

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, September 21, 2023
Hovander Group Picnic Shelter
5299 Nielsen Road, Ferndale, Washington

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Sonja Max at 6:03 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Sonja Max, Kristen Fagan, Joe Hashmall, Frank Boteler, Carl Weimer, Sheli Moore

Staff Present: Asa Deane, Rod Lamb, Christ Thomsen, Bennett Knox

Guests/Public Present: Daniel Probst

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

The September 21, 2023 agenda was inadvertently not approved at the beginning of the meeting.

Joe Hashmall moved to approve the August 17, 2023 minutes as written. Carl Weimer seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

- a. **Daniel Probst** – Daniel Probst is the project lead for the Bellingham Mount Baker Trail and also a trail and recreation advocate. Daniel thanked Bennett for offering two of his Saturdays to tour the trail corridor for the Bellingham Mount Baker Trail. Daniel said that Whatcom County Parks currently has roughly a 60-mile deficit of trails, that this has been the case for over a decade, and he feels that it needs to be addressed. Daniel said that the Seattle Times published an article about the next Eddie Bauer being in Utah. The article asked if Washington could do more to support the \$862 billion outdoor business and spoke about Washington not keeping up with providing recreation that actually brings in money. Daniel would like to donate \$23,000 towards trail development, but needs the parks commission and parks department's help with it. Daniel proposed the construction of a Lake Whatcom circumnavigation trail that is roughly 50 miles in length. Daniel has been riding this trail with friends and he advised the mountain bike community has been using it as well. The trail consists of mostly unofficial trails. This circumnavigation trail around Lake Whatcom would make it possible to put on mountain biking trail races that would bring in money to the community and be able to give back to the trails. Daniel also brought up the topic of unsanctioned trails and told the commission that fall and spring are the unsanctioned trail-building seasons. Daniel said he didn't know if there had been conversation about bringing the unsanctioned trail builders in to talk about volunteering for legitimate trail projects, but he would like

to see that addressed at some point. Daniel would like to propose the creation of a trail advisory board to Whatcom County Parks. He said the parks commission deals with a lot more than just trails and is not focused on trails. He would like to see an advisory board that would be made up of the different user groups to address the issues he has brought up. Daniel gave Carol Frazey a tour of the South Fork and talked about connections for the Bellingham Mount Baker Trail and issues surrounding trying to get more recreation in the Acme area. Carol is taking some of those recommendations and forwarding them to the county executive. Daniel told Rod that he talked to Chris Elder and Chris said that the flood zone property is county property and that the county council is the Flood Zone Board for that, so those properties could be used for park purposes. The Whatcom Mount Bike Coalition is talking about supporting a pump track in Acme. Daniel said he would provide information about pump tracks, costs, timelines, and grants if the department was interested. Daniel said Whatcom Tourism created a gravel adventure field guide that shows a bunch of different routes throughout the county. He said some of the trails included in the guide are sanctioned and some are not and that it would be a good thing if the department looked to see what tourism is promoting. Daniel said that DNR has started on the Olsen Trail development plan and is building trails off Y Road.

4. Director Update

- a. **Forest Management Plan** – Bennett submitted a draft RFP (request for proposal) of the Forest Management Plan to Finance. Bennett was able to get input on the draft from Public Works staff, the Forest Advisory Committee, and the Lake Whatcom Policy Group. Bennett would like to get a contract approved and in front of council before the end of the year, but isn't sure there is enough time. If a contract is not approved by the end of the year, funding will need to be renewed for next year.
- b. **Canyon Lake Access Update** – Bennett has the signed Canyon Lake Access agreement. That agreement and a supplemental budget request to fund gates and signage will be submitted to council on October 10. The goal is to have Canyon Lake open to the public in the spring.
- c. **Mid-Biennium Process** – Bennett recognized Daniel's comments about trails and shared his perspective that the department does not currently have the organizational structure and capacity to fully address trail issues. Bennett shared that the highest priority of the mid-biennium budget requests is to increase the departments frontline staff who perform day to day park maintenance. The mid-biennium budget requests are submitted to the Executive, who will make a recommendation on November 8. His recommendation goes to the council for approval on November 21.
- d. **Fall All-Staff** – The department's Fall All-Staff is on October 5. Bennett plans to continue the conversation from the spring all-staff on building the organizational

culture and is excited to have new staff members participate in the meeting. The day will be facilitated and will include getting staff input for strategic planning, identifying departmental priorities, and creating specific goals. Bennett would like to come to a consensus on these topics to give our overall organization and staff a sense of purpose and direction. The results from the second annual survey will be reviewed and compared to 2022. Commissioners are welcome to attend.

5. Operations Manager Update

- a. Plantation Rifle Range** – Christ Thomsen introduced Asa Deane, the Parks Supervisor, and Asa shared about himself. Christ received a scope and fee schedule from Kane Environmental for additional site characterization at the range to include additional soil sampling, monitoring well installation, and a terrestrial ecological evaluation.
- b. Priority Projects Update** – WC Parks is working with the Master Gardener Program on improvements to the irrigation and water distribution system for the gardens at Hovander. WC Parks is working with Whatcom Million Trees on a collaborative agreement on tree planting, controlling English ivy and other vine invasive species, and blackberry control. WC Parks has a letter of agreement with Washington Trails Association to provide support for trail maintenance. This includes the recruitment, training, and supervision of volunteers on a number of trail maintenance projects in the county. WC Parks is working with the Opportunity Council at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center on potential improvements to the kitchen facility to upgrade it to a commercial kitchen. WC Parks is also working with the Whatcom Council on Aging to make improvements in the kitchen at the Bellingham Senior Activity Center. The contractor for EH1 lost about a week of time because of the fire at Lake Whatcom Park, but Christ anticipates the project being substantially complete by the end of the month. Christ suspects that the department will be able to open it by the end of October.

6. Parks Design & Development Manager Update

- a. CPROS Update** – Rod shared a timeline and Table of Contents for the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space plan update. The Table of Contents has been reorganized from previous versions for better document flow. Rod will submit the SEPA review as soon as possible. Rod and Bennett have reached out to the planning commission to get their support of the plan before it is submitted to the council. Rod will have drafts available for the commissioners at the next meeting.
- b. Capital Projects Update** – Rod shared that Dave Bramer has been doing great work with keeping projects moving. Those projects include the demolition of the Ranger's Residence at Silver Lake Park, a rebid of the Silver Lake Lodge roof replacement, design work for the HVAC systems at the Bellingham Senior Activity Center and parks headquarters, and a road repair project at Lookout

Mountain. A single bid was received for the roofing and siding project at Lighthouse Marine Project, but it exceeded the available budget. Rod and Dave worked with the Executive's office and received their support to request additional funding from the council. Rod will report back on that next month. Pacific Surveying and Engineering began soil testing this week and will start surveying next week for the parking lot improvements at Stimpson Family Nature Reserve. Rod expects to have design plans by the end of the year. Jill Jacoby, the Lead Ranger for the West Region, has been leading the paintworks project for the Hovander barn with some support from Dave Bramer. Two bids were received for that project and both were within budget. There were some irregularities in the bids that came in that need to be worked out with the county's attorney, but that project is moving forward. The department is working hard to get these projects encumbered so the funds don't go away at the end of the year. Bennett advised that Dave worked on and successfully submitted a \$100,000 deferred maintenance grant through RCO to renovate the Baker Cabin at Silver Lake Park. The Baker Cabin is the only ADA accessible cabin and is the most popular, so this would be a great upgrade. The design team has also been siting the Cedar shower and restroom facility location.

7. Old Business

- a. **North Lake Samish Bridge Replacement Project** – Christ presented his letter to Kevin Thompson, the Project Engineer for the North Lake Samish Bridge Replacement Project, authorizing public works to use the Samish Park parking lot during construction of the bridge. This project was originally planned for 2023, but has been delayed until 2024. The park is set to be closed to the public on or about April 15, 2024 through August 20, 2025. Christ advised the department is also working with Public Works to look at the possibility of public works using a portion of the Samish Lodge, which will be closed to the public during the duration of the project, for their staff. The parks department would be compensated if public works used the building for office space. Carl Weimer asked why the department would get compensated for the use of the lodge and not compensated for the shutdown of the park. Christ advised it's a totally different issue and is something the department will be exploring as well. Christ said compensation for the closure of the park typically happens at the end of the project once the department knows how long the park will be closed. Christ said the parks department received approximately \$60,000 from public works for the use of the Birch Bay Community Park property during the berm project.
- b. **Acme Valley Follow-Up (public comment from past meeting)** – Bennett, Frank, Carl, and Sonja met with representatives of the Acme community (Jamie and Jim Sutterfield and their daughter, Sydney) and Daniel Probst as a follow-up to the previous commission meeting in which the Sutterfields shared their document titled Strategies for Enhancing Recreation in Acme, Washington:

Revitalizing Economy and Community through Recreation. Bennett said there was good conversation around opportunities in the area. Bennett presented the department's plans for South Fork Park and the new property acquisition at the end of Saxon Road. Bennett believes that the department has encouraged them to come together as a community to explore their opportunities and engage some other stakeholders, of which they have pledged to do. Bennett said that he pledged that as the department moves forward with its projects, he would commit engaging and participating in whatever evolves out of the Acme community group. Bennett shared that in Louisville his general approach in terms of community engagement and the role of government working with community on an initiative like this is to facilitate community ownership and leadership with government in support. Frank shared that he thinks this kind of activity is really above and beyond and thanked Rod and Bennett for taking the extra time to do more than is expected. Bennett had a tour of the Jones Creek berm and has reached out to Public Works to talk about public access on the berm. Bennett shared that the department has begun quarterly meetings with Public Works and Planning & Development Services to bring up issues and increase communication so that the department is more aware of projects like this in the future.

- c. **Smith Creek Follow-Up (public comment from past meeting)** – Bennett acknowledged that he has not yet had an opportunity to research the issues Fred Miller presented at the August 17 commission meeting, but will do so and report back to the commission when he has information to share.
- d. **Commission Vacancy – Pete Coy Resignation** – Pete Coy resigned from the commission because he lives part of the year in Arizona, thereby creating a vacancy in District 2. Bennett said the vacancy will be listed on the county's boards and commissions page and asked the commissioners if they had any input or suggestions on the roles and responsibilities of commissioners to add that they would like to add to the posting.

8. **New Business**

9. **Open Discussion**

Carl asked if Bennett was able to reach out to councilmember Galloway about the Forest Resilience Plan prior to submitting the Forest Management Plan for RFP. Bennett said that though the two may be similar, he believes the proposed timeline for the Forest Resilience Plan is 2-3 years and didn't want to delay submitting the RFP for the Forest Management Plan.

10. **Commissioner Engagement Opportunities**

- a. **Parks All-Staff – October 5th, 9:00 AM-3:30 PM, Semiahmoo Cannery Lodge, 9261 Semiahmoo Parkway, Blaine, WA**

11. Meeting Input/Evaluation

Bennett shared that he has met individually with several of the commissioners and enjoys learning from them on an individual basis. He is happy to continue these meetings if the commissioners are interested.

12. Next Meeting: October 19, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on October 19, 2023 at the Parks Administrative Office, 3373 Mount Baker Highway, Bellingham, WA.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director