

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, July 20, 2023
*****5:15 PM – Tour of Silver Lake Park*****
Silver Lake Day Lodge
9006 Silver Lake 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: Sonja Max, Joe Hashmall, Pete Coy, Frank Boteler, Carl Weimer, Sheli Moore

Commissioners Absent: Kristen Fagan

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

Guests/Public Present: Steve Rossing, Jacki Rossing, Kyler Larsen, Jim Sutterfield, Jamie Sutterfield, Jeff Margolis, Mary Ross, Lane Davis-Coury, Alan Krum, Jeremiah Winchester, Jerry Burns, Vicki Wilson, Carrie Berg, Kate Chandler, Jackie Ross

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Joe Hashmall moved to approve the July 20, 2023 agenda as written. Carl Weimer seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Carl Weimer moved to approve the June 15, 2023 minutes as written. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

- a. **Lummi Island RCO Grant to LICA – Public Dock Feasibility Update** – Lane Davis-Coury, the Secretary for LICA’s Public Dock Advisory Committee, gave a presentation on the Lummi Island Public Dock.
- b. **Jeff Margolis** – Jeff Margolis, a past chair of the commission, shared his concerns about Whatcom County’s lack of seasonal aquatic resources. Jeff is hoping there is something the county or commission can do to help contribute to the economy of the south fork valley. Jeff shared that he and Gordon Rogers authored “The Mt. Baker Foothills Chain of Trails Concept Plan” 19 years ago and suggested the commission and department take a look at it (it’s available online at the Whatcom Council of Governments webpage). Jeff endorsed Daniel Probst and the resurrection of the Bellingham to Baker Trail.
- c. **Jerry Burns** – Jerry Burns, a Kendall resident and candidate for county council, shared his goal to make sure the county doesn’t destroy the iconic south fork float; he wants to make sure it remains something available to the residents of the county.
- d. **Kate Chandler** – Kate Chandler shared that she’s spent a lot of time with Jackie Yereance, of the backcountry horsemen, and is aware of the work that Jackie

and Dan Probst have done on trying to make the connecting trail for Raptor Ridge to Pine and Cedar more accessible for bikes and horses. Kate wanted to let the commission know there is renewed interest and youth interest in trail users that want to use backtrail space. She thinks this would be a really good addition to the parks and the people who are willing to volunteer their time and effort toward that.

- e. **Jim Sutterfield** – Jim Sutterfield has lived in Acme with his wife for 32 years and they've had a business in Bellingham, Signs Plus, for 31 years. Jim is on the board for the Chamber of Commerce in Bellingham, is a commissioner at Whatcom County Water District #18, and he and his wife are the recent owners of Acme Diner. He and his wife bought the restaurant because they wanted to see it continue on. They're very concerned about the reduction of summer revenue from the tubing ban and are attending the meeting in hopes of finding other ways to bring revenue and recreation to the businesses and people of the valley. Bennett will reach out to meeting attendees to set up a time to learn more about the Acme Valley community.
- f. **Jackie Ross** – Jackie Ross, from the Acme Store, said that she didn't have much more to add than what Jim and Jamie said, but is wondering if there is some sort of entity that the people in the south fork valley need to form in order to be able to apply for grants and what type of grants they would apply for. She said that they are trying to figure out how to move ahead and survive the tubing ban because it is a big blow for them. She is very interested in working with the parks department to see what we can develop there.
- g. **Carl Weimer** – Carl Weimer, a commissioner, said that he spoke at the council meeting in which tubing was banned and that afterwards he was approached by a number of people unhappy with the vote. Carl knows that there is a pot of money for tourism and that two of the council members that voted in favor of the ban have already said that they want to put a lot emphasis in recreational planning and tourism development in the south fork to make up the difference left by the tubing ban. Carl advised the group needed to keep the momentum going so that this issue is not forgotten in a month or two.
- h. **Jeremiah Winchester** – Jeremiah Winchester shared his frustrations about the tubing ban and advised there was a lot of other ways to deal with the salmon issue and that tubers would love to be a part of the solution instead of just being cut out of the issue. Jeremiah said that he has been part of groups that help clean up garbage from the river. He shared that they have cut loose two nets at the fish camps and that there are garbage cans at those camps that are full of dead salmon. Jeremiah said that the north fork isn't safe for tubing and that banning tubing on the south fork is a bad decision; that there are many other options other than just saying not to recreate on the south fork. Jeremiah would like to be part of the solution and said that tubing is a great way for children to learn about conservation and safety of the river. He said that the natives are all

about wanting to save the fish, but he doesn't hear anything from the tribes about refraining from fishing for a couple of years to let the salmon come in. He also said that he doesn't see fish and game stopping people from taking so many native salmon out of the river every day. Jeremiah said that his group would like to be involved with education on the river and that people need to be taught to respect the earth. He said that by banning tubing, you are alienating a whole bunch of Whatcom County residents who have enjoyed the river their whole lives. He said that money needs to be put into tourism for Acme and Van Zandt to keep the gas station, grocery store, and diner open. Sonja Max thanked Jeremiah for all of his comments.

4. **Director Update**

- a. **Multi-Modal Initiatives Update** – Bennett Knox, Christ Thomsen, and Rod Lamb have been meeting with stakeholders in various communities about the Bay to Baker Trail. WC Parks supported the Columbia Valley Park District's effort to acquire a piece of tax title parcel that connects to their park property. WC Parks had conversations with Joseph Garcia, a proponent of the Glacier to Baker Trail, which could tie in to the Bay to Baker Trail. Bennett anticipates arranging a meeting in potentially in September with key stakeholders to discuss an overall vision and that could help advance the Bay to Baker trail.
- b. **Canyon Lake Access Update** – Bennett Knox advised that WC Parks is in the final stages of negotiating an easement with Sierra Pacific for access to Canyon Lake. Bennett anticipates the agreement to be completed in several weeks. Gates and signage will need to be installed before it is opened to the public, which could push the opening to next year.

5. **Operations Manager Update**

- a. **Plantation Rifle Range Presentation** – This will be rescheduled to September.
- b. **Operations Staffing Update** – Asa Deane, the Executive Director of the Friends of the Anacortes Community Forest, will be filling the new Parks Supervisor position. His first day will be August 17th and the department is really excited to bring him on board. Christ hopes to have him at the next commission meeting so that he can introduce himself. The department has been unsuccessful in hiring seasonal staff at Point Roberts, so full time staff from the mainland will be sent to Point Roberts on a daily basis to help. This will impact some operations on the mainland, but will be a huge benefit to Point Roberts operations.
- c. **Priority Operations Projects Update** – The original scope of work at the Plantation Rifle Range has been completed. The contamination concentrations are higher than anticipated and the vertical extent (how deep it goes into the soil) is deeper than hoped, but is not as bad as it could have been. The lateral extent of contaminations is still unknown, as contamination was found all of the way up to the points where the samples were being taken. The ground water samples

had a high amount of lead concentration in the solid form, but that is attributed partially to the sediments falling in when they were doing the boring. The dissolved lead numbers were good, but lead was present. WC Parks is going to do a volunteer private well sample program for nearby wells to help detail the effects on the environment and look at the potential impacts to human health. WC Parks is working with the consultant to get a task and fee schedule to get that work done. The public meeting has been delayed until September. The boardwalk of the Bay to Baker Trail has been closed for a while because the department has struggled getting materials for the project. Repairs are scheduled to start July 24th and should be completed in a couple of weeks.

6. **Parks Design & Development Manager Update**

- a. **Priority Capital Projects Update** – Rod Lamb is working through a last few punch list items with Tiger Construction to close out the Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility. The consultant is making progress on the third shower and restroom facility to be located near the Cedar campground and cabins. This facility will be identical to the one at Red Mountain which will help expedite design, engineering, and permitting. Dave Bramer has been working with the consultants for the parking lot improvements at the Stimpson Family Nature Reserve to revise their scope of work to minimal necessary for budgetary reasons. Rod shared that Dave has done a really great job in the few months that he has been with the department and that has allowed Rod to focus on other projects. Progress on the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan expedited update continues and is on schedule allowing the department to be grant eligible next year. The application deadline for a one-time grant opportunity for local parks maintenance projects has been extended to September. Rod is reviewing several potential projects in order to find the most competitive one because only one entry is allowed per agency.
- b. **Maple Falls Community Park** – WC Parks is working with the Maple Falls Community Park Association on installing some new exercise equipment they procured. The department his helping with equipment placement and permit requirements.

7. **Old Business**

- a. **Review of Council Decision Related to Nooksack River Tubing** – Carl Weimer shared that the commission wrote a letter to the county council in January opposing a tubing ban until there was more evidence linking the diminishing salmon population to tubing and also to look for other alternatives than a complete ban. The county council voted to move forward with the ban, the county executive signed it, and the ban goes into effect July 25th. Carl believes that a couple of the council members who previously voted against the ban were swayed by the additional scientific evidence provided by the Lummi

Tribe and the Nooksack Tribe showing the negative impacts of tubers startling the salmon during reproduction. Carl said that everybody agreed that tubing was not the cause of the decline in the salmon, but with only dozens of the native salmon left, the reproduction process needed to be protected. Carl shared that several of the councilmembers would like to meet to discuss other recreational opportunities in the south fork to help with tourism and economic development. Carl said there is a real interest in communicating with the tribes to understand why all recreational options in the south fork are a “no” from them. Bennett would like to keep this topic on the agenda for next month.

8. **New Business**

- a. Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail – Academy Road Right-of-Way – Daniel Probst –** Daniel Probst asked for a recommendation from the commission for using the Academy Road right-of-way as an easement for the Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail.

MOTION: Carl Weimer moved to have the commission write a letter of support. Frank Boteler seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

- b. Interview Process – Commission Vacancies –** Bennett would like to come up with a process in which the commission is involved in the interview process for new commissioners when vacancies occur. He advised there is nothing in the ordinance that precludes the commission from participating in the interview process and making their recommendation to the director. Bennett would also like to develop some criteria to ensure that the commission has representation around the community that will be important as the department embarks on the process of having a more inclusive CPROS renewal process. Sonja thought it was a great idea.
- c. Commission Role in Land Acquisition –** The commissioners are curious about how the department acquires land and if the commission should be involved in that decision process. Pete Coy said that in the past a number of different pieces of property have been acquired; some to be held in reserve and some designated as future parks. Pete is concerned that the properties held in reserve are still on the park process and that the properties that are designated as future parks have no timeline of becoming parks. Pete originally brought up the topic because of Euclid Park, which he thought was a future Whatcom County park, but found out that 95% of it belongs to the City of Bellingham. Pete thinks that if the county isn't going to develop it that maybe it should be sold or given to the city so that it can be developed. The group discussed that sometimes property acquisitions are a public process and sometimes they are sensitive in public meetings. Bennett will find out if the commission can have executive sessions. Bennett thinks it's appropriate for the commission to have input on land acquisitions. He would like the commission to be more involved in the CPROS process to help guide the departments decision making moving forward. Rod

advised there is a park inventory in the CPROS that shows which properties are developed and which ones are undeveloped.

- d. Commissioner Question Prompt: Why do you serve?** – Carl Weimer – Carl worked for the National Park Service for 8 years, mainly as a wilderness ranger. After his years on the county council, he learned that if the budget needed to be cut, parks was always where it was cut. Carl is serving to try to give parks a higher profile with council members and the executive when it comes to the budget and also to be the voice for “yes, we need to develop our parks, but we need to do it in such a way that they don’t just get inundated and ruined by too many people”. Sheli Moore – Sheli got involved when her kids were out of school in the Blaine Birch Bay Parks and Recs Department where they had success with the land trust getting some park property along the California Creek estuary. She loves walking and biking and wants to help the council to recognize and prioritize that getting out into nature is just as important as most of the other things on the budget. Frank Boteler – Frank shared that there’s so much divisiveness in the world and he feels like parks and forests are one of the places that people get together and like each other and say hello. Frank’s career was parks and recreation and if he can bring some of that experience to others, it is very rewarding to him. Pete Coy – Pete has been a user of parks since he moved to Whatcom County more than 50 years ago. Pete has noticed how dramatically the staff and the budget has been cut back and he wanted to get involved to help advocate for parks. Pete has also been on the Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Foundation for about 10 years. Joe Hashmall – Joe has been heavily involved in and wants to advocate for trail use and senior centers. Joe was urged to apply and feels that in addition to advocating for those, he can make rationale decisions on other areas. Sonja Max – One of the main reasons Sonja moved to Whatcom County was because of the parks and outdoor opportunities. Sonja bikes, hikes, and runs and said that the parks are very much like islands, in that you need a car to get to them. Part of Sonja’s goal is to make parks more equitable to people that don’t have transportation and to help parks become integrated into daily life. Bennett Knox – Bennett believes in working with the community and that you will get more done when people come together around a vision. He also believes you can’t take care of nature unless you function as a community. Rod Lamb – Rod grew up camping and visiting a lot of national parks as a kid which inspired him to seek out a profession where he could work in the outdoors. Through trial and error, he found landscape architecture and it is the perfect field for him. Rod worked in the private sector for the first part of his career and found that his favorite jobs were working for municipalities and making public parks. Rod enjoys making beautiful places to enrich the community. Christ Thomsen – Christ spent his childhood summers camping and always knew he wanted to be a park ranger. His first job was with a state park where he worked up from a park aide, to a seasonal ranger, to a

ranger, to a park supervisor, and to where he is today. Christ enjoys providing opportunities for people to get out and enjoy trails and camping and providing the best experience possible. Dave Bramer – Dave worked as a landscape architect in the private sector and always wanted to get into the public sector so that he could help develop places that everyone could visit, not just the select few that happened to rent at the development that you were designing.

9. Open Discussion

Carl Weimer suggested adding a second public comment agenda item at the end of the commission meetings.

10. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

- a. **County All-Staff Gathering** – August 3rd is countywide Staff Appreciation Day. Parks will be having a gathering at Nugent's Corner from 11:00 am until 3:00 pm with the Executive coming at 2:00 pm.
- b. **September 16th** – The Bike Ped committee is organizing a bike ride from Ferndale to Bellingham and back. Sonja Max will send details.

11. Meeting Input/Evaluation

None.

12. Next Meeting: August 17, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on August 17, 2023 at the Ferndale Senior Activity Center, 1999 Cherry Street, Ferndale, WA.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director