minutes, November 19, 2025\***

6:10 WHATCOM COUNTY UPDATES

- County Council Member Scanlon
- Ferry Master Poole
- Pam Gould Overview of plans for 2026\*

6:30 OLD BUSINESS

- Elect WCFAC member to serve on the “Service Alternatives” Planning Work Group (formerly Island access subcommittee). This work group will make monthly reports at regularly scheduled WCFAC meetings
- Amendments to **RCW 36.54** to allow for Counties with Ferrys to enact Countywide Ferry taxing districts, have been introduced in both the House and the Senate of the Washington State Legislature. These Amendments have bilateral support.

6:50 NEW BUSINESS

- Elect new Chair, Vice chair, Secretary for 2026
- Establish Meeting dates for 2026- (2 months are selected for meeting in Bellingham)

7:15 OPEN SESSION

7:45 ADJOURN

COMMITTEE SCHEDULE:

WCFAC Meeting February 2026, 6:00pm, (Date to be determined) at The Gathering Place, 3913 Legoe Bay Rd

\*Attachments:

WCFAC November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025, Meeting *Draft* Minutes

“What’s next 2026 for WC Ferry System” ppt

## Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee (WCFAC)

November 19, 2025

Draft Minutes

**CALL TO ORDER** by Pam Gould at 6:03 PM

Present: Rhayma Blake, Pam Gould, Carol Landt, Thomas Philpot, Catherine Shornick, Markis Dee Stidham, Tess Winds-Johnson

**Chair Pam Gould welcomed** the board members, Whatcom County Council Member at-Large Position B Jon Scanlon; and attendees.

**Pledge of Allegiance** and moment of silence.

### BUSINESS MEETING

**Agenda** - Accepted as presented

**Minutes, October 22, 2025 Meeting** – Adopted as presented.

#### Updates:

- Jon Scanlon
  - County Budget - Whatcom County Council has reviewed its budget at the one-year mark in this two-year budget cycle. Public Works, which manages the ferry, reports that it is facing budget shortfalls due to inflation and labor cost increases. Therefore, they are cutting staff and delaying some road improvements. Jon noted that Council has also added \$500,000 to the \$3 million it has already allocated to support the Food Bank and help address current needs. Council will take final action on its budget at its December 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting.
  - Zoning - A hearing at the Whatcom County Planning Commission on December 11 will address the zone scrub needed to properly authorize kitchen usage at The Gathering Place on Lummi Island. This would then be addressed by Council next January.
  - Climate Resilience - The county's 20-Year Plan is being reviewed in light of the effects of sea level rise and the need to add berms or help people move, especially in county coastal areas.

#### Old Business:

- RAISE Grant Update – Pam confirmed the RAISE grant application for the smaller 20-car design and dock improvements has been approved. Updates, including a graphic of the replacement ferry vessel, are now available at <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/3432/New-Ferry-Vessel>. A permanent passenger gangway will be included on the island side.
- Extended Ferry Outage Needs Priorities - Plans for necessary terminal improvements call for passenger only ferry service for 3 months between August and October in 2028. Public Works has asked the Island Access Committee to identify needs to be addressed during this outage. It was confirmed that at least one WCFAC member should be part of this committee. Pam has offered to be on the committee but will not be on WCFAC next year. To date, an ADA accessible passenger vessel and possible barge options for supplies, etc. have been identified. Tess stressed the need to increase the availability of free parking on the mainland during the outage. Carol suggested using the current ferry waiting lane along Lummi View Drive. Markis and Carol suggested that listening sessions might be helpful in identifying additional issues and needs to address during the outage.
- WA Legislature RCW 36.54 Amendment –
  - The County Executive’s office has drafted a proposed change in the state statute that provides ferry funding from **property taxes**. The proposal would assess properties countywide, not just property in unincorporated Whatcom County. Such a change would probably lower the burden on those currently paying for the ferry as part of their property taxes. It would also benefit the funding for county road improvements since much of that funding currently goes to ferry maintenance. Jon has already started sharing with our state representatives the need for this change which must be made in the upcoming January 2026 state legislative session. He shared that he and County Council members Galloway and Buchannan were working with other counties to create a County Ferries Caucus to address ferry funding issues at the state and federal level. Pam will publicize when it is appropriate to start contacting our state representatives once there is a bill number. This additional funding is needed as part of the \$25 million match required to secure the \$25 million federal RAISE grant.
  - Pam shared that she, Markis, Carol, and Janice had met with Elizabeth Boyle representing Whatcom County District 2 and Jessica Rienstra representing District 3 on next year’s County Council and briefed them on this need to fast track new ferry funding.

- Upcoming WCFAC Open Positions – Pam’s, Catherine’s, and Carol’s terms are ending. So, there will be 2 on-island and 2 off-island positions open. Pam stressed the importance of having a strong committee in the next several years and that to be appointed one should not only apply online at <https://wa-whatcomcounty.civicplus.com/521/Whatcom-County-Ferry-Advisory-Committee> but be present at the January 13<sup>th</sup> County Council meeting to be appointed.

#### **New Business:**

- Upcoming WCFAC Meeting Dates – **Catherine moved and Carol seconded a motion that WCFAC not meet in December due to the holidays and no urgent issues. Passed unanimously.**
- WCFAC Meeting Opening – Pam shared that it has been suggested that **WCFAC add an additional statement to its meeting opening: “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 this indigenous people.” Catherine suggested that this is appropriate. Markis moved and Tom seconded a motion to approve. Passed unanimously.**

#### **Open Session:**

Stuart Rich – Inquired about the timeline for bids on the new ferry. Jon will confirm the latest, but thought it was February 2026 for the vessel and October 2026 for the terminal work.

Bob Anderson – Thanked Pam for her grasp of the issues involved. But he called out the recent ferry rate increase and its significant impact on the island this year and the year ahead. He pointed to the impact of the fare increase on people like Mary Ross, who shared the toll it took as she took her husband to town for physical therapy twice a week. As well as the impact on health care providers who used to come to the island but now find it increasingly unaffordable. Bob is exploring the possibility of health care providers walking on the ferry, but then getting to clients with the proper equipment is a challenge. There are many for sale signs with people having to move to the mainland for jobs and services. If the school has to close, the island could become a retirement community. “The fare increase blew the lid off island economic viability.”

Pam Gould - Warned about the possibility of additional ferry fare surcharges being considered in the future to fund “the next” ferry if the county considers using the current surcharge to help service the debt on this current funding plan.

Stuart Rich – Inquired whether bonds could not be considered as part of the funding package. Jon shared that currently bonding efforts are focused on funding the new county jail which will be determined 1Q26. Also, the final bid for new vessel construction has yet to be determined. He also shared that the border situation has had a detrimental effect on current sales tax revenues affecting county revenues available.

Charles Bailey – Asked what has become of the idea of a Lummi Island taxing district to fund the new ferry. Pam shared that that suggestion has been tabled in favor of a county-wide 1 cent per thousand property evaluation tax which would raise more funds. And Islanders could not be double taxed for the same project.

Loren Conroy – Asked if there could be flexibility in the dates of the ferry outage discussed earlier to take into account possible work needed on the Scenic Estates water system. Markis shared that the fishing season is probably constraining the outage to these currently planned dates.

Pam shared that she will post invitations island wide to participate in the Lummi Island Access Group's work in the coming year.

**Meeting adjourned 7:29 PM**

Attachments:

WCFAC October 22, 2025 Minutes - Approved

Submitted by R. Blake

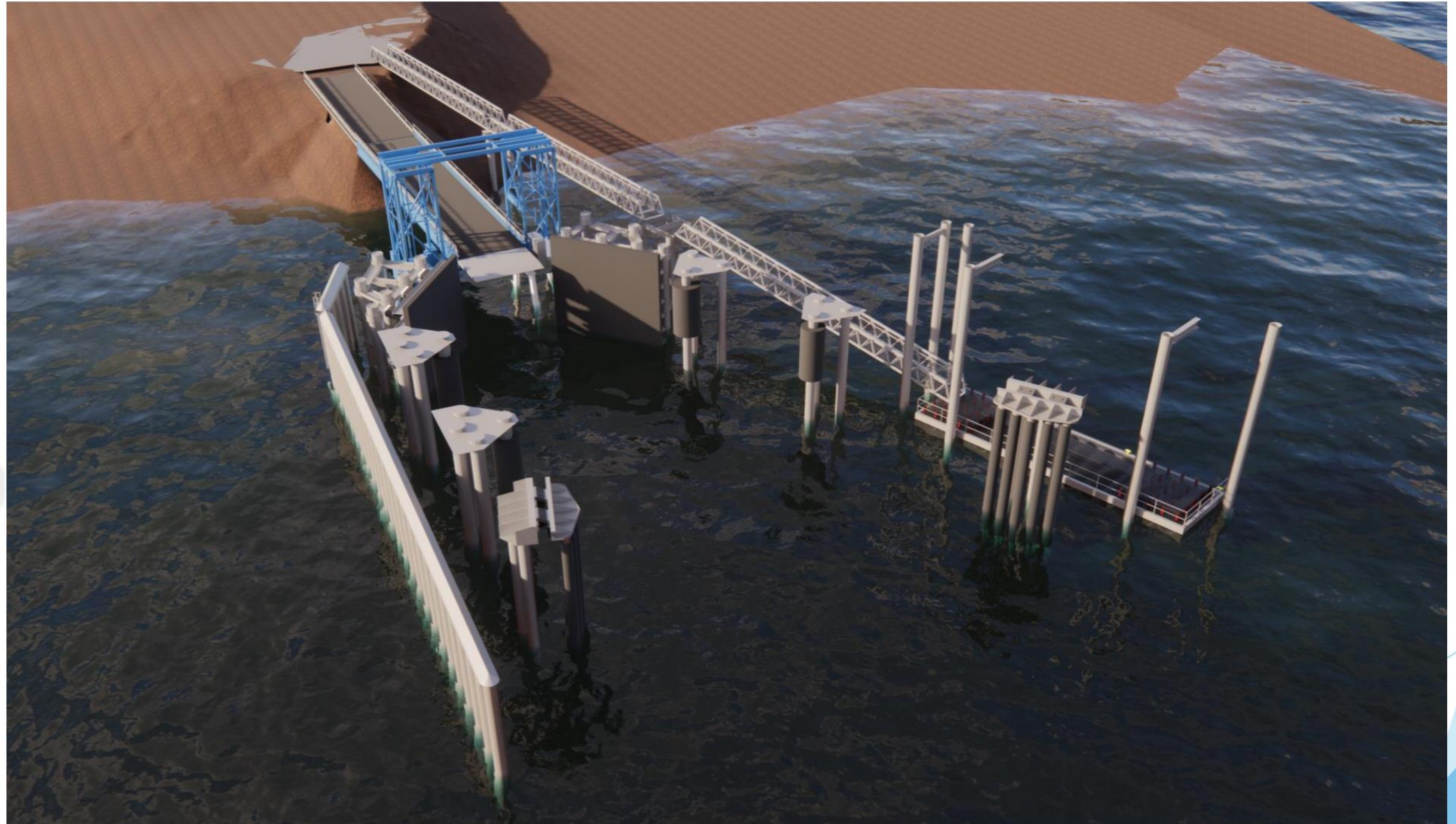
# Whatcom County Ferry System- 2026

**What's coming Next....**

## Project Schedule

- January 2025 – January 2026: Complete NEPA environmental assessment!!
  - July 2026: Grant agreement approved by County Council
  - **September 2026: Grant obligation deadline**
  - July 2027 - February 2029: Terminal construction (planned in two seasons)
    - *Season 1 (2027/2028): Limited short vehicle ferry service outages*
    - *Season 2 (2028/2029): Estimated 12 weeks vehicle service outages, around August to October 2028*
- Project team to continue exploring options to minimize vehicle service outage***
- Early 2029: New vessel delivery**

# Completed Island Terminal



## Current permit status for the ferry terminal work and the MARAD RAISE grant:

- The draft NEPA EA was sent to the federal permit agencies on November 12, 2025 and received comments 1/22/26 from MARAD. We will edit the EA to address the comments
- The Corps of Engineers has begun their NEPA process. We expect their signature March or April
- The Biological opinion is now at the “top of the review stack” with NMFS. We expect a sign off February or March
- Archaeological and Cultural Resources reviews are complete, as well as our negotiation with the Lummi Nation for marine work mitigation. item with the County Council for approval.

Expect to have a draft grant agreement from MARAD by June. As soon as we have the agreement, we will schedule an agenda item with the County Council for approval.

JAN. 12- MAR. 13  
Legislative  
Session



OCT:  
Bid terminal  
work

DEC: Award  
bid for  
terminal work

**2026**

Financing

FEB:  
Bid  
vessel

APRIL:  
Ferry district  
decision  
Order vessel

AUG 1:  
Deadline  
for new  
district  
levy filing