

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, January 19, 2023

East Whatcom Regional Resource Center
8251 Kendall Road
Maple Falls, Washington

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Sonja Max at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Frank Boteler, Sonja Max, Joe Hashmall, Pete Coy (by phone), Terry Terry (by phone), Kristen Fagan

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Christ Thomsen, Bennett Knox

Guests/Public Present: Jacob Stewart, Stephen Zylstra, Bill Walker, Richard Whitson, Rochelle Hollowell, Michelle Gillis, Kathy Wilbeng, Raymond Wejke, Daniel Probst, Cindy Johnson, Melonie Aucheta, Dawna Drum, Carl McDaniel, Jerry Burns, Ronda Breault, Hannah-Mal Pippin

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Joe Hashmall moved to approve the January 19, 2023 agenda as written. Frank Boteler seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Frank Boteler moved to approve the December 15, 2022 minutes as written. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

Bill Walker shared that he and other people in the community would like to develop an off-leash dog park on the property where the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center is. He is wondering if this is possible and if WC Parks would be in support of it. Sonja Max advised this discussion could be added as an agenda item for a future meeting.

Carl McDaniel, a commissioner for the Columbia Valley Parks & Recreation District, shared that their district purchased property for a park and have inquired about purchasing a tax property that is attached to it. He has not been able to get any response from the county and is very frustrated. Bennett Knox said he would love to follow up with Carl after the meeting to get up to speed on this issue.

Terry Terry contacted Kristi Dominguez, the new Ferndale School District Superintendent, and she loved the idea of having a conversation about wintertime recreation opportunities. Sonja Max advised the topic would be added to the February agenda.

4. **Director Update**

- a. **Staffing Update** – Interviews are in progress for the Parks Design and Development Manager position. Bennett hopes to have an announcement for that by the next meeting. Job descriptions are being completed for the two new positions that were approved in the last budget cycle (Parks Project Manager and Parks Supervisor). Those positions will be posted once the job descriptions are complete.
- b. **Canyon Lake Community Forest** – Bennett Knox shared an article from the Cascadia Daily News about access to Canyon Lake Community Forest. Bennett is optimistic that public access will be available late spring to early summer.

5. **Operations Manager Update**

- a. **Plantation Rifle Range** – Once the water quality assessment plan is submitted, the compliance component of the Expedited Settlement Agreement (ESA) with the Department of Ecology (DOE) will be complete. The next phase will be maintenance, monitoring sediment erosion control, and sampling. This will continue until cleanup is started. Christ Thomsen shared that the relationship with the Department of Ecology has become very collaborative. The DOE identified a surplus of \$750,000 at the end of the 2022 fiscal year and worked with WC Parks to create an interagency agreement allowing \$700,000 to go to WC Parks to use for assessment, sampling, analysis, and developing a cleanup plan. These funds exceed the funds that the county initially set aside for this project. The DOE is retaining \$50,000 to develop cleanup specifications. The commission is very pleased to see the cooperation between the organizations.
- b. **Extra Help Recruitment** – Seasonal extra help recruitment is beginning. The first application review will be February 28th, with interviews beginning in March. Staff have been looking at different approaches to recruitment including flyers, job fairs, community outreach, and job boards. On Monday, current staff members who started as seasonal employees will be interviewed to create a video to share their experiences at Whatcom County Parks & Recreation. The hourly wage for extra help was increased to \$18 and staff are exploring ideas for retention such as fiscal opportunities for staff who return.

6. **Old Business**

- a. **South Fork Nooksack River Recreation – Review Letter** – Sonja Max shared the South Fork Nooksack River Recreation letter with the commissioners.
MOTION: Joe Hashmall moved to send the letter as written to the Whatcom County Council members and Executive. Kristen Fagan seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.
- b. **Bellingham to Baker Trail – Review Letter** – Sonja Max shared the Bellingham to Baker Trail letter with the commissioners that will be sent to Bennett Knox.

c. Multi-Modal Trails Discussion – The commissioners reviewed the county comp plan prior to the meeting. Terry Terry found it very helpful and has been sending individual community members to the comp plan to help them clarify their requests. Pete Coy didn't think that trails were a high enough priority in the comp plan and would like to see the commission recommend a reprioritization that includes more emphasis on trails. Frank Boteler and Joe Hashmall agreed with Pete Coy. Bennett Knox envisions the commission taking on a greater role as a facilitator of conversation as the updating of the CPROS continues. Bennett's goal is to meet routinely with stakeholders and to have a vision that is more actionable so that the department can look for grant opportunities, leverage partnerships, and begin to build some capacity to deal with some of the issues that may have been roadblocks in the past. Bennett would like to educate the commission on trail opportunities and then have the commission work on engaging with existing or future committees to help these opportunities come to fruition. Jacob Stewart from the Greenways Advisory Committee (City of Bellingham) spoke about their committee and what they do. He advised that one of the important distinctions about the Greenways Advisory Committee is that it has a funding source. The committee has a strategic plan that sits underneath the Bellingham Parks & Recreation Open Space Plan. When considering multi-modal trails, oftentimes easements and rights-of-way are necessary. The Greenways Advisory Committee is able to direct city staff to contact landowners to negotiate easements, but WC Parks does not have that kind of staffing. Sonja Max presented the multi-modal trail handouts. Sonja Max asked the commissioners what their priorities were for the trail connections. Kristen Fagan's priorities were community connections, transportation, and recreation. Pete Coy is concerned about the commission overstepping its jurisdiction and would like to focus on recreation. Terry Terry spoke about her experience lobbying for the Birch Bay Berm and how tourism and public health and safety were important in getting the project moving forward. Terry believes these could be great selling point for these trails, especially after the pandemic emphasized the necessity of trails and parks. Joe Hashmall thinks the commissions primary goal for the trails should be recreation with the benefits of transportation, health, etc. being selling points. Frank Boteler thinks the commission should take a leadership role in contacting other entities to help get these trails built, whether for recreation, transportation, connecting communities, etc. Frank thinks that safety is very important, especially with the rise of popularity of electric bikes, scooters, and skateboards. Frank also thinks a trail from Bellingham to Mount Baker would provide a significant source of community pride. Bennett Knox believes multi-modal trail systems need to go in first so that the infrastructure is there to serve as a catalyst for future improvements such as spur trails, programming opportunities, and helping communities. Bennett thinks the Birch Bay berm is a great example of getting people to think about what's possible and

wants WC Parks to be a part of contributing to that conversation. Sonja Max thanked everyone for contributing to the conversation and advised multi-modal trails will be on future agendas.

7. New Business

a. Election of Commission Chair and Vice Chair –

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to elect Sonja Max as the Commission Chair and Frank Boteler as the Commission Vice Chair. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

b. Identify Upcoming/Relevant Agenda Items – Sonja Max wanted to be sure the agenda encompasses items that are important to the commissioners and also relevant to staff. Sonja advised she would send an email about two weeks prior to the next commission meeting asking commissioners for any items they would like added to the agenda. Bennett Knox would like the commission to be more collaborative with staff. Frank Boteler would like the commission to be more in sync with staff. Bennett thinks the CPROS process will be a good start to molding the relationship between the commission and staff.

i. Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan – Site Visits

8. Open Discussion

None

9. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

a. Plantation Rifle Range – Potential Site Visits – Bennett Knox asked if there was interest in scheduling a site visit for the Plantation Rifle Range. Sonja Max will reach out to commissioners to find a time that works.

10. Meeting Input/Evaluation

None

11. Next Meeting: February 16, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on February 16, 2023 at the Semiahmoo Cannery Lodge, 9261 Semiahmoo Parkway, Blaine, WA with a tour of the APA Museum at 5:30 p.m.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director