



(360) 678-4708  
Fax (360) 678-2271  
[www.whidbeycd.org](http://www.whidbeycd.org)

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P.O. Box 490 – 1 NE 4<sup>th</sup> St, Coupeville, WA 98239

## **Conservation District Going Through Changes**

Like the island we live on, the Whidbey Island Conservation District is going through some significant changes. Three staff members have retired or moved on to new challenges in the last six months and a new member of the Board of Supervisors is joining the board. At the same time, the demands for district services are increasing.

Established in 1967, Whidbey Island Conservation District is guided by a five-member volunteer board of supervisors and local staff with professional expertise, all of whom have a personal investment and interest in improving the quality of life in their communities on Whidbey Island. As a political sub-division of state government, the district provides resources and programs that are voluntary and incentive-based, and available to all interested landowners and residents that live on Whidbey Island. The district's technical assistance and educational programming are also free, non-regulatory, and can be tailored to meet Whidbey residents' conservation goals. The district strives to be a community resource that empowers landowners to conserve natural resources on their property.

Staff members leaving the district include Matt Zupich, who was with the district for four and a half years starting as a planner and working his way up to manager; Sandy Welch who was with the district for fourteen and a half years and is retiring from her position as office administrator; and Shannon Bly who has moved into a role with the Whidbey Island Grown Cooperative, a new organization that she helped get off the ground while with the District.

District Board Chair David Edwards said, "We have some big shoes to fill. We know that Matt, Sandy, and Shannon will continue to be advocates for natural resource management on Whidbey in their new roles, so that mitigates our loss a bit. Our continuing planning staff, Kelsi Mottet and Gwendolyn Hannan, are stretched a bit thin at the moment, but I'm confident they will continue to provide the excellent support for district residents that they have in the past."

Josh Monaghan, formerly with the King Conservation District, is serving as part time, interim district manager to facilitate the changes. Monaghan has only been with the district since March 15, but he already sees great potential for the district. "In my short time here, I've been impressed at how the staff has stepped up during a year when Covid-19 has impacted everyone, and we have been short-staffed," Monaghan said. "The Board has made it clear to me that my

priorities are to make sure that we continue to provide service to our customers, to help recruit a new manager, and to set up the new manager to hit the ground running.”

Former district manager Zupich will continue to be involved in district activities. “The district does important work and I really enjoyed the natural resource planning that I did there,” Zupich said. “I met a lot of great people during my time with the district. I want to continue to support good natural resource management on Whidbey and hope to be a resource for the district in the future on a volunteer basis.”

Welch will continue as a part time, temporary employee of the district to ease the transition. She agreed with Zupich’s assessment of the District. “Over the years, the district achieved recognition at the state and local level for its conservation work,” Welch said. “The work of the district is an important piece to the health and sustainability of Whidbey Island natural resources.”

Sarah Richards, a long-serving member of the Board of Supervisors, is leaving the board in the near future. “The challenges of natural resource management on the island are changing, and the district needs to change along with it,” Richards said. “This is a great opportunity for the district to evolve so that it can provide the services needed now and into the future.” Jennifer Abermanis was recently elected to fill her position.

In the next few months, the board will be revising its associate supervisor policy, providing former board members and other members of the community an opportunity to contribute expertise that could benefit the District and natural resource management on Whidbey Island.