

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, February 16, 2023

Semiahmoo Cannery Lodge
9261 Semiahmoo Parkway
Blaine, 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: Sonja Max, Carl Weimer, Frank Boteler, Joe Hashmall, Kristen Fagan, Pete Coy (by phone), Terry Terry (by phone)

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Christ Thomsen, Bennett Knox

Guests/Public Present: Daniel Probst, Sunny Brown, Susan Willhoft

2. Welcome Commissioner Weimer – Sonja Max introduced Carl Weimer.

3. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Kristen Fagan moved to approve the February 16, 2023 agenda as written. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Joe Hashmall moved to approve the January 19, 2023 minutes as written. Kristen Fagan seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

4. Welcome to Semiahmoo and APA Museum – Sunny Brown – Sunny Brown shared that the APA Museum averages 1,600 visitors every summer. This year the museum stayed open during the winter and had just as many visitors as the summer.

5. Public Comments/Communication

Daniel Probst saw on the agenda that Rod Lamb is back as the Parks Design & Development Manager. Daniel is really excited that Rod is coming back because Rod has done a great job with the parks. Daniel knows Carl Weimer from the good work he did on the county council. Daniel welcomed Carl to the commission and thanked him for serving.

6. Director Update

- a. **Parks Design & Development Manager Position Filled – Rod Lamb – Rod Lamb will be starting March 6. Rod was with the department for roughly 12 years prior to being away for the last year and a half. Rod is a registered landscape architect with tons of experience and Bennett is very excited to have him back.**

Rod will be able to interview the applicants for the Project Manager position he will be supervising. That position is posted and closes on March 5.

- b. **Project Backlog** – Bennett Knox advised there's a list of about 50 projects that have been delayed. Administrative staff are in the process of moving money from last year's unfinished projects to this year so that the projects can be completed. Once Rod Lamb starts, these projects will be divided so that the department can get caught up and then begin implementing projects that are on the CPROS plan. Rod will be leading the CPROS process.

7. **Operations Manager Update**

- a. **Extra Help Recruitment** – Whatcom County has changed its recruiting platform and is now using Neogov. Neogov automatically posts all recruitment to Governmentjobs.com and this has been a game changer. Last year WC Parks couldn't even fill the three part-time temporary positions that were posted and this year there were 25 good applicants. Interviews have been completed and job offers will be made shortly. There was also good turnout for the Project Manager position and the seasonal recruitment that began February 3rd.
- b. **Policies and Procedures** – Staff are working on a number of policies and procedures for operations in the parks. A new uniform policy was just rolled out and staff in the parks will be getting back to having a consistent look. Staff are placing orders this week so that a bulk order can be placed for all uniform items. Christ hopes to have the uniforms before summer.
- c. **Projects** – Supplemental budget requests are being completed for projects that weren't accomplished in 2022 so that the money can be carried over to 2023.
- d. **Plantation Rifle Range** – WC Parks has started negotiations on the Agreed Order and those negotiations are going well. The Agreed Order should be done in March.

8. **Old Business**

- a. **Lynden-Sumas-Everson Trail Meeting Summary** – Sonja Max advised there was a meeting in Lynden about railbanking a trail that is no longer being used by the railway; this trail would link Lynden, Sumas, and Everson. The meeting was a first step to gauge interest from various stakeholders. The next step is to find out if the trail is still available and what the process is to get it. Bennett Knox acknowledged that this isn't a new project and hopes to generate momentum and support for it. Bennett said that historically, this type of trail would probably have been more in the realm of Public Works because it's multi-modal, but he would like to figure out how WC Parks can engage in the process to help connect these communities. Sonja Max explained that railbanking is where the right-of-way is purchased from the railroad company; if the railroad ever wants to use it again, it reverts back to them, but in the meantime, it is used as a trail for the public. Sonja will keep the commission updated.

9. **New Business**

- a. **CPROS Plan Review – Initial Discussion** – The Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (CPROS) outlines the goals and direction of the parks department for the future. The CPROS gets folded into the recreation chapter of the county’s comprehensive plan, which is set to be updated by 2024. A final draft of the CPROS needs to be completed by the end of December so that there can be a public comment period and the plan can go to council for approval. Once it’s approved by council, it will be submitted to the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) so that it is ready for grant opportunities in April and May. Bennett would like to keep the CPROS as a regular item on the commission agenda. Bennett would like to improve the department’s vision so that it represents the needs of the community. He would also like to make the goals and objectives more concrete and measurable. Bennett said a contractor will most likely be brought in to help with community engagement for the CPROS. Bennett would like the department to be mindful of health and racial equity and also tie more to tourism and economic development. He would like to discuss other recreation amenities that could be developed to fit the needs of the community. Bennett recognizes that it’s going to be challenging to get all of this done in nine months. He would like to review the model of how WC Parks operates. Currently, WC Parks provides a basic level of services and then coordinates with partners to provide services that the department doesn’t have the capacity to provide (i.e.: APA Museum, senior centers, Van Zandt Community Hall, etc.). Bennett wonders if the department should evolve to provide some programming and services, but recognizes that the department does not have the capacity to do that right now. Bennett sees the commission as being an integral part of the community outreach process for the CPROS. Bennett encouraged the commissioners to review the current plan for the next meeting.
- b. **Electric/Motorized Bikes on Trails** – Kristen Fagan shared part of a video about a little boy who is a paraplegic who was able to go off of a trail into snow-covered grass because of the Not-A-WheelChair he was on. Kristen thought it was important to bring motorized/electric vehicles to the conversation about trails, as sometimes these open the door for a person with a disability to recreate that otherwise would not be able to. Kristen thinks that Parks and Rec should move toward allowing electric bikes on land and property to encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion. Sonja Max said that the City of Bellingham now allows ebikes on multi-modal trails, but has set a speed limit of 12 or 15 mph for safety. Kristen is going to work on a matrix to capture the different types of vehicles and trails and options for education, etiquette, enforcement, rules, etc. for user safety.

10. **Open Discussion**

Frank Boteler said that he enjoyed the last meeting because the local residents who attended were really appreciative of the meeting being held in their community. Bennett Knox mentioned that it was also positive because the park district was represented at that meeting and he appreciated making a connection with them. Someone said they appreciated the meeting minutes because it's helped them find out what's going on in the county.

11. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

- a. March 23, 2023 – All Staff Meeting, Roeder Home, 2600 Sunset Drive, Bellingham, WA**

12. Meeting Input/Evaluation

None

13. Next Meeting: March 16, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on March 16, 2023 at the Samish Day Lodge, 673 North Lake Samish Drive, Bellingham, WA.

14. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:11 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director