

**MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, March 19, 2015**

**Tennant Lake Interpretive Center
5236 Nielsen Ave, Ferndale Washington**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Paul Woodcock, Chair at 6:09 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Commissioners: Jeffrey Margolis, Janet Boyhan and Paul Woodcock.

Staff: Mike McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rodney Lamb

Guest: Matt Aamot, Whatcom County Planning and Development Services

EXCUSED: Theresa Sygitowicz, Ken Kiesner and Richard Sturgill

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS / COMMUNICATIONS

A. PUBLIC COMMENTS: NONE

B. COMMUNICATION: NONE

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Jeffrey Margolis commented that at the recently attended Open Public Meetings and Record training the representative from the Attorney General's office stated that there is currently the question on whether or not some agencies that have contracts or relationships with government entities should be required to follow the public meeting forum and asked if this is the case with Whatcom County.

Mike stated that the opinion of the County legal staff is that the County does not have the authority to require non-profit agencies to operate in an open meeting format unless agreed to in a contract. At this time the Department does not have any agreements of this nature.

Mike also discussed that some independent bodies are required by statute to conduct certain types of their business in a public forum whereas the Parks and Recreation Commission is operating under County code, which calls for it to convene under the open meetings requirements.

V. AGENDA

A. AGENDA APPROVAL

Because there was not a quorum present the Agenda was not approved. It was the consensus of those present to follow the Agenda for meeting continuity.

VI. MINUTES

A. FEBRUARY 19, 2015 MINUTES APPROVAL

Because there was not a quorum present the Minutes were not approved. The February 19, 2015 Minutes approval will move forward to the April agenda.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE

1. Whatcom County's new web site – The site went live on March 11th. It is in phase one of the build and will continue to be improved and upgraded in upcoming phases.

Mike said that he has asked various user groups to assist with links and information and would ask the Commission to call the Administrative office that if there are observations or questions that need to be added or addressed.

The public campsite reservation system is also functioning on the new site. There is additional shelter information that needs to be added. Once this is complete the Department will begin a public promotion for on-line reservations.

The first week that the new reservation system was live the revenue was approximately \$5,000.00 in campgrounds alone. Based on feedback, the system has been extremely well received by the public. In addition, the vendor has been very cooperative and helpful working through the bugs and customizing the software to the Department's needs.

Mike stated that for a roll out of this nature and considering that it had to be coordinated with a new credit card vendor and that all the park data needed to be entered into the software, the Parks' staff and the software vendor did an excellent job in terms of getting it all to mesh and move forward to a live site.

2. Reconveyance Planning Meetings – See Item VII, C, 4.

3. Staffing – The recruitment to fill the retirement vacancies continues. The Construction Maintenance Supervisor position closes next week and the two maintenance positions that will cover electrical, finishing carpentry, HVAC and plumbing will open soon.

Extra-help recruitment also continues. The extra-help position is open on the web and if there are any interested individuals, the job description, the application and application process can be found there or at the County Human Resources Department located in the Court House.

4. Birch Bay Community Park – A meeting was held with the Blaine-Birch Bay Park and Recreation District to discuss the District's contribution to the park. Christ will provide additional information in his Operations Report.

5. Maple Falls Community Park – There were approximately 75 volunteers that worked on brush removal. The committee has a landscape architect that will help with the park planning process and are moving forward.

6. Communication Towers – The Department received a proposal to sell a permanent easement to provide access to the south end of Lookout Mountain. The other option to selling a permanent easement is to extend the current easement for another five years, with a 35 year first right of refusal on the leases. The Department will continue to evaluate the benefits but at this

time the agreement extends out to the year 2020 with a yearly escalator so there is no need to make an immediate decision.

7. Y-Road Trailhead – A letter of agreement to continue to maintain this trailhead has been submitted for review to the Backcountry Horsemen. Because the Department has a current working relationship with this organization it will continue to oversee this agreement for the Department of Health, who recently took over that property from the Public Works Department. Once this agreement has been returned it will move forward to Council for approval.

8. Hay Cutting Request for Proposal (RFP) – The RFP to cut hay at Hovander Park, Deming Eagle Park and Silver Lake Park has been released for bid. Information can be obtained at the County Finance Department web page or directly at the County Court House.

This is the final year of a five year agreement for the Agricultural License at Galbraith Farm and then this lease/agreement will go out for a RFP.

9. Sinclair Island - Mike met with Skagit County and Western Washington University to discuss their negotiations with the Department of Fish and Wildlife to procure a portion of low bank beach property on the north side of Sinclair Island to establish a 35 acre public mooring park.

Western is involved because they have a retreat center on the south end of the island. There is an importance to Whatcom County from a recreational standpoint because of the anticipated use by Whatcom County boaters.

The Department's role at this point is simply providing support for the project.

10. Bay to Baker Trail Planning Charrette – The National Park Service is hosting a charrette in the Kendall area on April 24 & 25, 2015. The subject is the connection of the Bay to Baker Trail from the Kendall Library to the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center (EWRRRC). There will be a public presentation at 6:00 PM on April 25th at the EWRRRC.

11. Charter Review Committee – The Charter Review Committee dropped the proposed amendment prohibiting expenditures to non-profit agencies. This amendment would have had a significant impact on the Department, particularly senior services and the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center because of the contracts with these non-profits to operate the facilities. It is not clear what the difference would have been but the Department would have had to release an RFP and it is thought that a public entity would need to charge the department substantially more to operate the facilities than the non-profit agencies.

B. OPERATIONS REPORT – CHRIST THOMSEN

1. Staffing – The spring season arrived about a month early this year which pushed the mowing schedule up and caused additional strain on the already limited staffing resources at a time when staff is preparing for the busy summer season.

a. Vacant Positions – The Maintenance and Construction Supervisor recruitment will close March 26, 2015. Once all applications are received the Department will begin the review/interview process. There was a national recruitment for this position in the hopes that there will be several exceptional candidates to select from.

A requisition request to begin recruitment for the two maintenance positions that were vacated due to retirement has been submitted. The Department will go through the internal

recruitment process first and if a qualified applicant is not identified internally the position will be released for external recruitment.

The Department is currently in the internal recruitment segment for the open Ranger position. That position closes internally next Tuesday and if not filled will be released for external recruitment that will include a regional release.

b. Temporary, Seasonal Help – The first round of interviews are complete. Out of that group it is anticipated that 10 individuals will be selected to begin employment on 3/30/15.

A second wave of interviews will begin soon for a May 29, 2015 employment date.

2. Plantation Rifle Range – Underage and Youth Shooters

a. Underage Shooters – The Department has been reviewing the age limit requirement policies for range users under the age of 18 year old. Christ stated that both he and Mike have conducted independent research studies and have determined that ranges within the state of Washington consistently require shooters under the age of 18 to be accompanied by a parent or guardian with the guardian required to sign a waiver. The Department is considering implementing this policy.

b. Youth Shooters – This is an area that is more difficult to define. The National Rifle Association does not have clear guidelines and leans more toward determining the child's abilities on a case by case basis.

The age requirement for ranges throughout the state varies widely from requiring a parent to be present at all times, to allowing the instructor of youth programs to determine the child's abilities, to not allowing children under 12 years of age to use the range.

The Boy Scouts of America's guidance is 10 years and older. This is the guidance that the Department is leaning toward with a guardian or parent accompanying youth shooter between the ages of 10 year olds age 18 for .22 caliber weapons only. Additional guidance being considered is that shooters under 21 years of age will not be allowed to shoot handguns.

This subject will need to be brought to the County's risk pool to provide the Department with guidelines prior to setting policy.

3. Up-Coming Projects.

a. Lighthouse Marine Park Boardwalk – Boardwalk demolition will begin tomorrow. The amount of work completed in the day will set the schedule for project completion dates.

This project includes the lower portion of the boardwalk that was condemned last year and will include only the demolition phase of the project. The boardwalk will be replaced at some time in the future and will have a much smaller footprint than the previous boardwalk.

Rod spoke briefly on the proposed site design.

b. Silver Lake Park Restrooms – The Department is working on reducing some of the deferred maintenance projects at Silver Lake Park. The first project will be painting the interior of the campground vault toilets prior to fishing season opening day.

- c. **Silver Lake Park Signage** – New signage will include the installation of campground numbers and park way-finding signs.
- d. **Birch Bay Community Park** – The on-site building demolition process has begun. This first phase is to complete the required permitting and conduct an asbestos inspection.
- e. **Lake Whatcom / Chuckanut Parks' Trail Maintenance** – A stakeholder group is being formed to identify, discuss and prioritize trail maintenance needs throughout the Lake Whatcom and Chuckanut Parks landscapes and how to coordinate and complete the work through volunteer work parties, etc. The group's meetings will begin in April, 2015.

C. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT REPORT – ROD LAMB

1. **South Fork Park Trailhead Development** – The permitting process is progressing with a review from Whatcom County River and Flood. Whatcom County Public Works has yet to complete their review but it is anticipated that they will in the very near future.
2. **Silver Lake Park Road & Electrical Improvements** – The directional signs have been installed throughout the park. Additional campsite numbering signs have been ordered that will reflect the new campsite names and numbering system. It is anticipated that the order will be received and signs installed by the end of April, hopefully before opening day on 4/25/15.
3. **Lighthouse Dock Renovation** – Rod stated that he was able to come to mutual terms with the US Army Corps of Engineers and the US Fisheries Department regarding the surf smelt and pile driving activities. The project has been changed in that it is no longer tied to a date window but to specific tidal condition and no evidence of surf smelt activity. This will provide more flexibility to complete the work and project planning is moving forward within the allowable conditions.

The plan is to begin in April, during a zero tide. A surf smelt survey will be completed but based on past spawning activity it is anticipated that there will be no activity at this time.

When the conditions have been met the contractor will blade the ramp and knock down the sediment south of the ramp for approximately 50 feet. Once the sediment has been removed the goals will be to keep the area free of sediment to discourage any surf smelt spawning and allow pile driving activity to take place June 1st. This will complete the site preparation, allowing pile driving beginning tentatively on June 1st.

4. **Lake Whatcom Reconveyance Planning** – Rod provided the Commission with an update on the March 18, 2014 Reconveyance Public Planning Meeting. He had initially planned to provide the meeting Power Point presentation to the Commission but all the Commissioners present this evening were at the planning meeting so it was decided to provide the presentation at the April Commission meeting, if requested.

Rod distributed updated Conceptual Trails Alternative Maps for Lake Whatcom Park and Lookout Mountain Park that reflect the requested changes and a Conceptual Trail Alternative Summary of the changes.

It was discussed that these maps are still in the conceptual phase and will continue to be modified as the project moves forward.

The question was raised whether or not the proposed new trail construction for the section of trail in the reconveyance area that is needed for the Mount Baker Marathon will proceed as planned this summer.

Mike discussed that the park plan is currently in the public planning process and requires council approval prior to any trail construction taking place either by park staff or volunteer work parties and that any construction would also need to go through the required permitting process. As a result, the Department's main focus for the season will be to maintain existing trails as opposed to new construction.

Another consideration when building trails is that any trails that may route outside of the park boundaries will need to have the proper easements in place or permission from the property owner to cross into private property. This has been a specific request from property owners surrounding the park. The permission in this case would be above and beyond a property owner giving an individual permission to cross their property for a running route because these trails would be part of a larger public trail system. This is also a concern for the private timber companies that adjoin the park.

Rod discussed the reasons for the location of the current trail system in terms of topography, views, trail grade and the utilization of existing trails.

There was a concern raised that the increased activity on that road due to park use could require a road upgrade. Rod stated that he did consider this and recently met with the County Public Works Department to discuss the road classification and overall road capacity. Public Works stated that the road is classified as a neighborhood collector and is currently well under capacity and that it is their opinion that increased use due to park access will not exceed that capacity. Rod did comment that there is a difference between perception and reality and the perception based on neighborhood comment is that North Shore Road is crowded and dangerous not only for pedestrians but also bicyclists.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. WHATCOM COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN – CHAPTER 9 MAPS – Mike provided the Commission with the most recent version of the maps and discussed the legends and areas of recreation that are covered on the maps. The maps have been proofed for accuracy of county owned properties and locations.

Matt Aamot asked if the Commission could provide any final comments they might have prior to posting the maps to the web page.

It was discussed that because all the existing trails cannot be included on the map due to the scale of the maps and because the existing trails are not only inventoried in the Comprehensive Plan they can also be found in more detail at the Department level in the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Open Plan, it was the consensus to remove the existing trails and park references but leave the proposed trail corridors on Map 9-2 and to add a pale yellow key titled "Incorporated Cities" to both maps.

The changes will be made and the finalized maps brought back to the April Commission meeting for final approval.

Matt stated that the draft Comprehensive Plan Chapters are on the County Planning Department's web site, including Chapter 9 but without the maps. These will be added once the Commission recommendations have been added and approved.

Matt also commented that the Land Use Manager reviewed the Commission's previous recommendations and as a result, identified several policies that were overlapping and were able to be consolidated into one policy.

B. LAKE WHATCOM RECONVEYANCE PLANNING UPDATES – See Item VII, C., 4.

IX. NEW BUSINESS – NONE

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS - NONE

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE AND LOCATION

The April 16, 2015 Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting will be held at Silver Lake Park at 6:00 PM, preceded by a tour of the road and electrical upgrades at 5:30 PM.

XII. ADJOURNMENT – The meeting was adjourned at 7:57 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director