

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, August 17, 2023
Ferndale Senior Activity Center
1999 Cherry Street, Ferndale, Washington

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Committee Vice Chair Frank Boteler at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Sheli Moore, Joe Hashmall, Carl Weimer, Frank Boteler, Pete Coy

Commissioners Absent: Sonja Max, Kristen Fagan

Staff Present: Bennett Knox, Rod Lamb

Staff Absent: Christ Thomsen

Guests/Public Present: Fred Miller, Dan Probst, Jim Sutterfield, Jamie Sutterfield

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Pete Coy moved to approve the August 17, 2023 agenda as written. Carl Weimer seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

The Bay to Baker Trail reference was changed to the Bellingham to Baker Trail under Public Comments – Jeff Margolis (3b). Joe Hashmall and Frank Boteler’s comments under New Business – Commission Question Prompt: Why do you serve? (8d) were switched to correctly reflect each person’s statement. Pete Coy moved to approve the July 20, 2023 minutes as amended. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

- a. **Jim and Jamie Sutterfield** – Jim and Jamie Sutterfield, the owners of the Acme Diner, shared a document with the commission titled Strategies for Enhancing Recreation in Acme, Washington: Revitalizing Economy and Community through Recreation. Jim advised the valley is pretty limited on recreational opportunities; there is South Fork Park and the old RV Park, but both of them are not utilized very well. Jim thinks both have the opportunity to increase recreation and has been working with Daniel Probst to brainstorm ideas. Pete Coy asked if the Bellingham Whatcom Chamber of Commerce has shown any interest in the valley. Jim said that they haven’t had a chance to discuss it because they haven’t had a board meeting in a few months. Pete suggested an event that would attract people to the area. Jim shared that one of the biggest challenges is the lack of facilities for events. South Fork Park was envisioned as a horse park, and is basically for horse riding, but people aren’t using it for that. Jim shared that they have lots of ideas on how to develop that park so that it will be utilized

more (one example is dry camping). Jim said there isn't very much parking in Acme and that it would be good to have trails that connected to other trails. Carl Weimer asked who else Jim was sharing the document with, as some parts of it apply to the parks commission, but some of it is more tourism or more business development. Carl suggested sharing it with county council, the tourism bureau, and/or other groups. Jim said the commission was their first stop, but sharing it with other groups is the plan. Jim gave permission for the document to be shared. Jim realizes that some things will take long-term planning, but knows there are other short-term things that can be implemented to increase the recreational opportunities in the valley. Pete Coy shared that this situation reminded him of a discussion that started about 10 years ago by the people in the foothills area around Glacier. They formed a non-profit corporation and got donations to buy land for a park. He suggested reaching out to them to see what their process was. Bennett Knox advised that the information Jim was sharing is great and that he's looking forward to follow-up conversations and diving into more of these kinds of issues. Bennett said that some of the assets Jim was bringing up weren't familiar to him and that he's looking forward to the information being shared and figuring out how the parks department can develop plans to compliment those assets. Bennett loves the fact that the discussion is including other entities that may need to be engaged and feels like the department is starting a process to develop that.

- b. Fred Miller** – Fred Miller's wife's grandfather sold the field and slope for what is known now as Lake Whatcom Park in the 70's or late 60's. Fred shared three assumptions. First, Fred thinks the reconveyance was a good thing, but at the time that it was done, the concerns about increased traffic and impact to the area and water supply may not have been fully realized. Second, Fred advised the reconveyance property is a very complex piece of property that affects health, safety, and drinking water. Finally, Fred advised that it's getting hotter and drier and the storms are getting weirder. Fred talked about the debris flow and the lawsuit initiated by the neighbors in 1983 against the county and DNR and is wondering who is liable for the property now. Fred said that Steve Fox from county public works leads annual surveillance trips up the creek bed and writes reports on his findings. Fred said that Steve will likely be retiring within a year or two and he is concerned about the knowledge and expertise that will be lost when that happens. Fred said that there are a number of permits that need to be obtained to do any maintenance in the area and is wondering if there is a mechanism that could be explored to do one permit for multiple years. Fred is concerned with debris flows, mass wasting, slope instability, fire danger, and human loading on the property. Pete Coy shared that he brought up the forest fire issue three years ago when he first started on the commission. Pete's concern is that the department has taken responsibility for a very large tract of land and has no plans on how to protect it from a fire. Pete advised that if there

were a fire, it would do damage to the water supply for Bellingham and the surrounding area for 20-30 years. Pete thinks this issue is bigger than the parks commission and that both the county and the city need to be involved in the discussion. Fred is concerned about the increased usage of Lake Whatcom Park and the planned parking lot expansion. Fred is wondering if at some point access to the park will need to be limited or more user education put in place. Bennett shared that the parking lot expansion at Lake Whatcom Park is in the CIP for 2025 and will double the parking area. Bennett agrees that as the park becomes more popular, the department is going to need to think more proactively for its future. Carl Weimer shared that the county council is looking to create a Forest Resilience Task Force by the end of September to look at climate change, drier conditions, flooding, etc.

4. **Director Update**

- a. **Mid-Biennium Process** – Bennett gave an update on the mid-biennium budget process. Bennett's highest priority is increasing frontline staff who perform day to day park maintenance. Currently there isn't enough staff to keep up with all of the departmental tasks and responsibilities. Bennett said there is a future need to focus on forest management. The department previously had staff capacity who would have served to support that activity, but this capacity was shifted in service to operational duties some years ago. Bennett would also like to lay the groundwork for more community outreach. Currently the department does not have the staff capacity to dedicate to fulltime outreach functions. Bennett would like this position to promote the department and raise the community profile of the department to generate support.
- b. **Canyon Lake Access Update** – WC Parks finally has an agreement with Sierra Pacific Industries for the maintenance cost share for the easement for access to Canyon Lake. That agreement should be signed in next couple of weeks. Staff are discussing a public event prior to closing in winter.
- c. **Fall All-Staff** – The fall all-staff meeting will be in October and will move towards strategic planning that will feed into the CPROS update. Commissioners are welcome to attend.

5. **Operations Manager Update**

- a. **Parks Supervisor** – Asa Deane started in the Parks Supervisor position today. Bennett is excited for Asa to help the department focus more on partnership development.
- b. **Partnerships: WTA/Whatcom Million Trees/Master Gardeners** – WC Parks has an agreement with Washington Trails Association for volunteer dates on properties funded by Conservation Futures Funds. WC Parks is working to finalize an agreement with Whatcom Million Trees for habitat restoration at Hovander Park. WC Parks has a really great relationship with the Master

Gardeners at Hovander. WC Parks is looking to implement the Master Gardeners' landscaping plan with the gardens at Hovander to include trail construction and irrigation systems.

- c. **Priority Project Updates** – WC Parks has an agreement with Kane Environmental for site characterization at the Plantation Rifle Range. Kane Environmental submitted an initial report that identified additional needs, so a contract was put in place to complete that additional work in the next two months. A public meeting will be held later in the fall when all of the information has been compiled.

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

- a. **CPROS Update** – Rod has been working to update the department's Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan. Sections of the plan are being moved around to make the document flow more conventionally. Staff are also considering renaming it to a visioning plan to help reduce the confusion with the overall county's comprehensive plan and so that the name caters more to what the document is supposed to do.
- b. **Capital Projects Update** – Christ Thomsen asked Rod Lamb for assistance on the HVAC system replacement at the indoor range. The large, new air handling unit has been installed, but is not connected to the building. The project faced numerous challenges through COVID, but also with the contractor and the design consultants to the point that communication stopped between the county and both of those entities. Rod is happy to report that he has made a positive connection with the consultant, drafted a scope of work to finish their work, and has also kept the contractor on board. Rod will process contract amendments for both so the project can be completed.
- c. **Assessment of MRSC Process** – Whatcom County recently gained the ability to procure professional services and small public works contracts through Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC). MRSC is a non-profit that helps local governments across Washington State. Part of their service includes hosting a website where consultants and contractors can list their qualifications so that when a local government is looking to have a project completed, a search can be completed and a list of qualified contractors will be generated based on scope of work or specialty area. The process is taking a little longer because it is new, but in the future should allow staff to get RFQs and RFPs processed more quickly.

7. **Old Business**

- a. **Pickleball Proposal** – Bennett shared that a gentleman from the Bellingham Pickleball Association gave a proposal to WC Parks. The association has a potential donor for a 12-court covered pickleball facility, but they need to find a location for the facility. WC Parks has had follow-up discussions about potential locations centered around the finding space at the Northwest Soccer complex.

WC Parks has met internally with other relevant agencies including Public Works to discuss Pickleball opportunities at the NW Soccer complex, including potential use of areas that are under Public Works control. Further discussion depends on the outcome of required mitigation efforts that PW is undertaking. WC Parks will look to revisit by the end of the year.

8. New Business

- a. WC Parks is actively pursuing the purchase of a parcel of land on Saxon Road that would help with future trail connectivity. WC Parks is seeking budget authority to replace a sign at Semiahmoo Park that has been a source of community comment related derogatory language toward the Asian-American community related to a piece of equipment at the Semiahmoo Museum.

9. Open Discussion

Carl Weimer asked if anyone else received the email yesterday from a councilmember regarding the Forest Resilience Taskforce and Plan. Carl was told to share it with anyone who might be interested and will forward it to the group.

Frank Boteler suggested skipping the August commission meeting in future years to not take up valuable staff time during peak season. Joe Hashmall thought it was worth a discussion in December.

10. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

- a. **Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee Group Bike Ride – September 16th at 10:00 AM – Star Park, Ferndale**
- b. **Fall All-Staff – October 5th – Semiahmoo Cannery Lodge, 9261 Semiahmoo Parkway, Blaine, WA**

11. Meeting Input/Evaluation

Pete Coy suggested limiting the public comment portion of the meeting to topics that are within the commission's jurisdiction and also limiting the time a person can speak. The commission agreed to limiting public comments/communication to 5 minutes and if there are questions, it can be extended beyond that. Pete also asked how item agenda item 3 differed from agenda item 12. Carl Weimer said that was probably his fault because he had suggested adding a comment section to the end of the meeting. Bennett advised Carl's suggestion was interpreted as having a public comment/communication agenda item at both the beginning and end of the meeting.

12. Public Comments

None.

13. Next Meeting: September 21, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on September 21, 2023 at the Hovander Group Picnic Shelter, 5299 Nielsen Road, Ferndale, WA.

14. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director