



Lake Whatcom Policy Group

February 5, 2020 Meeting

Brief Digest of Presentations and Discussion

Policy Group members in attendance: Todd Donovan (Whatcom County Council); Michael Lilliquist, Hannah Stone (Bellingham City Council); Todd Citron (Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District Board).

1. Administration: Overview of Lake Whatcom Management Program; Role of the Policy Group

Staff reviewed the history of the Lake Whatcom Management program and the Policy Group. The Lake Whatcom Management Program was formed in 1990 and is a joint effort of the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, and the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District. The structure of the Lake Whatcom Management Program includes legislative bodies, a management team, an interjurisdictional coordinating team, and other agency staff. The executives of the three jurisdictions also meet periodically to facilitate interjurisdictional coordination, and to review and discuss policy issues affecting the Lake.

Every five years, the jurisdictions work together to plan for a new round of projects and programs aimed at meeting the Lake Whatcom management goals. The latest plan, for the 2020-24 period, is being reviewed by the three jurisdictions and will be approved at the annual legislative meeting in March. The Work Plan is currently divided into ten Program Areas, each addressing a function of the Lake Whatcom Management Program. These are:

1. Land preservation
2. Stormwater
3. Land Use
4. Monitoring and data
5. Hazardous materials
6. Recreation
7. Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention
8. Utilities and transportation
9. Education and Engagement
10. Administration

The Lake Whatcom Policy Group was started in 2008 by members of the Bellingham City Council and the Whatcom County Council. Original members were drawn from the Bellingham City Council, the Whatcom County Council, and the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District Board. A representative from the Sudden Valley Community Association was added in 2014.

The Policy Group is not an official decision-making body but may propose resolutions later adopted by the legislative bodies. The group functions as an informal sounding board for staff to get legislative feedback on emerging policy issues and to provide updates and reports on Lake Whatcom programs and activities. The group also

improves communications across jurisdiction by providing a forum for legislative members to discuss emerging and ongoing issues affecting the lake. Agenda items are proposed by staff or Policy Group members.

2. Administration: 2020-24 Lake Whatcom Management Work Plan: Process and highlights

Work under the 2015-19 work plan has just finished up and a draft plan for the next 5 years is being completed. The draft 2020-24 Lake Whatcom Management Work Plan is being developed to meet our stewardship goals and also to meet the regulatory requirements of the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) regulatory regime from the Department of Ecology.

A public comment period has started beginning on March 5. The plan will go before the three legislative bodies for discussion and preliminary approval in February, on the following dates:

- Wednesday, Feb. 12: Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District Board of Commissioners meeting, 6:30 p.m. at 1220 Lakeway Drive, Bellingham.
- Tuesday, Feb. 18: Whatcom County Council Water work session, 10:30 a.m., Garden Level Conference Room, 322 N. Commercial Street, Bellingham.
- Monday, Feb. 24: City Council regular meeting, 7:00 p.m. at City Hall Council Chambers, 210 Lottie Street, Bellingham.

The comment period ends on March 2. More information on how to comment on the plan, and on the review process before the legislative bodies, can be found at:

<https://www.cob.org/news/Pages/features/Lake-Whatcom-Management-draft-work-plan-available-for-review.aspx>

Staff provided Policy Group members with a brief overview of the new plan, with a focus on elements that have been added or changed, and also reviewed the process for its approval. The following elements were discussed:

- Land preservation -- A new metric will be adopted to track the restoration of parcels obtained through the acquisition program, with the metric measuring the condition of forested acres, with a goal of restoring these to biologically mature stands.
- A budget summary section has been added. The indicated amounts in the table get incorporated into the jurisdictions' budgets during the annual budget process. There has been some care taken to accurately measure staff costs as well as operations and maintenance costs.
- There is a new section on the TMDL on page 30 of the plan. The permit for the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), which includes regulatory requirements that apply to both the city and the county, will incorporate the requirements for the TMDL. The new Lake Whatcom work plan will note links to TMDL throughout the report, along with timelines for compliance.
- There will be new phosphorus tracking reporting for various elements of the stormwater program, including capital projects, Homeowner Incentive Program projects, land use regulations, and operations and maintenance activities. Most of the phosphorus tracking is from engineering estimates although there is some direct measurement going on for some projects. The city has 52 facilities, and a

	<p>sample will be measured for control of phosphorus and fecal coliform. For homeowner projects, there are self-reporting requirements including documenting regular maintenance activities, and a sample of properties will be spot checked.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and data – The Lake Response Model and phosphorus reduction goals are being reviewed and updated. The County is administering the contract for this. If the lake response model is changed, the goals in the TMDL may also be adjusted slightly to reflect this. • Hazardous materials -- there will be a collection event for household hazardous wastes to remove these from the watershed. • Education and outreach -- The survey first completed in 2018 will be repeated to document trends of homeowner awareness of and participation in stewardship activities. This will help the program develop new educational materials and outreach events.
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3. Stormwater: County stormwater utility update

	<p>Whatcom County created a stormwater district for the county portion of the watershed in 2017, and the fee structure was adopted in July 2019 after a study was completed, along with significant consultation with the affected residents. The fee began to accrue starting in January 2020, and actual payments will be included in upcoming property tax bills. The fee will be phased in through 2021. There is a tiered fee for residences (small, medium, and large footprint), and nonresidential structures are charged according to amount of impervious surface. A capital facilities fee will also be assessed on new development starting in 2021, which will help pay for new stormwater control projects required because of the new development. This facilities fee will be the same for all single-family housing developments, and scaled according to developed impervious surface area for other projects.</p> <p>The district is expected to bring in about \$800,000 per year when the fee is fully phased in. The revenues will go toward capital investment as well as maintenance of capital projects. The revenues can also help pay for residential projects completed as part of the Homeowner Incentive Program and will also pay for activities such as lake monitoring and education. For more information on the stormwater utility, associated fees, and planned use of the revenues, see: http://www.whatcomcounty.us/2830/Lake-Whatcom-Stormwater-Utility</p>
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4. Administration: Discussion of 2020 Policy Group: goals and agenda topics

	<p>Policy Group members and staff reviewed proposed topics for upcoming meetings and suggested new meeting topics. The following topics were proposed by staff for the 2020 meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoreline Master Plan Update • Lake Loading and Response Model update • On-site sewage system impact assessment update • City of Bellingham Lake Whatcom Regulatory Chapter update • Land acquisition program review • Report on 2020 forest practices
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- Homeowner Incentive Program update
- AIS 2020 Program Review
- Tributary monitoring update

Policy Group members suggested that the following additional topics be added to the running list for the year:

- Discussion of possible County challenge to DNR management of forest lands
- Please add information on phosphorus contribution of streams when discussing the tributary monitoring topic
- A review of City and County capital project planning
- A review of traffic counts in the watershed, at trailheads, etc. to help manage impacts of recreational activity. Also, provide an update on parks development plans.

5. Administration: Discuss Joint Councils and Commission Annual Meeting agenda

Policy Group members reviewed a draft agenda for the annual Lake Whatcom Joint Councils and Commission meeting, to be held on March 25 in the City Council Chambers, 210 Lottie Street. At this meeting staff will present the new 2020-24 Work Plan for approval from the three legislative bodies, and this will be a major part of the agenda. Staff will also report out on accomplishments both from the last 5 year plan (2015-19), with a focus on more recent accomplishments from 2019. Participants will also hear from Dr. Angela Strecker, who is the new director of WWU's Institute for Watershed Studies, with a report on the most recent data on trends affecting the health of the lake.

Upcoming Meetings:

- The annual Lake Whatcom Joint Councils and Commission meeting will occur on March 25, 2020 in the Bellingham City Council Chambers, 210 Lottie Street, starting at 6:30 PM.
- The next Lake Whatcom Policy Group meeting is scheduled for June 17, 2020, 3:00 PM, Fireplace Room, 625 Halleck Street, Bellingham.