

**MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, March 20, 2014**

**Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Administrative Office
3373 Mount Baker Highway
Bellingham, Washington**

PRESENT: Commissioners: Paul Woodcock, Gordon Rogers, Jeff Margolis, Richard Sturgill, Kenneth Kiesner

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Rodney Lamb

ABSENT: Janet Boyhan, Theresa Sygitowicz

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chair, Paul Woodcock at 6:13 PM.

I. AGENDA

A. March 20, 2014 Agenda Approval

MOTION: It was moved by Kenneth Kiesner, seconded by Gordon Rogers and passed unanimously to approve the March 20, 2014 Agenda as written.

II. MINUTES

A. February 20, 2013 Minutes Approval

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers, seconded by Jeff Margolis and passed unanimously to approve the February 20, 2014 Minutes as written.

III. PUBLIC INPUT/COMMUNICATIONS

A. Van Zandt Community Hall Event – The chair recognized Jeff Margolis. Jeff extended an invitation to all Commission Members to attend a “baby shower” at the VanZandt Community Hall on March 30, 2014, 3:00 PM to celebrate the arrival of their new baby grand piano.

B. Chuckanut Mountain Storm Damage Cleanup – Mike McFarlane relayed that Jake Strauss would like to recognize the Park’s Maintenance crew for their excellent results in cleaning up the storm damage in the Chuckanut Mountain trail system. The cleanup involved approximately two weeks of tree removal, slide damage repairs, etc.

C. Point Whitehorn – The chair recognized Jeff Margolis. Jeff stated that he would like to note that the trails at Point Whitehorn are in impeccable condition.

IV. DIRECTOR’S REPORT – MICHAEL MCFARLANE

A. Deming Eagle Park Haying Request for Proposal (RFP) – The RFP for this project will be released soon.

All other haying licenses have been completed for Hovander, South Fork Parks and Silver Lake Park. Previous year's licensees have first right of refusal on these parks, otherwise RFP's will be released for any refusal to renew an existing contract.

B. Ordinance – Parks Maintenance and Improvement Special Fund – An Ordinance will be introduced to County Council at the April 8, 2014 Council Meeting to implement a Parks Maintenance and Improvement Special Revenue Fund. This is a continuation of the 1983 implemented Parks Improvement Fund that consists of proceeds received from activities such as the sale of easements, specific park and project donations and other miscellaneous revenue.

Mike explained that some grant programs require revenues from easements and right-of-ways remain with the individual parks and not deposited to the General Fund. The County Finance Department has requested that the Parks Improvement Fund be used for capital projects only. The new Special Revenue Fund will be used for maintenance and operations when donations and other funds are received.

C. 2015 / 2016 Capital Projects Review – The 2015 / 2016 Capital Projects Review will be introduced on the April Agenda for discussion. The list will be reviewed and adjusted and will be sent for County Council review.

The goal is to provide a more seamless process in terms of the Capital Improvement Plan, budget approval, and the Park's work plan.

D. Maple Falls Elementary School Site - A contract is in place for an appraisal of the property. The appraisal is expected to be returned within 30 days and then forwarded to Council for action.

E. Birch Bay – Property and Community Center – A County Council motion request that the County Executive direct staff explore the purchase of park property in Birch Bay for a park and community center.

The motion included evaluating a packaging of funding options, an appraisal of properties that are available in the area and that the Executive expedite an appropriation up to \$9,000 for an appraisal to acquire a piece of property for this purpose.

F. HVAC System – Plantation Rifle Range - Parks is currently working on an RCO Firearms Archery Range Recreation (FARR) grant for Council approval in June. There is approximately \$150,000.00 that is available for grant funds that could be used to replace the ventilating system at the Range. The project is anticipated to cost approximately \$250,000.00. Parks is currently seeking quotes and refreshing engineering designs.

J. Phone System – The County is upgrading their phone system. This should be in place by this time next year. The Council on Aging at the Bellingham Senior Center will be installing a separate phone system by June of this year as their current system will no longer be supported by the County's IT Department.

K. Reservation System – Staff continues to coordinate the installation of the new reservation system with the vendor, Itinio. This new system will not only streamline our credit card fees to coincide with other County departments, it will also provide an updated campground reservation system and improve customer service.

The IT Department is upgrading the operations system to Windows 7 County-wide. Due to this change most of our computer equipment will need to be upgraded. The cost for this upgrade will come from the Parks' budget and is an unanticipated expenditure.

It has been decided that the Parks Department will also upgrade outdated software programs that are being used in our Design and Development and Accounting Departments.

L. Staffing – Operations Manager – Interviews for this position have been completed and an offer is pending.

M. Camp Horizon – The lease amendment for Camp Horizon to assume responsibility for the hostel building has been drafted and will be presented to Council for approval. In the process the insurance requirements and endorsements were reviewed and updated to meet current standards.

V. OPERATIONS – MICHAEL MCFARLANE

A. Storm Damage – Over the winter season there has been a significant amount of storm damage with downed trees and small scale slides. The crew has cleaned up all of the damage except one slide in the Reconveyance area.

Point Roberts and parts of the Chuckanut Mountain Park trail system sustained damage with the heavy, wet snow and wind. The cleanup continues in these areas.

B. Equipment – Discussions on the transfer of the boom arm mower from Public Works continue. This equipment will allow Park staff to better manage vegetation in our parks and complete projects that in the past have required more expensive and often unavailable contractor services to complete, This is a good addition to the fleet as it will result in both cost and time saving benefits for the Department.

C. Bellingham Senior Activity Center Parking Lot – Mike recently receive notice from the landlord that the rent for the parking lot will be increasing from \$14.40 to \$30.00 per space. Even though this is less than the market rate, Mike will be meeting with the other parking lot tenants, the Council on Aging and the City of Bellingham to discuss possible cost saving options.

VI. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT REPORT – ROD LAMB

A. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock Renovation – The preliminary design drawings from the dock manufacturer were received March 17, 2014. Once these are reviewed and finalized the permitting process will move forward. The project timeline is on track and work will resume when the in-water work window opens on July 15th.

B. Hovander Trail – The volunteer mitigation planting by the Whatcom Conservation District and the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association will take place on Saturday, April 19th.

The directional trail signage and mile marker posts have been installed. The information kiosk will be completed in the near future. The kiosk will have a park map, rules and interpretive information.

It has been determined that the removal of the blackberries provided room for riparian mitigation planting on the river side of the trail as opposed to the field side. Planting on the river side of the trail will benefit the river and improve user safety.

The field side of the trail will be seeded with native grass and a wildflower seed mix.

These changes to the mitigation planting will maintain views of the river and Mt. Baker and increase trail user enjoyment.

C. Lookout Mountain Trailhead – The project is complete. The generator and propane tank have been installed. The generator will provide backup power to the restroom facility during power outages reducing the possibility of damage to plumbing fixtures caused by freezing temperatures.

We are currently installing trail signage to alert authorized vehicles and trail users that the road is a shared use road.

We are also alerting the maintenance personnel that are authorized to use the road to the transmission tower sites that there are now trail users present in the park.

D. South Fork Park – The scope of work for the first phase of the parking improvements is being defined with Reichhardt & Ebe Engineering.

The trail head parking lot has been separated into two areas, one for single cars and one for vehicle and horse trailer parking. Designing both elements is a large project. The strategy is to design the parking lot to include both elements and permit it as one project, then phase the project as current and upcoming budgets allow.

The preliminary scope of work and fee has been received from Reichhardt & Ebe and it is over budget. There will be continuing meetings and negotiations to bring the project to or under budget.

E. Silver Lake Road & Electrical Improvements – It has been determined that the scope of work will need to be more clearly defined in terms priority and available budget funds.

It is being considered to design a phasing plan. The first phase will be to complete the electrical upgrade of a portion of the campgrounds to 50 amp breakers, replace pedestals and upgrade the transformer for the power supply.

The second phase will be to identify a specific scope of paving improvements that can be done without requiring them to be disturbed later when additional phases of the electrical can be completed, as future budgets allow.

The areas that are being considered for paving first are; 1) the gravel parking area near the playground which would finish the project and clean up the area, 2) sections along the main entry road that are narrow and lack proper gravel shoulders and 3) the parking and roadway that service the rental cabins.

There was discussion regarding the changes that are required in the electrical upgrades, the impact on older camper units and how the improvements will benefit the park in the future.

F. Silver Lake Park Way-finding Signage – Considerations are being explored on the best way to provide way-finding signage. The goal is to assist visitors along Silver Lake Road, at the park entrance and throughout the remainder of the park. The current entrance sign is too wordy to read and slows visitors down therefore it will be simplified to improve the traffic flow into the park.

The camp loops in the park are being renamed to improve the reservation process. The Horse Camp will be Red Mountain Campground, Loops 2-6 will be Maple Creek Campground and Loop 1 is going to be called Cedar Campground. The new signage will reflect these changes.

It is the plan to have the signage installed prior to this season.

G. Semiahmoo Industrial Fish Cleaning Equipment – APA Museum – Rod stated that he has taken rough measurements of the equipment and begun a simple four post design that provides cover over the equipment. Given the height of the structure and the pitched roof it is coming out larger than anticipated and is raising permitting questions.

He will meet with the City of Blaine regarding the permitting requirements, discuss the footing and hurricane straps that secure the roof with a structural engineer and research whether an archeologist and tribal review will be required when digging the footing.

Updates will be provided as they are available.

F. Multi-use Trail Etiquette and Safety Signage – As a result of previous Commission meeting discussions, standard, nationally recognized courtesy signs were ordered that indicate the proper yielding sequence for best-practice trail user etiquette. Rod provided the Commission with a sample of this courtesy sign.

There was discussion regarding the hierarchy of trail yielding for hikers, bikers and equestrian users. It was suggested that the sign could be interpreted in the park's information kiosk for clarity.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Proposed Storm Water Improvements at Cottonwood Beach Public Works Presentation – Kraig Olason, Public Works Storm Water Senior Planner – Mike introduced Kraig Olason, Public Works Storm Water Senior Planner. Kraig was invited to provide additional clarification on the proposed storm water improvements on Cottonwood Beach that was discussed at the February, 2014 Commission meeting.

Kraig thanked the Commission for the opportunity to discuss this issue and that this presentation was recent shared with the Birch Bay public.

Kraig discussed that he works directly with the Birch Bay Watershed Aquatic and Resource Management District (BBWARM) and that BBWARM is managing agency for the storm water and water quality in the Birch Bay area.

He provided handouts on the Birch Bay Storm Water Priority Retrofit Projects Pre-Design that included the Cottonwood Beach project and a Power Point presentation that covered the background for the storm water improvements at Cottonwood Beach, the project design alternatives, the pros and cons of the designs and the impact that the improvements will have in the area.

There were discussions regarding levels of flooding in the area, clarification on the design alternatives and future projects in the area. Kraig also answered questions regarding other possible alternatives such as curtain drains and alternate flow routes.

Kraig provided the website address for BBWARM: <http://www.bbwarm.whatcomcounty.org/> He explained that the information that has been shared at this meeting will be posted to the site in the near future.

In conclusion, it was the consensus of the Commission that the presentation provided the clarification that was requested at the 2/20/14 Commission meeting.

B. Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan (CPROSP) – Mike provided an update on the progress of the CPROSP.

A work session was conducted March 11th that provided Council an opportunity to ask questions, express any concerns or include additions to the CPROSP. To date there have been no comments received however Council is aware that there is still time to submit comments.

The work session discussion focused mainly on the relationship of the CPROSP to the County's Comprehensive Plan and whether the CPROSP should go through the Planning Committee versus the County Council.

Mike shared the pros and cons that were discussed at the work session and provided the Commission member with the draft meeting minutes for review.

There was a short discussion regarding the remaining steps and timeline for the completion and adoption of the CPROSP.

C. Reconveyance Update – Mike provided the following update on the Reconveyance.

1. Tower leases – The tower leases are being finalized pending minor paperwork from DNR. He discussed the pending action and the complexity of the leases, the tower that will be generated and the proposed allocation of these funds.

2. Trail Assessments – Trail assessment continues, through continued meetings with user groups to gather information, entering data into the GIS system, signage and identification of property lines.

3. Budget – County Council directed the Executive to return with an ordinance to reinstate the RCO park improvement funds back to a special revenue fund that will be used for the operating budget in the Reconveyance area. This will be on Council agenda in April, 2014.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Planning Process for Reconveyance Land and the Role of the Parks and Recreation Commission – Notices to set up planning groups will be sent out soon. Mike commented that there is a lengthy list of individuals who have requested an invitation to participate in the planning process. Meeting dates for the planning groups will be posted to the public and shared with the Commission and County Council.

The process will begin with a general “kick-off” meeting to explain the process, the limitation on the properties as well as how and what is expected to be accomplished by the end of the process.

There will be two work groups; one group will focus on recreation and access and a second group will focus on watershed / ecological issues and land management, primarily from a forest management stand point.

Mike briefly discussed the limitation on these lands in terms of the existing ordinances and laws, forest practices and watershed windows. These will be posted on-line prior to the meetings for public information purposes, setting the “ground rules” for discussion.

It was suggested that brief update for the public on the Mt. Baker School District issue may be helpful. Mike stated that he could provide a review of this issue at the kick-off meeting.

It is anticipated that the process will conclude in late fall of this year for presentation to County Council. The goal is to provide the guiding principles for addressing issues such as phosphorus,

public safety and how to maintain a light footprint on the landscape, a report on critical areas, a habitat conservation plan, and clarification on area limitations.

Jeff Margolis stated that he would like to see a common long range goal for this process in the nature of “direct withdrawal of drinking water is a beneficial use to be protected”. He feels that promotion of this idea as a standard of achievement would meet the wishes of many and that he would like to submit this for consideration. Mike stated that it is the intent of the Reconveyance to protect and have no impact on the lake’s water quality.

Mike stated that it is the assumption that the Parks and Recreation Commission will serve as an advisory committee to the planning process. There was a request for clarification on whether this will as an advisory capacity to the Executive or to the process itself and when there are comments or concerns where will they be addressed.

Mike stated that as an advisory group, the Commission would be making recommendations to the Department on issues that surface regarding the process and the plan. He stated that the recreational plan will not be difficult in terms of trails, etc. The bigger question will be the long-term management of the timber and forests in terms of recommended reports and evaluations to provide for a viable timber plan.

It was the consensus that a standing agenda item could be added for discussion of the Reconveyance planning process until further notice.

B. Meeting Format – Paul Woodcock provided a draft document of suggested Business Rules for the Commission meetings.

He felt that when there is a change of Chair it is advisable to review the methods that the new Chair maintains meeting order for both the Commission and public attendees, and how the Commission will conduct its business.

Because this Commission does not currently have formal rules of business, Paul requested assistance from Mike for suggestions.

Mike stated that portions of these business rules were taken from the Planning Commission’s business rules and that they are intended as a suggested manner for conducting an orderly meeting.

He discussed that the first portion of the document includes what it is required by County Code. Code states that the Parks and Recreations Commission has the prerogative to adopt such rules and procedures necessary to conduct their business, will elect officers once a year, are subject to the requirements of the state Open Meetings Act and that they are to serve in an advisory capacity to the Parks and Recreation Department.

Mike discussed portions of the document may or may not apply to this Commission and items that could be added that may apply to the Commission in the future.

Paul recommended and it was the consensus of the Commission that this document would need to be reviewed by Commission members and placed on the April agenda for discussion.

IX ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Hovander Trail Dedication – A trail dedication ceremony will take place on Saturday, May 17, 2014. The County Executive and Ferndale Mayor will be attending. There will be a guided

hike from Pioneer Park to Hovander Park and will conclude with donuts and coffee in the Hovander Main Picnic Shelter.

A. NEXT MEETING – Thursday, April 17, 2014 6:30 PM.

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers, seconded by Ken Kiesner and passed unanimously to meet at Hovander Park, 5299 Nielsen Avenue, Ferndale, Washington.

X. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: It was moved by Ken Kiesner, seconded by Jeff Margolis and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:33 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director