

News Flash from Lagoon Point

November 28, 2009

Dredging Update – Aaron Lowin

I apologize for the long break. Its been a long while since the last update. A lot has happened, though I wish we were even further along.

2nd drafts of permit applications were received from Grette & Associates, our permitting consulting firm, in early September. The dredging committee: Bill Brown, Andy Messer, and Aaron Lowin, reviewed the drafts and found them clear improvements over the 1st drafts, though some work was needed here and there. Comments and suggestions were provided back to Grette and to our engineering sub-consultant firm, Dalton, Olmstead & Fuglevand, that had prepared some of the technical documents.

An on-site visit by permitter agency reps was held September 28. The site visit was arranged and conducted by Cassandra Moore of Grette & Associates. On site were: Island County Planning (Bobek Tralebi, Matt Kukuk), WA Fish & Wildlife (Doug Thompson), and US Army Corps of Engineers (Vicki Didenhover, Kathy Kunz). LP was represented by your usual suspects: Bill Brown, Andy Messer and myself.

1. Dredging strategy: Reasons for selecting the preferred (hydraulic cutter-head) dredging strategy were presented and discussed. No objections were heard from permitters.

2. Sediment disposal strategy: Reasons for selecting the preferred disposal strategy were presented and discussed. There is no suitable disposal site available at Lagoon Point. Upland disposal is impractical due to county requirements and would be very costly. From there we moved on to extensive discussion of beach nourishment. Beach nourishment would be our preferred disposal strategy, we indicated, as it would be most beneficial to the local environment, would rebuild Lagoon Point owners' eroded beaches at no cost to those owners, and would be least costly for the project. But permissions would have to be obtained from the owners of all 36 or so privately-owned beachfront lots south of the inlet channel. Some of those owners have already declined to give permission, others have not responded to inquiries. Our attorney has advised that without owners' explicit permissions we should not do any work on private lots.

Permitters acknowledged these constraints and indicated that under the site circumstances they would likely not require we dispose by means of beach nourishment.

The sediment disposal discussion then turned to the remaining available option: pumping the sediment and liquid to a barge moored nearby, dewatering on the barge,

then towing the barge partly filled with settled sediment to an approved 'open water' disposal area for dumping. No objections were heard from permittees, provided we met water quality standards.

3. Eelgrass mitigation strategy: Permittees next viewed possible on-site areas at Lagoon Point for temporary or permanent transplanting of the eelgrass threatened by our dredging. Grette explaining that the few available Lagoon Point sites were each too small for the volume of eelgrass to be transplanted, and had other biologic limitations. Grette indicated they were looking for other Whidbey Island sites for permanently transplanting the at-risk eelgrass, but as yet had not identified any such sites.

4. Who may submit permit applications for the canal portion of the dredge work? Permittees raised this question. We explained that the original plat maps show 'Community Waterway Easements' on the central portions of the East and West Canals, and that the Div 234 Architectural Committee likely has de facto responsibility for maintaining the easement areas. We were asked to document that authority. We have since been consulting with the AC attorney on this matter.

This matter is not yet settled, but that should not delay consideration of our applications. Island County indicated the county would receive and review our permit applications (provided some organization signed the applications), but would hold up issuing its permits until the permissions issue was resolved. (We can live with that.)

All November: It is so frustrating. Our permit applications are near ready for submission, except that we have as yet no viable plan for eelgrass mitigation. (A few other matters need to be resolved as well, but these are small and are not holding up submissions.) Having as we do very limited eelgrass planting-and-holding area at Lagoon Point, Wa Fish & Wildlife had in October indicated it would consider a proposal to plant our eelgrass elsewhere on Whidbey Island. Our permitting firm, Grette, looked for a month, but has been unable to identify any potential eelgrass site elsewhere on-island.

If you know of a possible Whidbey Island site for planting eelgrass, please let us know right away, and we'll look into it.

In late-October, not able to find an off-site mitigation site, we decided to look again at possibly planting our eelgrass permanently or temporarily at several sites at Lagoon Point. No one Lagoon Point site is big enough, but perhaps two or more together could do the job. In particular we are looking at using the eastern end of the Lot C silting basin, eastward of where we propose to dredge, and perhaps also limited areas in the canals. These sites may be the only Lagoon Point sites we could use, and if we can't come up with an acceptable plan to mitigate the threatened eelgrass we won't be given permission to dredge. Its that serious.

In mid-November Grette identified several data sets they would need to assess the viability of the candidate sites. To save us money and speed things up Grette suggested we ourselves gather the needed preliminary canal depths data and underwater surface sediment samples. Bill Brown, Andy Messer and Steve Bondelid got right on it and (when the early November rainy weather cleared) by boat surveyed the candidate areas to secure depth data, samples of the underwater sediment, and even took underwater videos to see what eelgrass is already present at those sites. (Anyone loose a watch in the East Canal? They saw one.)

One or two volunteers needed: Bill Brown and I are leaving the LPCA board, and I am thus also leaving the Dredging Committee. The 2010 board as one of its first actions will need to appoint a new liaison to Grette, to replace me, and to replace Bill a new LPCA Board rep to the three-person Dredging Committee . (The Dredging Committee, which works really well, is composed of one rep from LPCA, one from AC, plus the liaison to Grette.) Particularly in this development phase of the project we need two folks who have technical engineering and project management experience. The Grette liaison person will need to devote to this project several hours a week on average.

Interested? Contact Janet Bondelid at jbondelid@gmail.com or 360-222-3182 or me, Aaron Lowin, at alowin@earthlink.net or 206-498-8090