

# Chehalis Basin Local Actions Program • Implementation Advisory Group

## MEETING 6 SUMMARY

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**Date:** Thursday, 11 February 2021

**Time:** 1:00 – 5:00 PST

**Location:** Zoom online meeting

### Purpose of Meeting

- Summarize Implementation Advisory Group (IAG) responsibilities, work completed to date, and potential work items that will be contemplated for Chehalis Basin Board review/approval.
- Presentation from ECONorthwest staff regarding environmental justice considerations in the Chehalis Basin and IAG discussion.
- Recap of discussion with Chehalis Basin Board regarding potential feasibility of structure relocation, acquisition, and retrofits for flood damage reduction in the Chehalis Basin.
- Continue discussion of potential policy and implementation considerations for improvements to the I-5 corridor.
- Continue discussion of potential implications and actions needed from regulatory perspective to managing future floodplain.
- Preview draft bank protection strategies/approaches and implications to communities.
- Continue discussion of potential ways to provide agricultural stay-in-place assistance.

### Meeting Notes

These meeting notes are intended to be a public record of key points, questions, and discussion topics raised during the meeting. They are not intended to be transcripts. The meeting was recorded on Zoom.

### Environmental Justice Considerations

Sarah Reich, Laura Marshall, and Jade Aguilar (ECONorthwest) summarized initial findings related to Chehalis Basin population vulnerability and resilience associated with flood management strategies. (Technical memo with more details is forthcoming.) These findings can lead to lines of inquiry to better understand vulnerable groups in the Basin and additional conversations about how to incorporate environmental justice aspects into the Strategy; they are not proposals or recommendations.

ECONorthwest's work stems from the Board's desired outcome regarding environmental justice: *Communities with environmental justice concerns would suffer less hardship and damage from flooding, would not be economically disadvantaged by displacement or otherwise disproportionately adversely affected by actions to reduce flood damage, and would be improved by flood solutions.*

ECONorthwest determined demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of people in the Basin by examining two vulnerability indices (FEMA's National Risk Index for Natural Hazards and CDC's Social Vulnerability Index) and other individual attributes (e.g., income, minority status, or rent/own status). They identified two underlying conditions that make people or communities vulnerable to flood risk: *hydrodynamics*, or who is at risk of flooding, and *resilience*, or people's ability to respond and recover from flooding (e.g., vehicle owners are likely able to evacuate an at-risk area more quickly than those who don't own a vehicle). When designing a flood protection action and determining who is affected by the action and whether they will be better off, things CBS should consider include: potential biases in decision factors, historical inequities, accessibility of materials and information, and how a project is

funded. Strategies to proactively avoid or mitigate any potential adverse outcomes for vulnerable populations include developing an equitable development plan with specific criteria to select program actions and/or elements.

IAG questions on the ECONorthwest presentation included:

- How can communities best navigate increases in property values due to floodproofing projects (e.g., building a levee) that may have negative distributional impacts, such as reducing affordable housing stocks? ECONorthwest response: Flood actions or projects need to be considered in the context of overall city planning priorities and in coordination with the local housing authority and other agencies to appropriately weigh tradeoffs and externalities. This challenge is not a reason to avoid creating safe places, and hopefully, because social issues are crosscutting, the project can be designed with shared impact responsibility and overall wins.

## **Floodplain Acquisition Programs**

Jim Kramer, meeting facilitator, reviewed previous IAG acquisition program conversations and Andrea McNamara Doyle, Director of OCB, described next steps in considering an acquisition program in the Basin. Based on IAG feedback, OCB drafted the following four messages to share with the Board:

1. Floodplain acquisition could be one tool in broader flood damage reduction toolbox.
2. Board could be open to acquisition opportunities with willing landowners, especially in strategic locations or areas that can offer multiple benefits.
3. Board could consider structure retrofits (e.g., elevations) where acquisition is less feasible.
4. Board could consider initial master planning work or feasibility evaluations in strategic areas with potential relocation opportunities (e.g., Davis Hill in Centralia).

In addition to these messages, OCB will also describe the general need to ramp up a more robust and integrated approach to landowner outreach for the entire strategy, which directly relates to any acquisition program and communication.

IAG comments on the OCB acquisition program messages included:

- Acquired land management needs to be directly addressed
- The message order could be adjusted to indicate that structure retrofits are a priority adaptation and will be considered in many other scenarios (not just with acquisitions).

## **Structural Measures for Flood Damage Reduction**

Jim Kramer summarized TAG and IAG feedback on potential next steps for local structural flood reduction actions:

- Identify types of structures in priority areas (residential, commercial, etc.)
- Outreach to jurisdictions and the public in priority areas on interest and need for local actions (potential interest in lower flood levels)
- Identify land use, zoning, buildout, economic, and social justice considerations for jurisdictions
- Consider identifying initial alignment possibilities
- If the Board determines there are any areas worth analyzing further, conduct modeling to help determine height and costs

The IAG responded to the following question: *What are your thoughts on how technical issues, policy implications, and public outreach should be conducted in regard to exploring improvements to the I-5 corridor and/or any of the 14 priority areas under consideration?* IAG comments and discussion topics included:

- To implement the next steps for the structural flood reduction actions for the I-5 corridor and 14 priority areas, it will be important to get to the next level of implementation detail at the local level (e.g., considering jurisdiction-specific scenarios, like zoning). The OCB could provide a framework for analysis and guidelines for local jurisdictions, and that could be used as part of the outreach to determine local priorities. In addition to outreach, there would probably need to be funding or other incentives to support this work.
- Economic development councils already bring together partners and conduct strategic planning in these areas. These groups should be kept informed of any activity, so they are not surprised by new developments.

## **Floodplain Management Recommendations and Land Use Implications**

Jenn Tice (Ross Strategic) described original floodplain management and land use recommendations and summarized IAG feedback on each recommendation to date. The modified recommendations are:

- Use the flood of record or the current, modeled 100-year flood (whichever is higher) as the regulatory standard.
- Use the current, modeled 500-year flood or the predicted, 100-year flood in 2080 for planning and educational purposes.
- Subdivision/large development regulations should focus on rural areas.
- An acquisition program could be used to acquire development rights for priority undeveloped lots to protect expansion of high-density zoning and/or for the benefit of aquatic species.
- Low density zoning can include policy guidance to discourage upzoning and urban growth area expansion.
- Compensatory storage for fill can be standardized and provide guidance for implementation.
- Zero rise policy can be standardized and provide guidance around implementation.

The IAG briefly discussed the revised recommendations before working in Jamboard to respond to six questions ([link to land use Jamboard](#) to see responses):

1. What additional info or issues should the Chehalis Board consider in deciding whether to recommend using the flood of record or the current, modeled 100-year flood for *regulations*?
2. What additional info or issues should the Chehalis Board consider in deciding whether to recommend using the current, 500-year flood or the predicted, 100-year flood in 2080 for *planning and educational purposes*?
3. What additional info or issues should the Chehalis Board consider in recommending adoption of subdivision requirements and policy guidance to discourage upzones/urban growth expansion?
4. What ideas do you have on standardizing the implementation of zero rise and compensatory storage requirements? Are there key principles to keep in mind to propose to the Board?
5. What project/funding criteria and/or other program characteristics should the Chehalis Board consider for an acquisition/incentive program for undeveloped properties?
6. What additional info or issues should the Chehalis Board consider in deciding whether to recommend that local/tribal jurisdictions continue to implement other past land use recommendations (CRBFA 2010 and French Assoc 2016) as appropriate for their communities?

IAG comments and questions on the revised recommendations included:

- Regulatory floodplain standards and planning goals:
  - Participants asked how the proposed regulatory standards related to FEMA flood levels. Both the current, modeled 100-year floodplain and the flood of record are stricter standards (e.g., higher elevations) than what is on the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps.

- Buildings built to these standards are more protective than if they were built to the FEMA level (e.g., they might need a higher freeboard level); however, the FEMA flood insurance rates are lower than they would be at the flood of record or 100-year flood.
- The 2080 prediction or 500-year flood are more conservative goals that will lead to more conservative planning and infrastructure.
  - The Board can help encourage each jurisdiction to adopt the use of regulatory standards and future flood planning goals.
  - Some IAG members feel that it is difficult to get people to understand a number that's 80 years in the future; a 500-year flood event is easier to explain than 2080 prediction. However, the 500-year event makes a flood sound like a low probability.
  - A code written for long-term planning must be backed by science and supported by local elected officials to be enforced today. Ways to operationalize the goal is a next step.
  - More modest regulatory standards do not mean we cannot plan for a big flood event.
- The agricultural community will likely have reservations about acquisitions so it is important to emphasize agricultural reliability. Skagit County used an acquisition program to purchase boundary land that blocks the urban growth area from expanding into the agricultural area.
  - If local jurisdictions develop their own programs, they will need continued technical support. Supporting local jurisdictions with technical assistance for implementation needs to be included with these recommendations.

## **Channel Migration and Erosion Hazards**

Merri Martz (Anchor QEA) presented an updated erosion management strategy and criteria to determine potential for an erosion management project. In general, the strategy recommends that erosion management projects be (1) developed and implemented in the context of reach-scale conditions and (2) combined with habitat enhancement or where critical infrastructure is threatened *and* an expanded reach-scale project can be pursued. Projects must meet two primary criteria:

1. A local project sponsor is willing to develop a reach-scale project with multiple landowners.
2. Erosion risk is immediate or near-term (within next 5 years) that that would cause significant damage to valuable structures, infrastructure, or productive agricultural land (“significant” loss or damage).

And three of four secondary criteria:

1. Landowner is willing to consider relocation that would provide long-term reduced erosion (or flooding) risk (either with or without an associated bioengineered or habitat solution).
2. Landowner is interested in a bioengineered solution and willing to maintain a bioengineered solution as part of a funding agreement.
3. Opportunities exist for a reach-scale approach to reduce velocities through reconnecting former channels/swales, placement of large wood, riparian revegetation, bank sloping/terracing, or other elements that would benefit the reach and maintain or restore natural processes and/or habitats.
4. Project is likely to provide significant benefits for the cost to multiple landowners.

Comments and questions on the erosion strategy included:

- Future mapping that analyzes and extrapolates past migration data would increase the objectivity of the criteria. If this pilot program goes forward, there would be many judgement calls due to the current lack of Basin mapping.

- It is difficult to keep landowners who want erosion assistance involved for 3 to 5 years because, despite their interest in techniques, they typically want quicker implementation.
- The criterion about significant benefits for the cost to multiple landowners should be about multiple benefits (e.g., to infrastructure) rather than necessarily multiple landowners.
- It should be recognized that it may be necessary to install temporary protection measures if a landowner can commit to coming back to install a bio-engineered project in the future.

## **Agricultural Stay-in-Place Assistance**

Jim Kramer revisited Tim Abbe's (Natural Systems Design) presentation from the IAG meeting on 21 January. Andrea McNamara Doyle summarized key takeaways for Board:

- Messaging with farmland owners is key; to do this we need to build on what we already know from subject matter experts (excessive unnatural rates of erosion are top of mind) and we need technical assistance that focuses on erosion management. The messenger is also a critical consideration; information needs to come from credible, reliable people to engage in constructive conversations.
- Deposition of wood and debris on fields is an example of an issue that can be addressed by focusing on technical/financial assistance with preventative measures (e.g., flood fencing or hedgerows). These measures are less helpful where erosion is occurring.
- Washington Conservation Commission has state-wide funding available for conservation practices that go beyond ASRP and there is funding available for hedgerows/flood fencing. There may be ways to tap into existing Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs.
- Better outreach/education can help connect new farmers who are not as familiar with erosion risks to conservation district assistance.
- While there's value in having agricultural acquisitions, it is a lower priority because there's likely not going to be much interest.

## **OCB Next Steps**

The IAG split into three breakout groups to discuss OCB's next steps and share additional thoughts on the IAG's work. OCB next steps are:

- OCB will summarize results from advisory group discussions and staff work, identify differing technical and policy perspectives for the Board and a table with the current progress for each work element.
- OCB is not recommending specific projects to the Board but rather proposing options (studies or additional analyses) for how specific projects could be pursued if the Board chooses.
- Future involvement of the IAG/TAG will depend on the Board's decisions and the interest of IAG/TAG members.
- IAG/TAG members are welcome to provide individual input to the Board through written correspondence and/or during Board meetings.

IAG comments on next steps included:

- Small-scale local projects are achievable and timely; they should have weight when considering future work.
- Interest in more discussions on erosion management. There is potential for habitat benefits from projects that might not fit "ASRP" goals, so need to have tools and solutions for landowners.
- The local actions will take champions for a new vision; they haven't been analyzed to the same extent as other Strategy elements, so need to catch up.

- The IAG has covered a lot of territory, and members were able to learn a lot from one another.
- Moving forward, the Strategy should continue to look for integration opportunities throughout the Basin ASRP and Local Actions Program.
- The LAP is not going to be a silver bullet, but it will be able to help in many ways.

## Next Steps and Summary of Follow-Up Actions

The next Implementation Advisory Group meeting will be combined with the Technical Advisory Group on Monday, 22 February 2021, at 3:00 PM PST.

Below is a summary of follow-up actions identified during the meeting:

- The OCB Team will distribute ECONorthwest's technical memo on environmental justice considerations for the Basin.
- The OCB Team will convene conversations with service providers throughout the Basin to discuss environmental justice ideas and messages the Board consider as they advance the LAP.

## Appendix: Email from Tammy Baraconi (City of Chehalis) re: buyout concerns

**From:** Tammy Baraconi <tbaraconi@ci.chehalis.wa.us>

**Sent:** Monday, February 1, 2021 8:49 AM

Jim and Andrea,

I have attended a couple of the Advisory Board [sic] meetings and will be at this afternoons meeting. I want to make sure that my concerns about a possible buyout are made for the record. I am happy that you are looking at buyout programs on tribal lands in Washington State, buyouts in North Carolina and Texas, and the relocation of the entire community of Hamilton WA. However as important as these programs are, I don't think they reflect the impacts/concerns caused by buyouts here in Lewis County and specifically Chehalis.

As someone who has done a buyout program in Centralia in the past, my concerns about a buyout of approximately 1300 properties are as follows. I would also be willing to make a presentation to the group about some of the issues I see with a buyout program based upon these concerns.

1. Residents are generally not interested in a buyout or relocation of their home.
  - a. During the buyout in Centralia I did reach out to other property owners but they weren't interested.
  - b. Objections they raised.
    - Generational homes
    - Family in the area
    - Prefer these schools for their children
    - Prefer the life style in our communities.
    - Cost of living in other communities makes living there unaffordable.
2. Even if we did get everyone to buyout, where do they move to? Would they move to Thurston County, Cowlitz County??
  - a. We currently have a housing shortage up and down the I-5 corridor. 1300 homes and businesses would only add to that current pressure.
  - b. We are becoming a bedroom community for places as far away as JBLM and Tacoma. A lot of State workers choose to live here in Centralia and Chehalis and commute because of lifestyle and cost of living.
  - c. A lot of the properties in the floodplain are rentals. We would be displacing a lot of people that either can't or choose not to buy a home. (Social equity) When I asked about buyouts landlords weren't interested in giving up their rental income.
3. What will our communities look like after a buyout on the scale of 1300 structures?
  - a. What would the loss of these homes and businesses mean to our local economy?
  - b. What would it mean to our local tax base, not just property tax but sales tax also?
4. Will eminent domain be used for property owner's that won't sell? Who will have that authority? I don't see the local councils being willing to use eminent domain to force buyouts and I don't see a buyout program being successful if it is completely voluntary.
5. And presuming that we are successful in buying out 1300 properties here in the area, who will be responsible for maintaining/policing them afterwards? Without regular maintenance they will become dumping grounds for debris and refuse as well as an attractive nuisance. (again I refer you to the properties I was able to buyout in Centralia) Our cash strapped community couldn't afford to hire additional staff to maintain/police these properties. And without the regular policing and maintenance of those buyouts, the properties on the edges, the ones that

don't get bought out, will have to deal the impacts. Not only to their life style but their property values as well.

- a. I would be happy to share my experience about how we tried to use the buyouts in Centralia to provide land for a park in the area and the obstacles that we faced. And why we ultimately had to abandon the idea and just simply buyout the properties.

Again, I respectfully ask that my comments/concerns be entered into the record. If you would like me to present or would like to talk with me as a side bar please let me know. Tammy

*Tammy S. Baraconi, CFM*

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