

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, April 15, 2021

Virtual Meeting

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Sonja Max at 6:03 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Commissioners: Terry Terry, Pete Coy, Sonja Max, Brad VanderWerff,
Joe Hashmall, Brian Estes

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

EXCUSED

Commissioners: Kristen Fagan

GUESTS

County Executive Satpal Sidhu

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

None

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Pete asked if the Commission could start meeting in person. Mike advised he would address that in his staff report.

V. AGENDA

A. April 15, 2021

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the March 18, 2021 agenda as written. Brad VanderWerff seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VI. MINUTES

A. March 18, 2021

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the March 18, 2021 Minutes as written. Brian Estes seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. Director's Report – Michael McFarlane

- i. **COVID Update** – Mike contacted county legal staff to see if the commission could start meeting in person, but found that because the

meeting is an open meeting, it would still need to be streamed virtually and the department does not have the technology to do that. Mike is hopeful that in the couple months the commission will be able to meet outdoors in one of the parks. The Canadian border remains closed and probably won't open until later this summer. The Canadian Prime Minister has advised that all provinces will open at the same time and will not be considered for opening on a province by province basis. Lighthouse Marine Park campground may remain closed until the border opens. Silver Lake campgrounds opened, but the showers are closed. Senior Centers remain closed and the State has not provided any guidance on opening them. Indoor park facilities remain closed because it is too challenging and time consuming for staff to manage COVID restrictions. Park outdoor shelters are open and reservations are coming in for the summer season. Public gatherings, community events, and special events are slow to start because COVID requirements are challenging to interpret and COVID protocol is cumbersome to follow.

- ii. **East Whatcom Regional Resource Center** – WC Parks is submitting the Certification of Applicant Match to the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office for the covered sports courts at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center. The project is roughly \$550,000 with \$350,000 of grants from the RCO and \$200,470 in local match from the Opportunity Council working with the Whatcom Community Foundation. The Opportunity Council would like to get the project started before winter, but that will depend upon the processing of the state contracts and the bidding process. WC Parks is working with the Finance Department to get the project started and Mike will know more about a potential timeline next month.
- iii. **Staffing Update** – WC Parks is having a hard time recruiting seasonal extra help.
- iv. **Kayak/Bicycle-In Campsites** – The Executive has approved kayak/bicycle-in site fees at Lighthouse Marine Park and a bicycle-in site at Silver Lake. The fees for those sites were not included in the Unified Fee Schedule, but will be \$6 for residents and \$7 for non-residents. The Lighthouse Marine Park site will be available as soon as the park is opened and the Silver Lake site will be available as soon as it is completed.
- v. **Little Squalicum Park** – The City of Bellingham has asked WC Parks to transfer the County portion of Little Squalicum Park to the City. Historically, WC Parks has leased this portion to the City and the City has managed it. WC Parks received the first legal draft review and is set to present it to the county's Property Management Committee in May so that it can go to the council for approval at the end of May or beginning of

June. The City will follow a similar process with the city council to approve the transfer. The only fees associated with the transfer are recording and closing costs.

B. Operations Report – Christ Thomsen

- i. Staffing** – Recruitment of seasonal extra help is progressing, but very slowly. Typically, by this time of year, most of the seasonal positions are filled and people are already working or are scheduled to start. This year there are 23 positions to fill and only 10 are filled (6 have started working and 4 will start in the next couple of weeks). Applications are being reviewed as they come in and so far, every applicant has been interviewed. Admin staff has started looking at how to structure and assign staff to meet basic services in the event that the extra help positions aren't filled.
- ii. Whatcom Humane Society** – The Whatcom Humane Society rents the WC Park facility at Nugent's Corner where they operate their wildlife center. The humane society has been looking to relocate the wildlife center and has acquired a facility that they will be moving to, but the move is going slow. WC Parks is working on the third extension of their lease to extend it through the end of May. The extension does not affect park operations. The building is scheduled to be razed in June.
- iii. 2021 Agricultural Licenses** – WC Parks reviewed the agricultural license program in February. The licenses were advertised for proposals and closed this week. Proposals were received for the fields at Hovander Park, Deming Eagle Homestead Park, and South Fork Park. Christ will be preparing those licenses for review and signature over the next week.
- iv. Operations** – The bid packages for the Plantation Rifle Range HVAC and roof replacement project and trail construction in Lake Whatcom have been sent to the Finance Department. They aren't being reviewed and will be advertised soon. The beautification work in the Red Mountain Campground was completed before the campground opened for the season. That work included vegetation management, campsite driveway and road maintenance, and trail construction connecting the campground to the new shower and restroom facility. The crew is completing the installation of the new self-registration kiosk, a new entrance sign, and additional lighting at the campground. The dewinterization of all parks is complete.

C. Planning & Development Report – Rod Lamb

- i. Red Mountain Shower and Restroom Facility** – The contractor is almost finished with the plumbing and electrical work and has started installing exterior siding. The contractor's civil crew completed most of the exterior improvements including the parking area in front of the building and driveway improvements. The civil crew is currently working on the

septic system and installing the tanks and mainline from the tanks to the septic field. The WC Parks crew is finishing the installation of the new self-registration kiosk and entrance sign. The project will be completed at the end of May and will be open to the public in June.

- ii. **Maple Creek Campground Shower and Restroom Facility** – Rod submitted a small water system management plan to the State Department of Health on April 6. This is same permit process that was necessary for the shower and restroom facility at Red Mountain campground. The well at Maple Creek Campground has a blue level water operating permit, which does not allow for expansion of the existing water system. The Department of Health and the Department of Ecology need to verify that WC Parks has a protected water right to add to the capacity of the existing system and that the pump and aquifer can sustain an additional connection. If WC Parks has the water right and the pump and aquifer can sustain the additional connection, a green level water operating permit will be issued. The Department of Health has approved the septic location and the engineer is working on the final design.
- iii. **Birch Bay Beach Park** – Granite Construction, the contractor for the berm project, has demobilized from the Birch Bay Beach Park. Rod did a walk through with Public Works staff on Wednesday and verified that the contractor left the site in good order. Rod submitted a shoreline exemption package to Planning and Development Services for the initial phase of the improvement work. The existing chain link fence will be removed and replaced with a log railing that is constructed of large diameter cedar logs and concrete blocks that will act as a vehicular barrier and delineate the park's frontage. A small section will be built at the yard and Rod will bring a picture of it to the next meeting. A parks rules sign will also be installed. A second permit, the shoreline substantial development permit, will be submitted for the second phase of the project. That permit usually takes several months to get approval and is required for the other site improvements. Those improvements include removing the existing asphalt roads and putting in topsoil and seed. A small concrete pad will be poured at the entrance of the park where an entrance sign, a park rules sign, and bollards will be placed. Rod expects to get permit authority at the end of August.

D. County Executive Satpal Sidhu – Executive Satpal Sidhu commended the Parks Department and the Parks Commission for doing an incredible job in 2020 with the challenges of COVID and increased park usage. Executive Sidhu is very committed to planning for fire prevention in the 8,000 acres of reconveyance land in the Lake Whatcom Watershed. He also initiated the Whatcom Million Trees Project (www.whatcommilliontrees.org) to plant one-million trees in Whatcom County over five years.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Approve Goals and Objectives for 2022 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan – There was discussion about including wildfire prevention in the goals and objectives.

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the Goals and Objectives for 2022 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan as written. Brian Estes seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. Review Draft of Capital Projects List for 2022 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan – Rod presented the Master Capital Improvements List for the Department. It is being edited as part of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan update and will include input from regional park staff. Sonja asked if there was a place in the document for multi-modal trails or if a multi-modal trail would need to be planned before it could be included in the Capital Projects List. Conversation ensued on how this could be achieved. Rod asked that the commission provide input in May so that the list could be completed by the beginning of June. Mike added that the two-year Capital Project List will be reviewed in January 2022, so adjustments can be made at that time if necessary.

B. Discussion on Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan Request For Proposals – The Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan was supposed to have been started at the beginning of 2020, but was delayed because of COVID. Mike presented a document of the planning process, including goals and objectives, forest data and site conditions, strategies and prescriptions, forest management plan, and implementation. This RFP is in the very early stages and Mike would like input from the commission on what they would like incorporated in the proposal, including concerns, issues, ideas, etc. The final plan will go out to the public for review and comment and then will need to be approved by the Parks and Recreation Commission before it goes to the County Council for approval. Mike will bring a list of goals and objectives to the next meeting, as well as a map of the lands to be covered.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held virtually on May 20, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk III
Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director