

Skagit Flood Planning Blueprint Discussion

May 10, 2010

Those present: Todd Carlson and Kerri Woehler WSDOT, Bob Carey Nature Conservancy, Esco Bell City of Mount Vernon and Leonard Halverson Skagit County Sterling Area

Recommendations:

1. The Advisory Committee should revisit the issue of developing a project list without GI Study Data. How would the list be used? What are the advantages and disadvantages?
2. Clarify the differences between the CFHMP and GI Study
 - What does each do?
 - What are the products?
 - How are they inter-connected?
3. There needs to be pressure on results. Focus on developing a product that folks can accept. It needs to show progress, even if it's a bit underwhelming.
4. Provide adequately-resourced project management for the long haul that provides continuity and includes substantive interaction with process and product of the Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE) - Adequately-resourced means:
 - Funding (federal, state, local, other)
 - Leadership & Direction (policy)
 - Commitment at a high level (staff)
 - "Special projects manager" or "Flood Czar"
5. Clarify the role of the Advisory Committee and Technical Committees in the GI study, particularly in scoping. Would it be appropriate for those groups to serve as a steering committee? (The purpose would be to carry out the will of the County Commissioners and provide support, not to take over.)
6. It is very important to address environmental needs in the GI and related efforts. It is advantageous to serve multiple purposes (synergy), especially to seek funding.
7. The Advisory Committee should take this preliminary blueprint and develop a strategy for moving forward.

Obstacles and challenges:

1. Leadership
2. Deliverables not defined
3. Advisory Committee make-up is unwieldy
4. Distinction between GI / CFHMP not clear – blending is not constructive.

5. Where's the "bar" for adding projects (how much detail is needed)?
6. Chicken & egg – need more detail to go further
7. Land use implementation – does it help? How do we do it?
8. ACOE – personality conflict – need to overcome bad history.
9. Adequately resourced project management
10. Getting 1st project done diminishes benefits of other future projects?
11. Holding the ACOE accountable
12. Current draft CFHMP – too wordy – doesn't address the right audience
13. There is not a common understanding about what purpose a conceptual project list would serve
14. List without data is the reason the tribes left
15. Clarify the CFHMP products: it includes structural and non-structural elements
16. To be effective, the GI Study **must** be managed well
17. Unity of purpose
18. Resolution of hydrology issue
19. Work quality a problem
20. Need Regional Government leadership
21. ACOE is bound by rules, politics, etc.
22. Someone needs to feel the heat!

Discussion:

Todd

Need to lay out roadmap for CFHMP Advisory Committee - focusing on what, when & by whom. There is a need for the plan to coincide with a given time frame.

Focus will be on what we need to do to get to:

- 1) A list of projects
- 2) Establish a procedural process
- 3) Need to determine who is in charge – this especially needs to be resolved.

Bob

I'm participating in this meeting because of the opportunity and potential for service to the community. Bob noted that it has been 2 years since consultants laid out a process. There has been no follow through & no progress since the consultants have been out of the picture.

Reasons for this have been because:

- 1) Work of the Advisory Committee has been unclear
- 2) Communication between the County Commissioners and the Flood Hazard committees has been unclear – they are not working together

The County and the Committees working together will facilitate funding –

- 1) They need to make sure that each group's interest is incorporated into the process. Need to outline steps of the road map.

Leadership is needed as a core group

Esco

- 1) Structure of the core group leads to confusion
- 2) Coming up with a plan is not high on a priority list. There is a need to work through the priorities of the individual groups.
- 3) There needs to be clarification on what we need to do – there is not enough information to make decisions
- 4) Principles need to be outlined and then a list needs to be made.
- 5) There needs to be two tiers of principles – 1st tier would be to establish what is happening or important without contention and 2nd tier would be the rest.
- 6) First thing that needs to be done is to work on getting funding for completion of the GI Study – a blend of GI Study and Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan is not workable. The rhetoric sounds good, but it hinders moving ahead.
- 7) Can we make a list of where to go?

Leonard

Recon Study – Planning & Construction needs to be done. Advised that he had been part of a Recon study before – when it was presented to the County Commissioners, they did not like it & threw it out. Since then the Commissioners and the Corp have been at odds.

Kerri recommended an attempt be made to begin with a 2015 Goal and work backwards through the time line. The 2015 Goal would be to “Build Top Priority Projects.”

_____ From here on out – those speaking are not identified _____

- 1) Need to know dollar amounts regarding the GI Study
- 2) Need to know ecology information – fish
- 3) Need to know land information

It was noted that the cities and County have been unified when working with the Federal delegation.

Draft CFHMP – too much – need to consolidate. The “why do we need this” needs to be considered.

Need to make a list of everybody’s ideas. It does not have to be a reality list – just gets everyone’s thoughts/ideas out on the table. Problem: we don’t have enough data. It was suggested that we either get the information we need, or lower the bar for what goes on the “list” and accept the fact that the list may not be workable.

A conceptual list is okay – but plan for getting information needed for the plan is missing.

Question: Can a project list be done without GI Study information?
We need to be clear about what the CFHMP is doing and how will it, or can it interface with the GI Study.

Question: What is the purpose of the Advisory Committee?
The CFHMP is simply a basket to hold the interests of the technical committees. At this time there is no interaction between the Advisory Committee and the Technical Committees and no dollars – the committees do not work together.

The GI Study cannot be thrown out – it is critical and must be part of the plan.

Question: What is left for the Advisory Committee to do until the GI Study is completed?
The CFMHP is more than a project list – there are non-structural elements such as insurance, emergency management, etc. Members of the Advisory Committee may not share the chair’s understanding of this.

Problem: The ACOE and the Committees are not working together – the Advisory Committee can play a guidance role, however leadership is critical! It is important that the Corp and the leadership can work together.

The County Commissioners must provide leadership – they must recognize the importance of this. There must be a clear message from the Advisory Committee to the Commissioners before they can lead.

Question: What can we do without the GI Study? The Advisory Committee can identify what needs to be done now and what can be done later.

The hydrology has been resolved – this is critically important and must be recognized.

There needs to be a center point, with adequately-resourced project management

Continuity of project management is essential – this has not been provided in this project. Without unity, nothing will get done. Strong leadership is an essential component.

There needs to be a diplomatic way to address what has happened in the past – the structure has been poor and needs to be improved.

The Commissioners need to be convinced of importance – without that, the Advisory Committee is looking at continued failure.

To get to the goal of building projects:

- 1) There needs to be cooperation between the County and the ACOE – the County needs to get in the position of managing the ACOE in a diplomatic manner. The County should try to take on a role as a co-manager of the GI.

Part of the problem is limitations that are placed on the ACOE

100 year Flood Plain – Environmental wants it, City does not. Unsure of what County's position is.

Question: How do we convey recommendations to the Advisory Committee? E-mail to ask for a spot on the next Advisory Committee meeting agenda regarding how to use the information that has been gained from this meeting.

Note that the purpose is to help everyone who has an interest – all must have needs met.

Immediate needs must be met (e.g., imminent flooding) before conceptual needs can be considered.

Advisory Committee & ACOE - need to re-scope GI Study to include the 3 F's – Fish, Farm & Flood.

If you cannot get through the front door for financing, try coming through the back door – environment.

The reason for getting together to work on the blueprint is to help ensure that the process is successful to help everyone on the river.