

**MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, May 15, 2014**

**Tennant Lake Interpretive Center
5236 Nielsen Avenue
Ferndale, WA**

PRESENT: Commissioners: Richard Sturgill, Kenneth Kiesner, Gordon Rogers, Jeff Margolis, Janet Boyhan and Theresa Sygitowicz

Staff: Mike McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rodney Lamb, Tyler Schroeder

**Guests: County Executive, Jack Louws,
County Council Commission Member, Rud Brown**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Commission Vice-Chair, Jeff Margolis at 6:00 PM.

II. AGENDA

A. AGENDA APPROVAL

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers, seconded by Richard Sturgill and passed unanimously to approve the May 15, 2014 Agenda with the following change:

Move Item VIII, A. to Item IV, A.

III. MINUTES

A. MINUTES APPROVAL

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers, seconded by Janet Boyhan and passed unanimously to approve the April 17, 2014 Minutes as written.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT / COMMUNICATIONS

A. EVALUATE POTENTIAL PARK SITES – BIRCH BAY

The Chair recognized Executive Louws.

Executive Louws thanked the Commission for the opportunity to discuss his views on the two proposals that have been submitted for a community park in Birch Bay.

He thanked the Commission for the time they have spent on the two proposals and the Birch Bay community members for their efforts regarding the two sites in question.

He stated that it is valuable to all to receive input and recommendations from the Whatcom County Advisory Commissions concerning the potential purchase of property, as well as receiving input from the community to provide insight.

Executive Louws provided background on the two proposals and subsequent Council instruction. He explained that County Council has instructed County administration to begin due diligence on the north (Vogt) (Site #1) property and to obtain an appraisal for potential purchase. Based on this request it is perceived that Council is favorable to the north site and the vision for the property that was outlined in the proposal. He stated that he concurs with Council that this site will better serve the community and has instructed staff to pursue avenues of due diligence to ensure that the site is able to fulfill the requested vision.

Executive Louws stated that he would appreciate a decision from the Commission this evening on one of three options; 1. Select a preferred site, 2. Select both sites as suitable or non-suitable or, 3. Allow the Whatcom County administration to make the decision without formal recommendation/input from the Commission.

He asked if the Commission members had any questions.

It was asked how the potential loss of taxes on a privately developable piece of property weighed in on his decision.

Executive Louws stated that from his observations, the community's input and support and County Council instructions, that the north site will provide a desirable location for a public park.

He stated that he is open to hearing information from the Commission and the public that would support a change in decision to pursue the South site as a better location.

1. Public Comment - Jeff Margolis opened the floor for public input. Each speaker was asked to limit their comments to three minutes.

There were 34 persons signed in. Out of those 34 people, 22 spoke in favor of the north site, 2 in favor of the south site, 2 in favor of both sites and 2 in favor of neither site.

There were also 36 emails received regarding a proposed park site in Birch Bay. 31 voted in favor of the north site, 1 voted for no acquisition and 4 had their votes counted at this meeting and were excluded to avoid a double vote.

Listed below are the reasons given for supporting acquisition of the north site:

- Provide parking
- Provide public restrooms
- Centrally located
- Large low tide beach access
- Closer to the site of the beach restoration project
- To reserve common areas for public recreation
- Property is currently available
- There may not be an opportunity to acquire a property of this nature in the future
- The poor water quality of Terrell Creek
- Better visibility providing more safety
- Development of the south site would reduce local resident's privacy
- Development of the south site would reduce water quality further, due to parking lot run off

Listed below are the reasons given for supporting acquisition of the south site:

- Property is currently available
- The south site is larger than the north site for relatively the same price
- Provides shady parking
- Provide public restrooms

- Good beach access
- Preserve the wetlands
- Provides diverse educational opportunities

Listed below are the reasons given for supporting acquisition of both the north and south sites:

- South site provides potential for an interpretive center,
- Stop commercial development in both areas
- The north site is central
- Both sites are available
- Provides an opportunity to clean up Terrell Creek

Listed below are the reasons given for opposing acquisition of either site:

- Improve Birch Bay Drive prior to spending money on a park
- Use the money to improve the beach front in terms of parking, restrooms, trash management and install a paved footpath
- Complete the berm project prior to developing a park
- Provide a public vote on the issue prior to purchasing any properties

2. South Site Presentation – Harry Skinner provided a presentation on the south site. He pointed out the positive points for acquisition.

He stated that beach closures are an issue all along the beach and that it is the responsibility of the public regulatory agencies to take more affective steps to correct the problem.

He asked that the wetlands not be considered a defect but an asset for a park setting and that the wetlands would be protected if acquired by the County. This is also the case with any archeological issues and that both sites will require a wetland and archeological assessment.

Rutan & Tucker, LLC has provided a letter assuring that the injunction on the property will be lifted when an acceptable purchase offer has been received.

The south site will provide an additional 100 feet of beach front and an additional access point to the currently owned county property.

Harry asked that this opportunity not be overlooked.

3. North Site Presentation – Billy Brown provided a presentation on the north site beginning with the information that 1400 endorsements from Birch Bay citizens have been collected to date. He also listed the agencies and organizations that endorse acquisition of the north site.

He spoke to the economic reasons for acquiring the north site in that there are 7 acres of open beach that are centrally located to restaurants, stores and is an excellent spot for local events.

Mr. Brown spoke to the comparison points of the two properties. This information was provided in the documentation that was included in the Commission packet.

He spoke to the challenges of the south site acquisition in terms of the title and that the north site has clear title and is a local owner.

The north site currently has established utilities that will allow the site to be developed almost immediately after purchase and that because the site is developed, this would eliminate any archeological considerations.

Jeff Margolis thanked the guests for their input and presentations. He asked if there was a motion for a recommendation.

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers, seconded by Richard Sturgill and passed unanimously to recommend Site #1 (north) (Vogt) to the County Executive for purchase for park purposes.

ROLL CALL & COMMENTS:

Richard Sturgill – YEA. Richard stated that it would be preferable if both sites could be purchased but as the request was to recommend the best site, he recommends Site #1. His recommendation is based on the observation that there is a great deal of community support and that the majority of the activities in the area revolve around swimming and water play and that Site #1 supports these activities with easier beach access, better beach conditions and better beach visibility from the road and proposed park site, reducing safety concerns.

Ken Kiesner – YEA. Ken stated that Site #1 has easier beach access, it is a community project and is centrally located within the community. He did comment that the information that was provided from the Site #1 supporters regarding Site #2 was presented from the worst possible angle and disadvantage and is in his opinion offensive. He stated that it did not sway his decision but that the sales tactic was undesirable.

Gordon Rogers – YEA. Gordon stated that his decision was based on the fact that Site #1 is centrally located to the majority of the community activities and that the relationship between the berm project and Site #1 will be synergistic. Gordon is also concerned about the salability of Property #2 in terms of the difficulty in negotiations with multiple parties.

Janet Boyhan – YEA. Janet stated that she is impressed with the community effort on both sites to pull together their thoughts and desires and see the project through to the end, to provide a focal point for community use and preserve the charm and history of Birch Bay through collaboration with the County.

Theresa Sygitowicz – YEA. Theresa stated that last month she felt that the information provided by the site supporters alone did not provide her with enough information to make an informed decision. Therefore, she moved to table the final recommendation until this month to allow her additional time to gather information through community outreach and site observation. She stated that it is her experience that communities do not like to be dictated what is needed or desired in their communities and therefore she wanted to talk to the local citizens regarding their thoughts on the two sites.

In addition to public input, it was her understanding that the directive was to look for the best site to provide bathrooms, parking and meeting areas. During her site observations she was looking for the better viable building site to provide for these activities. She stated that based on her knowledge of wetlands, they are not conducive to building in terms of rules and regulations and that Site #1 does not have the wetland challenges and already has exiting utilities, making it the better building site. Theresa did suggest that when the parking area is planned that the infrastructure and permitting process include the ability to build additional layers of parking in the future.

It was her thought also, that it would be desirable to obtain both sites but with funding being an issue she put some careful thought and consideration into alternative funding sources. Because there are wetlands and fish bearing Terrell Creek in the area, a possible source of funding could be the Department of Ecology and/or Huxley College, with a proposal to build an education

center and/or community heritage project that would provide public restrooms and additional parking for their facility.

Theresa thanked both presenter and the public for their participation in the process.

Jeff Margolis – YEA. Jeff stated that the wetlands and Terrell Creek should be protected and that something should be jointly done amongst the responsible agencies regarding the water quality of the creek. Also, Site #2 has too many hazards in terms of foot injuries.

The considerations for his decision were parking, population use and the traffic in the area. It is his hope that the berm project will focus on fulfilling the parking need. He did not feel that this choice would solve the parking or restroom problem with the amount of public use.

He thanked the citizens for their involvement in the project.

Tyler Schroeder, Whatcom County Special Projects Manager provided a brief update on the berm project in terms of the progress that Public Works has made and additional steps that will need to be accomplished prior to completion. The completion target date is 2016.

V. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MICHAEL MCFARLANE

A. MAPLE FALLS SCHOOL SITE – The site appraisal has been completed and the County Executive is receptive to moving forward with the acquisition. A formal community agreement that is similar to the VanZandt Community Association will be drafted.

B. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS – A letter is being drafted to Planning and Development Services (PDS) to drop the Level of Service (LOS) requirements for activity centers; that trails LOS will be based on shared use or multi use trails versus trails and that park LOS will be based on the number of regional parks versus acres of developed parks.

C. COUNTY SCHOOLS REDUCED RATE FOR PARK SHELTERS – There was a request from Council Member Brenner to provide a reduced facility rental rate for county schools. Mike will meet with the County Executive to discuss this.

The concern is the reduction in revenues with an increase in facilities use as the schools take advantage of the reduced fees. This increased use will result in additional staff time to clean the facility, an increase in restroom supplies and a greater impact on the building in terms of maintenance and repairs.

This is a policy decision that Council will need to address to change the rates and fees as there are currently no reduced fees for schools in the Unified Fee Schedule.

D. DAKOTA CREEK GOLF COURSE – Mike received a call that the golf course has been placed back of the market for sale. It is unlikely that this is of interest to the County.

E. SEATTLE TIMES SILVER LAKE PARK ARTICLE 4/20/14 – Mike passed around a copy of an article in the Seattle Times that focused on Silver Lake Park.

VI. PARK OPERATIONS REPORT – CHRIST THOMSEN

A. STAFFING

1. Extra Help – Hiring Parks' seasonal extra help is substantially complete. Most positions have been filled with the remainder coming on board within the next few weeks.

Interviews for seasonal trail extra help are scheduled for next week.

2. Vacant Ranger Position – Recruitment for this position is closed and applications have been reviewed. Interviews are in the process of being scheduled.

3. Watershed Ranger – The job description for this position is being reviewed and revisions are being made. When the job description is complete it will be forwarded to the County Human Resources Department for evaluation.

B. PARK PEAK SEASON PREPARATION

1. Ground and Facilities – The focus has been on maintenance issue to prepare the parks for peak season.

2. Preparing Rental Boats – Boats are being inspected for in-water use at Silver Lake Park and Lake Samish. The Coast Guard Auxiliary will be inspecting the boats at Silver Lake Park.

C. MAINTENANCE CREW

1. Hovander – The sand scoops are being installed at the playground and the new drinking fountain has been installed at the main restrooms.

2. Chuckanut Mountain Trails – Trail maintenance for the last two weeks has focused on drainage and tread restoration.

3. Lake Whatcom Reconveyance – The closure of an unauthorized trail has been completed in the Lake Whatcom Reconveyance east property. The concern for closing this trail and removing structures is the possible environmental impacts and public safety issues.

D. PARK INSPECTIONS

1. Monthly/Weekly – A series of inspections are completed on each park on monthly and/or weekly basis with a follow-up report submitted for review/action. These inspections focus mainly on cleanliness and public safety.

2. Addition of Annual Inspections – Some years ago Park staff completed an annual inspection of the parks. This practice is being reinstated. A team consisting of management, field and maintenance staff will be formed to visit each developed property to complete an inspection on a broader spectrum in order to evaluate the health of the parks and facilities.

E. PLANTATION RIFLE RANGE

1. Water System – There was a temporary outage of water to the Range due to system flow problems that created a lack of water. This was evaluated, isolated and repaired within a 24 hour period.

2. Department of Health (DOH) Site Survey and Inspection – DOH completed their regular inspection of the Range water system on May 6, 2014. The report is pending but based on their on-site response and considering the age of the system they are generally pleased with the system's condition, excluding a few minor concerns. If there are any actions required on these concerns it will be included in the report and addressed.

F. LIGHTHOUSE MARINE PARK – The ship chain that was used as curbing was removed to reduce a possible trip hazard for park visitors. The chain was recycled for a gain generated of approximately \$1,000.00.

G. PARK EVENTS

1. **Silver Lake Park** – Opening Day for fishing season was a success. All campsites and rental facilities were booked to capacity.
2. **Hovander Homestead Park**
 - a. **Master Gardener’s Plant Sale** – The annual plant sale was May 10th and appeared to be well attended.
 - b. **Hovander River Walk Dedication** – The dedication ceremony will take place this coming Saturday, May 17th.

H. PARK INCIDENTS

1. **Lighthouse Marine Park Mowing Incident** – During regular mowing a rock was kicked up by the mower and broke a visitor’s car windshield. A request for repair has been submitted. The equipment that was being used was evaluated and it was determined that another piece of equipment would be more appropriate for that particular area. Safety measures were reviewed with staff.
2. **Getz Barn Trespass** – A person set up camp inside the barn and established a warming/cooking fire. The police department removed the individual and the fire department was on site to extinguish the fire. There was no damage to the structure. Security measures are being taken to avoid future incidents.

VII. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT – RODNEY LAMB

A. LIGHTHOUSE DOCK RENOVATION – The manufacturer has provided shop drawing and structural calculations for the proposed boarding float. This was the final element to submit the building permit. The permit was submitted May 7th. Rod stated he has heard nothing to date but will be checking with them in the near future to determine the progress.

HB Hansen has tentatively scheduled the pile driving for the end of July. This is after the fish window opens. It is expected that pile driving activities will be completed within one week’s time due to favorable tides. HB Hansen Company expects to be able to complete all driving activities from the existing ramp.

The week prior to the pile driving activities a surf smelt survey will be conducted by a marine biologist to determine if there are any spawning activities that could affect the pile driving. There is a possibility that there will be spawning activity already started by that time.

B. HOVANDER RIVER TRAIL – A volunteer planting effort coordinated by NSEA took place on Saturday, April 19th. Approximately 250 volunteers helped plant 2,700 native trees and shrubs along the new riverside trail. The work party started at 9:30 AM and was completed by 12:00 noon. It was a very successful project. The Whatcom Conservation District has offered and will continue to assist with maintenance of the mitigation planting. The trail dedication is scheduled for this Saturday.

C. SOUTH FORK PARK – A pre-application meeting was conducted with PDS on May 1st. This was an opportunity to meet face-to-face and review the permit application process with PDS staff. Included in the meeting were the wetland biologist and civil engineer contracted for the project. The meeting resulted in a clearer understanding of specific application requirements which should reduce the initial fee estimate by a modest amount.

The strategy remains to permit the entire project and complete the project in phases. The permit is valid for a two year period and may be extended for an additional two years, with the approval of the hearing examiner, giving a four year window to complete the park trailhead.

Once the revised fee estimate is received from the engineer an agenda bill will be generated for Council approval.

Rod met with Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt this week to lay out the hike/bike trail from the main trailhead and flag the alignment for the wetland biologist to be able to complete the critical areas assessment. This should be completed by next week.

D. NESSET FARM BUILDING RESTORATION – The Nasset Foundation has hired an engineer to complete minor modification of previously completed drawings for the structural foundation repairs and roof and siding replacement. This will be part of a bid package that will be released in the next few months.

E. RECONVEYANCE PLANNING – The first planning meeting was April 29th. It was well attended with over 100 people and was very constructive. At the meeting Mike provided an overview of the process and Rod reviewed the planning process. The attendees were asked to comment in four broad categories:

1. Recreation
2. Natural Resources
3. Forest Management
4. Other items

Staff is sorting through and consolidating all the submitted comments into a single document that will be available on the website when it is complete.

We're still in the inventory and base mapping phase and will begin complementing the office work with some field reconnaissance as we head into the analysis phase of the project.

Mike stated that one of the more interesting submittals for suggestion was from a cross country ski group. An initial meeting was conducted with the group to discuss the possibility of accommodating winter sports on top of Stewart and Lookout mountains.

G. OTHER – The sand scoops are installed at the Hovander playground, maps and park rules have been added to the kiosk at Lake Whatcom Park and signage at Silver Lake Park is ongoing.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. EVALUATE POTENTIAL PARKS SITES – BIRCH BAY – SEE AGENDA ITEM III A.

B. LAKE WHATCOM RECONVEYANCE PLANNING – SEE UPDATE IN THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. ECONOMIC IMPACTS RELATED TO TRAILS – Council Member Rud Brown was unable to stay for the remainder of the meeting and will be invited at a later date to address this topic.

B. BELLINGHAM SENIOR ACTIVITY CENTER (BSAC) PARKING LOT – Mike stated that the rate increase will move forward on the parking lot rates. The City of Bellingham fees will increase from \$6,000.00 to \$12,486.00, Whatcom County Council on Aging from \$2,000.00 to \$4,416.00 and Whatcom County from \$1,000.00 to \$2,088.00, annually.

Negotiations continue to establish a 10 year period of time on these fees in order to provide for stability in pricing.

C. PROPOSED 2015-16 CAPITAL PROJECTS – Mike provided an updated Department Work Plan for Master Capital Improvements document. He pointed out that if there is not a dollar amount next to the project that indicates that it is not scheduled for the 2015-16 budget and projects with designated amounts will be included.

Mike spoke to the priority projects for the upcoming budget as well as how the capital project list proceeds through the budget process.

Mike asked that if there are any questions to contact him.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. JUNE MEETING

1. Meeting Location – The next meeting will be held at the Semiahmoo Day Lodge. There will be a tour of the APA Museum at 6:00 PM with the meeting following at 6:30 PM

XI. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: It was moved by Richard Sturgill, seconded by Ken Kiesner and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:17 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director