



City Council Agenda Bill

<h2 style="margin: 0;">20050</h2> <p style="margin: 0;">Bill Number</p>

Subject: Report out regarding the July 8, 2013 Lake Whatcom Policy Group meeting.

Summary Statement: The Lake Whatcom Policy Group, consisting of representatives from the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District, the Whatcom County Council, and the Bellingham City Council, meets regularly to discuss policy issues regarding Lake Whatcom. This Committee Briefing will review the discussion from the July 8, 2013 Policy Group meeting.

Previous Council Action: n/a

Fiscal Impact: None.

Funding Source:

Attachments: 1. Lake Whatcom Policy Group, Brief Digest of Presentations and Discussions, July 8, 2013 meeting.

Meeting Activity	Meeting Date	Staff Recommendation	Presented By	Time
Committee Briefing Information Only	15-Jul-2013	Information Only	Cathy Lehman	5 mins.

Council Committee:

Lake Whatcom Reservoir & Natural Resources
 Cathy Lehman, Chair
 Michael Lilliquist; Stan Snapp

Agenda Bill Contact:
 Mark Gardner, 778-8204

Committee Actions:

Reviewed By	Initials	Date
Seth Fleetwood Cl. Pres.		
Cathy Lehman, LW Nat. Rs. Cmte	CL (by mg)	7/9/13
Legal Mayor	AAm KL/DA	7/10/13 7/10/13

Council Action:



Lake Whatcom Policy Group July 8, 2013 Meeting Brief Digest of Presentations and Discussion

1. Improving effectiveness of residential retrofit programs

Staff provided a recap of the Homeowner Incentive Program and the discussion of barriers to participation that began at the 2013 Joint Councils and Commission meeting. Staff are reviewing the program to identify improvements for the second phase of the program. Achieving the targets set by the TMDL will require that the majority of existing properties be retrofitted to improve phosphorus removal. Other critical pieces in meeting the TMDL requirements include investment in capital facilities, and acquisition of lands that could be developed or subject to clear-cutting. Although 70-80% reduction could occur via other programs, retrofits are necessary to get at the remaining 20-30%.

There are 4104 developed acres in the entire Lake Whatcom watershed. The goal is to retrofit all runoff- or phosphorus-generating surfaces within at least 3,500 of these acres so they function similarly to a forest for phosphorus control. This would remove 3,140 pounds of phosphorus a year.

Staff reviewed modeling data indicating that lawn and landscapes are a significant part of phosphorus loading in a number of creek basins. Many properties drain to stream systems without any treatment occurring. Also, many properties abutting the Lake have no treatment facilities. In addition, about a third of properties do not drain into any public right-of-way so runoff from these properties cannot be treated by public systems. The latter properties account for 1000 pounds of phosphorus going into the watershed annually. Lastly, when properties drain to public facilities, the effectiveness of public stormwater systems is improved when some of the phosphorus is taken out before reaching the treatment systems. In general, control of phosphorus at the source is one of the most cost-effective methods of treatment.

City staff have met with 400 homeowners regarding resources available through the HIP program. An interlocal will be signed with the County soon to allow participation of homeowners in the County portion of the Silver Beach Creek watershed. Up to \$6000 per property is available, with the reimbursement level depending on the amount of phosphorus removal achieved. The maximum grant is allowed if 92% of the phosphorus is removed. Some property owners are only removing 10-20% of the phosphorus. The average removal rate is around 50%. Actual reimbursements to homeowners have averaged \$2,800 per property, which does not include the value of staff time assisting in system design, permitting, etc. Staff noted that different properties vary in the ease of phosphorus removal. Properties with a lot of intact forest are cheap; properties that are mostly impervious are very expensive to achieve high removal rates.

Barriers to participation include lack of funds on the part of homeowners, lack of technical knowledge of what is available and how to proceed, distrust of government, and concerns about aesthetics. Staff presented some proposals to reduce some of these barriers. Financial barriers are reduced by the HIP program, which is funded by a grant from DoE plus local match. However, grant money for this purpose runs out in 2014. City staff will propose that City monies be made available after that date to continue reimbursements to homeowners.

Policy makers requested information on what it would cost if all the targeted properties were retrofitted. Also, there was a request that staff look at targeting the program toward properties with the largest phosphorus load moving into water bodies, and those with the highest probability of success. Clark County has initiated a similar targeting program for one of their watersheds.

Staff and policy makers discussed the fact that volunteer participation alone won't achieve the desired participation rate. At some point, requirements may need to be considered, as with septic systems. One question is how to fund this. A watershed overlay district could generate revenues to pay for residential retrofits. Birch Bay has a similar stormwater funding area.

Staff noted that there may be a tradeoff between aggressive targets and overall support for the program. Improved education could help but additional resources would be necessary. Polls show that there is broad support for improved water quality. One idea is to create a recognition program for properties that achieve high levels of phosphorus removal. Another incentive for participation is to inform residents that grants are available now, but later on they might not be. Also, involving more non-governmental participants could improve trust.

Some barriers are aesthetic. Some homeowners like large lawns and may not like extensive plantings, or may have concerns that trees will block views. In response, staff have relaxed the forest cover requirements because similar benefits can be achieved using smaller plants. Landscape designers who work with the HIP are asked to provide a variety of methods of achieving removal, and homeowners can choose the one they prefer. Staff also inform residents that some low-impact landscapes are low-maintenance. Lastly, research shows that properties with trees and shrubs as landscaping have as high or higher property values. Properties with views "framed" through trees can be highly desirable.

2. TMDL update

Staff briefly reviewed next steps in the rollout of the TMDL plan. DOE's Volume 2 Water Quality Improvement Report and Implementation Strategy is being reviewed and comments have been provided by the City, County and LWWSD. Staff noted that due diligence regarding development of the TMDL is necessary and should not be construed as deviation from commitment to improving water quality in Lake Whatcom.

3. Upcoming topics and announcements

- Note: The Lake Whatcom Policy Group will not meet in August. The next meeting will be September 9, 2013, in the Whatcom County Civic Center Garden Room.
- Upcoming Policy Group topics (specific dates for each not yet assigned)
 - Identification of ways to improve the interjurisdictional decision-making process.
 - Staff will present a plan to improve targeting of properties for participation in HIP.
 - Review of Lake Whatcom education, outreach, and communication programs.
 - Develop a process for building a strategic plan for the 2014 activities of the Policy Group. Policy-makers would identify policy issues that need to be resolved, and topics for the 2014 meeting will be built around these policy questions.
 - Fall review of the first year of the Aquatic Invasive Species Inspection Program.
 - Presentation on City of Bellingham's Nooksack diversion activities.