

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, May 18, 2023

Whatcom County Parks & Recreation – Administrative Office
3373 Mount Baker Highway
Bellingham, 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, Pete Coy, Sonja Max, Carl Weimer, Kristen Fagan (virtual), Joe Hashmall (virtual)

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb, Bennett Knox, Dave Bramer

Guests/Public Present: Daniel Probst, Daniel Tepper (virtual), Annelle Norman (virtual)

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

The Whidbey Telecom Project Proposal agenda item was removed as an agenda item and Maritime Washington National Heritage Area was added under “New Business”.

Pete Coy moved to approve the May 18, 2023 agenda as amended. Frank Boteler seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Pete Coy moved to approve the April 20, 2023 minutes as written. Carl Weimer seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

Daniel Probst gave the commissioners a document regarding the Plantation Rifle Range.

4. Whidbey Telecom Project Proposal (removed from agenda) – This proposal is for a temporary mobile unit at Lighthouse Marine Park to provide Wi-fi to park users under a grant they have received. Project proposal was removed from the Agenda, as Whidbey Telecom has put the project on pause.

5. Director Update

- a. **State Capital Budget Allocation (Affecting Parks) –** Two projects were approved in the State Capital and Operating Budget. The first is for the renovation of the Van Zandt Community Hall. \$502,000 was approved with the county contributing \$50,000 in REET funds. This project is set to start in 2024. The second is for the reconfiguration and replacement of the target system at the Plantation Indoor Rifle Range. The funds for this came in part because the state’s single law enforcement academy program in Burien is moving to regional

- academies, one of which will be based out of Skagit Valley College. This academy needs a range facility to use for their classroom exercises, so the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office and WC Parks worked together to propose that the Plantation Range be used. The state agreed that the Plantation Range was a good fit and approved \$360,000 for the project. WC Parks is hoping to also replace the bullet trap at the end of the range. This would significantly change the range's operations and WC Park employee's exposure to lead. This project will move fast, with hopes of it being in place before the first class in December.
- b. CIP Update Status** – The recommendations made by WC Parks to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Capital Improvement Program were approved by the planning commission. WC Parks will move forward with budget supplemental requests for projects that are most pertinent for this year. Those projects include the Bellingham Senior Activity Center sewer line replacement, the Semiahmoo Park sewage pump replacement, conversion of a rental at Hovander Park to a Maintenance Shop, and the Sumas Senior Center roof replacement (this work has been completed and WC Parks needs to pay their 25% portion). The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) update and supplemental budget requests will be submitted to council on June 6th for introduction.
 - c. Staffing Update** – The Parks Supervisor position was not filled and will be reposted. The department has one other vacancy, an Outside Maintenance Coordinator position, that they have delayed filling. The position was previously involved with supervising Sheriff's groups (which is no longer an option) and has most recently been responsible for some of the ground's maintenance. The position is being evaluated and staff will work with HR to get it posted later. Taking priority right now is filling the Parks Supervisor position and converting the Regional Park Supervisor positions to Lead Ranger positions. One extra help position is open on the grounds crew and several are open for Point Roberts. Interviews are being held for the Point Roberts positions and staff are hopeful to find candidates, as the position has \$2 per hour premium.
 - d. Canyon Lake Access Easement Status** – The county is currently reviewing the draft easement received back from the attorney for Sierra Pacific. Bennett advised he doesn't have an update on when it will be finalized, but is hopeful that it is moving forward. Bennett does not expect the agreement to be in place by summer. In anticipation of the agreement the Department has recommended adding this project, specifically associated gate and signage installations, to the CIP for 2023 and 2024.
 - e. Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan** – Bennett Knox finally had an opportunity to review where Mike McFarlane left off with the Forest Management Plan for Lake Whatcom. Bennett received clarification on the scope for the plan (in terms of a phased approach beginning with properties in the Lake Whatcom area watershed) and is on track to review it. Bennett will be making a

presentation to the Lake Whatcom Joint Policy Council on June 7th (note: this meeting was subsequently cancelled).

6. Operations Manager Update

- a. **Staffing Update** – Christ verified that the Parks Supervisor position was posted online. Christ said an interview was held today for extra help at Point Roberts and went really well. Two additional applications were received this afternoon, so Christ is hopeful that those positions will be filled. The rest of the extra help positions are filled, except for one position on the grounds crew. Christ advised that while it's good that all of the extra help positions are filled, it's challenging because most of the employees cannot begin working until mid-June (typically one-third to one-half of seasonal staff is already working full time at this point in the season).
- b. **Plantation Rifle Range Lead Reclamation** – Kane Environmental began work earlier this month on the site characterization for lead reclamation at the Plantation Rifle Range. The scope of work has been expanded to gain additional data to support the lead reclamation process and better identify the extent of contamination. This additional data will also help the department as it transitions from reclamation to long-term operations planning. WC Parks and the Department of Ecology will be holding another public meeting (TBD) on the extent of lead contamination, to discuss the agreed order, and to help educate the public on the processes involved in this project.
- c. **Plantation Rifle Range Agreed Order** – The Plantation Rifle Range Agreed Order was approved by county council on May 9th. Once the order is signed by the Executive, it will go to DOE for signatures, and then it will come back to WC Parks as a formal agreement. Christ will present the agreed order to the commission at the next meeting and will answer questions to the best of his ability. Chris shared that this agreed order has been a learning experience for both WC Parks and DOE, as it is the first order of this scope that the DOE has processed.
- d. **Project Updates** – The main well pump at Silver Lake Park will be replaced next week with a variable frequency drive that should improve water pressure throughout the park. Additional components are being installed that will allow for 24-hour water flow monitoring. This will give staff a better sense of how the system is being utilized and help to identify leaks.

7. Parks Design & Development Manager Update

- a. **Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility Opening** – The Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility opened to public use on April 14th. The showers were not opened because staff is waiting for the well pump upgrade so there aren't water pressure issues at the park. Unfortunately, on May 6th, there was a sewage back up in the system. The contractor was able to quickly diagnose the

location of the clog and implement a modification on Wednesday and the restrooms were reopened on Thursday. Tiger is finishing up the punch list of items so the project can be closed out.

- b. Cedar Campground Shower and Restroom Facility** – King Architecture was hired to complete the design and engineering for the Cedar Campground Shower and Restroom Facility. Rod expects them to begin work in the next couple of weeks with the project being bid and constructed in 2024.
- c. Silver Lake Park Water System** – Rod is working to get a green operating permit for Silver Lake Park which will allow for changes to be made to the water system while it continues to be run as a public water system. The current permit doesn't allow changes to be made without providing an engineering analysis to the Washington State Department of Health. Rod expects this to be complete by the end of June.
- d. Stimpson Trailhead Improvement Project** – Rod and Dave have been working on a request for qualifications for civil engineering services for the Stimpson Trailhead Improvement Project. The gravel surfacing in the parking lot will be replaced with asphalt pavement. This will help with stormwater treatment and upgrade the user experience (no more dust or potholes). These improvements will not increase the amount of parking availability. WC Parks is proceeding with contract negotiations with Herrera for this project.
- e. On-Boarding of New Parks Project Manager** – Rod introduced Dave Bramer, the new Parks Project Manager.
- f. Capital Projects Update** – The RFQ for the Parks Administrative Office HVAC replacement and upgrade was sent to Finance for review and approval. Staff are looking at the MRSC small works roster to identify consultants they would like to solicit bids from. The project will be initiated early fall and completed by October 15th. The Silver Lake Lodge roof replacement is scheduled to begin after Labor Day and be completed by the end of October. Day Lodge reservations during that time will be notified, cancelled, and refunded. Other current projects include the demolition of the old ranger's residence at Silver Lake and several other rentals located in other parks.

8. Old Business

- a. Multi-Modal Trails** – A meeting was requested by representatives of the Whatcom County Bike/Ped Committee with the County Executive and representatives of WC Parks and WC Public Works. The group expressed a desire to identify a path forward to advance multi-modal trail project, commit to better collaboration, and build community support. Kayla Schott-Bresler with the Executive's Office committed to putting together a framework.

9. New Business

- a. **Passing of Terry Terry** – Sonja Max shared that Terry Terry, one of the Parks and Recreation Commissioners, passed away suddenly and recently. Sonja said Terry was a delightful, poised, and very well-spoken person with a great presence. Sonja shared that a service is planned for Terry at the Lummi Grange on May 23rd at 2:00pm. Bennett Knox shared that he didn't know Terry Terry except for her times on the committee, but his understanding from meetings in the community, is that Terry made quite an impact on the community. Rod Lamb shared that he first met Terry Terry when she was a member of the steering committee for the Birch Bay Beach Park and that she was so friendly with a wonderful energy about her. Rod advised she was incredibly valuable and impactful on the plans for that park. Frank Boteler asked if Bennett could draft a letter for signature by the county executive to send to her family that recognizes her as a vital member of the commission that did an exceptional job of representing her community and the spirit of the county. It was decided that Sonja and Bennett will work on a letter.
- b. **Maritime Washington National Heritage Area** – Bennett Knox was contacted by Steve Walker of the Working Waterfront Coalition of Whatcom County about a meeting being held by the Maritime Washington National Heritage Area. The meeting is on Wednesday, June 7th, 3:00-5:00pm at the Squaticum Boathouse. Bennett and Christ both unfortunately have commitments and are unable to attend. Bennett asked if anyone on the commission would like to attend and represent parks at the meeting. There weren't any volunteers.

10. **Open Discussion**

Pete Coy shared his concern from a year ago about people camping in Euclid Park. He advised people were using the park itself as a bathroom because there are no bathroom facilities. At the time he didn't realize that more than 90% of the property was owned by the City of Bellingham. Pete is wondering if the county should sell or give the small county owned piece of property to the city. Christ Thomsen shared that the county cannot divest of the property because it came to the department through a HUD program. Christ advised that Euclid park is jointly managed with the city and the two entities are currently collaborating on the replacement of the culvert and stream in the park. He advised the problem with the homeless last year was a further struggle because the people camping were actually in the road right-of-way, so neither park department could do anything to remedy the situation.

11. **Commissioner Engagement Opportunities**

- a. **June 17, 2023, 11:00am – 12:00pm, Lighthouse Marine Park 50th Year Rededication Ceremony, Lighthouse Marine Park, 811 Marine Drive, Point Roberts, WA**

12. **Meeting Input/Evaluation**

Bennett Knox asked if anyone had feedback on how the meetings were going. Pete Coy shared that he thought the meeting was pretty useful and that the group kept things moving, finishing most business within an hour. He added that some past meetings would take several hours and would get a little dry in the middle. Pete Coy said he is appreciative of the job Bennett is doing and the communication he's providing to the commission. Bennett advised he's working to increase both internal and external communication in the department. Bennett asked if the commissioners had any topics they would like added to future agendas. Sonja Max would like to add the process for park property acquisitions to a future agenda. Carl Weimer would like to discuss why the commissioners volunteered for the commission, what their passions are in current Whatcom County parks, and what they would like to see 20-30 years in the future. Pete Coy asked if there was a process for getting grants (state, federal, etc.) to develop the many park owned properties that are currently undeveloped. Bennett thinks the initial answer is the CPROS process and RCO grants, but would like to explore funding beyond RCO (health equity, tourism, economic development, etc.).

13. Next Meeting: June 15, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on June 15, 2023 at the Lighthouse Marine Park, 811 Marine Drive, Point Roberts, WA.

14. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director