

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, January 22, 2015

Whatcom County Parks Administrative Office
3373 Mount Baker Highway, Bellingham, Washington

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Paul Woodcock, Chair at 6:38 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Commissioners: Paul Woodcock, Gordon Rogers, Janet Boyhan, Kenneth Kiesner and late arrival at 6:59 PM, Theresa Sygitowicz

Staff: Mike McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rodney Lamb

GUESTS: Matt Aamot, Senior Planner, Whatcom County Planning and Development Services

EXCUSED:

Richard Sturgill
Jeff Margolis

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS / COMMUNICATIONS

A. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

1. The Chair recognized Daniel Probst. Mr. Probst discussed some of the statistic of the recently release Economic Analysis of Recreation in Washington State.

He also discussed that he walked the Raptor Ridge Trail with Mike McFarlane as this is an example of the multi-use trail construction that is being suggested by the user groups for the Reconveyance area.

Mr. Probst extended an open invitation to the Commission members to walk the Raptor Ridge Trail and an invitation to tour any of the existing trails in the Reconveyance lands or to discuss any of the existing trail maps.

B. COMMUNICATION:

1. **Letter – Ray S. Power, RE: Silver Lake Park Veteran Camping Discount** – Mr. Power wrote to express his dissatisfaction with a park employee's justification of changes occurred in the camping discount rates.

Christ Thomsen discussed that in 2011 the discounts for the disabled veterans were changed to apply to be more in line with the State Park's discount policies and procedures. He also discussed the camper's documentation that is required to award the discount.

Christ stated that he has since spoken with Mr. Power and believes that the issue has been resolved but wanted to share the letter with the Commission members for their information.

Mike McFarlane pointed out that in the past the discount had been applied incorrectly and individuals were receiving a discount that actually did not exist on the County's Unified Fee Schedule (UFS) and that Mr. Power had been receiving a greater discount than what actually existed on the UFS and this is what caused the confusion.

There was some discussion regarding the park employee's response in that the employee could have better served Mr. Power by applying more diplomacy in their response. Christ stated that he discussed this with the employee and explained how the problem could have been avoided if the employee had taken more time to understand the situation.

Gordon Rogers wanted to go on record to say that not all disabled veterans have the disabled documentation and that some latitude might be considered when applying the discount. Mike McFarlane explained that the best way to track the discounts that have been applied and remain in compliance with the State Auditors was to follow the State Parks' policies and procedures for applying the discount and that this included the camper providing the required identification for disabled status.

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS – None

V. AGENDA

A. JANUARY 22, 2015 AGENDA APPROVAL

Paul Woodcock, Chair asked if there were any changes to the Agenda. There were none.

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers, seconded by Janet Boyhan and passed unanimously to approve the January 22, 2015 Agenda as written.

VI. MINUTES

A. DECEMBER 18, 2014, 2014 MINUTES APPROVAL

Minutes were not approved due to lack of quorum of members who attended the 12/18/14 Whatcom County Parks Commission Meeting. Approval deferred to the next meeting.

The following corrections were requested:

1. Gordon Rogers left the meeting early.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE

1. Gordon Rogers – Commission Term Complete – Mike stated that he would like to thank Gordon on behalf of the Whatcom County Park staff for his 10 years of service to the Whatcom County Parks Commission.

Gordon stated that it has been an enjoyable experience working with all the past and present Commission members and the County staff. He expressed that he felt a lot of good has been accomplished during those 10 years.

2. Countywide Invested Projects – Mike informed the Commission that the Department will be involved in two large countywide initiatives.

a. County Web Site / Telephone System - The County is upgrading the web site and telephone system. The web site will be live in March and the telephone system is on track for

mid-2015. This will not affect the outlying park areas but it will affect the administrative office. These are major expenditures for Whatcom County.

b. Land Infrastructure Management Integrated Technology Project NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) II Tracking software- Mike discussed that the project consists of three parts; 1. Land Records – The County is re-doing its land records and upgrading the software to improve data that will benefit staff and the public, 2. Updated NPDES II software (there will be continued updates on this project) and 3. The County permitting process.

These upgrades are major expenditures for Whatcom County. The changes will be very beneficial to the Department as we rely heavily on GIS information, land records in terms of property identification to notify neighboring properties regarding issues that may have an impact on these properties and overall planning efforts.

The NPDES II may require involvement from the Department as it includes monitoring a number of areas in the county that fall within the watersheds, Birch Bay and Lake Whatcom. It currently involves urban areas but may be expanded countywide.

The updated permitting system will streamline the process for the Health, Planning and Public Works Departments. It will also be helpful in terms of having increased access to the application process and viewing permit status.

3. Itinio Update – The recent addition of the new Department reservation software went active this month. There have been very few problems and any glitches that were identified have been resolved.

Once the Department is sure that the system is working properly there will be information released for public awareness and education and a link added to the Whatcom County Parks web site allowing the public to make online reservations for camping.

There was discussion regarding the public reservation process.

4. Retirements / Hiring – There will be four positions open in the coming year with one position currently vacant. The current vacant position is a Lead Ranger position and the other three are maintenance positions that will be coming available, one at the end of January, one at the end of February and one at the end of April.

Three of the positions will remain in the within the Union and one will be removed. Information regarding the staff reorganization will be shared with the Commission as it becomes available.

5. Little Squalicum Park Deed Restriction – Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Little Squalicum Park is leased to the City of Bellingham. The EPA contacted the Department and would like to record a deed restriction to prevent re-contaminating areas that have been cleaned of contaminated soils.

The Department will look at the request very closely, and will have our County legal staff review the request, for several reasons.

The City of Bellingham has utilities located on the property which will need to be replaced at some future date that would require digging in the area.

In the event that City Parks wants to erect any structures on the property.

And finally, in the event of a land disturbance such as a slide, the Department will need to reserve the ability to clean up the debris.

For these reasons the Department would like to make sure that the deed restriction will not impede these activities.

6. Y Road Landfill Lease – Back Country Horsemen – The Department is discussing the lease agreement that allows the Back Country Horsemen (BCH) to use the County Public Works landfill on the Y Road. The landfill is retired and has been capped and fenced. The Department has overseen this lease for the Public Work Department for the past 10 years. The lease expired last year and there were some revisions that needed to be made.

The lease allows BCH to use the landfill parking area as a trail head to access private and State timber lands leading up to Stewart Mountain. It is also used by public residents who have become aware of the location.

The lease is currently being reviewed by County legal staff and once we have received comment from that department the lease will move forward to the BCH and then to Council for approval.

There is no charge for the BCH to use this access and in return they have maintained the area. BCH is working with the Department Design and Development Supervisor to install a kiosk.

7. Final Commission Comments/Suggestions for the Comprehensive Park and Recreation Open Space Plan (CPROSP) – Mike asked that if Commission members have any final comments or suggestions for the CPROSP that they share those with him as soon as possible as he will be working on the final draft over the next couple months.

The document is on the Parks web page in draft format. Mike discussed that he has a number of revisions that will incorporate feed-back received from County Council, various user groups and public comments and would like to offer the opportunity for Commission to provide input for inclusion prior to submitting the final draft for Council review.

8. Open Government Training – Mike discussed that because the Parks Commission meetings are subject to the open meetings law there is an open meetings training that is a State requirement for all elected officials, boards and commissions. This training is available in a class setting in Council Chambers on March 18, 2014 in two sessions, 1:00 p.m. until 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. The training can also be completed online. Currently only County employees can register online but as soon as Commission members can register Mike will provide Commission members with all pertinent information to be able to access the online registration.

There is another training opportunity that has become available for Commission members on February 3, 2015, Effective Meetings for Focus & Productivity. The training will provide key guidelines to help public council, commission and committee members to function effectively and represent the interests of the public and provide support to county programs and activities. Mike provided a flyer on dates times and locations and asked that if any Commission members are interested in attending to let him know as soon as possible as space is limited and he will need to take care of the registration through the County system. This information will be shared through separate email from Mike to all Commission Members for the benefit of those not attending tonight's meeting.

9. Elections of Chair / Vice Chair – Previous election for these positions were conducted at the December 2013 Commission meeting and are up for renewal.

MOTION: A motion was made by Gordon Rogers, seconded by Kenneth Kiesner to retain the current Chair and Vice Chair for 2015. Discussion was called for and the motion passed unanimously.

B. OPERATIONS REPORT – CHRIST THOMSEN

1. Staffing

a. Conservation and Park Steward – An offer to fill the position has been made to one of the candidates. The Department is in negotiations with the individual and hopes to have a commitment within the next few days.

b. Vacant Positions – The Department is in the process of reviewing the position descriptions of all current and upcoming vacant positions to determine if any revisions need to be made to better meet current needs.

There was some discussion regarding the County hiring process.

c. Extra Help – Two four-month, full time, extra-help positions have been added in 2015. These positions will provide support during the transition between employees retiring and re-hiring for these positions.

In an effort to remain on top of the park operation's needs meetings have been ongoing with lead park ranger to identify and focus on priorities, safety issues, facility longevity, facility and grounds appearance and public service.

2. East Whatcom Regional Resource Center (EWRRC) – Christ attended a meeting with EWRRC staff regarding the HVAC System. The system has presented several challenges over the years and meetings are being held to identify the problems and how to best rectify them.

EWRRC has brought in a consultant to design modifications to the system to increase functionality. Christ discussed the problems and possible modification that might be made to the system. He discussed the project costs and that additional funds were being allocated from outside the Park budget to meet the costs of the modifications. The target to begin construction is during the summer months.

There was discussion regarding the age of the system, and whether or not the original designer has been contacted to address the problems that have been ongoing since the system was installed. Mike discussed that they have not been contacted. He explained that the County Facilities Management Department originally oversaw and managed the project and budget. In the course of the project there were some budgetary decisions that were made which resulted in changes to the original system's design.

3. Glacier Restroom Janitorial Contract – The Department is reviewing the contract and conducting a cost analysis to determine whether or not to shift the janitorial duties back to Park staff or continue with the contract.

4. Incidents – There were two minor staff injuries, one that required stitches and one back/lifting injury. Equipment use and lifting safety procedures were reviewed with the employees involved.

5. Plantation Rifle Range Youth Shooting Program Grant – Application is being made again this year for grant funding for this program. The grant application is submitted to and awarded through The Community Foundation and is titled the Pits Grant.

C. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT REPORT – ROD LAMB – Rod explained that his report will recap 2014 in terms of Capital Projects completed and in progress. In reviewing 2014 he is pleased to report that many of the back-logged projects have been completed.

1. Bellingham and Ferndale Senior Activity Center Fire Alarm System – New fire alarm systems were installed in both facilities.

2. South Fork Park Trailhead Development – The Department has applied for an easement from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), at DNR's request. Application was submitted 3/4/14. Rod has been in discussions with them since and it appears that we are close to reaching an agreement. Rod provided a map of the recent proposed South Fork Trail Connector showing the original proposed trail and the new proposed trail through DNR managed lands. DNR has asked that we move back to the old logging road locations and although not necessarily as good a trail experience as desired, there are cost savings with relocating them.

In May 2014 consulting services were secured for engineering and permitting trailhead development at Galbraith Farm. The preliminary engineering was completed in September 2014 and is ready to submit for permit approval next week for the substantial shoreline development.

Nesset Farm: The permit drawings for the foundation repairs at the Nesset House have been completed. The permit application was submitted in May 2014 and approved in June 2014. Since then the Department has been working on a bid package for the selection of the contractor to complete the work in 2015.

3. Silver Lake Park – The Department made several general improvements to Silver Lake Park in 2014.

The playground project was completed with the instillation of the drinking fountain.

There have been additional way-finding signage installed along Silver Lake Road that alert drivers of park entrances and attractions within the park. We also purchased new internal directional signage, cabin nameplates and campsite markers indicating the new names for each. These new signs have either already been installed or will be installed this spring.

Pacific Survey & Engineering has been contracted to complete the road and electrical improvements throughout the park. This work included a topographic survey, utility locate and preliminary engineering. They are nearly done with the phasing plan / overall improvement plan which will identify individual phases, the first of which will be completed this year.

4. Hovander Homestead Park – In May, 2014 the small playground was renovated by adding three new sand scoops, one of which is wheelchair accessible.

The Hovander River trail was completed, including a volunteer riparian planting work party in April, 2014. Two hundred and fifty volunteers installed 2,200 native trees and shrubs. Later in May, 2014 the Whatcom Parks and Recreation Foundation hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony for the River Walk.

The section of road that services the Main Picnic Shelter was relocated. The River Walk followed that road for a short stretch and relocating it improved the safety and enjoyment for trail users.

In conjunction with the new Picnic Shelter driveway, a new concrete walkway was built that provides ADA access from the picnic shelter to the restroom, the Hovander House and the Ranger/Information Office.

There were also signage improvements that have been made with a series of signs that delineate the off-lease area that is located near the boat launch.

5. Lighthouse Dock Renovation – Progress has been made on the renovation but there is still more to do.

The replacement of the rotten timber barriers with pre-cast concrete blocks along the perimeter of the parking lot has been completed.

The final permit approval from Planning and Development Services on the boat ramp and our building permit was secured in June, 2014 and the boarding float section was received in December 2014.

Yet to be resolved is the surf smelt spawning issue. The Department has not gotten permit conditions modified to date but progress is being made. Discussions with the regulating agencies regarding the permit conditions continue but it is expected that this will be resolved prior to the summer months and optimal tides.

6. Lookout Mountain Trail Head – The trailhead was completed and the restrooms were opened after dealing with cold weather, broken pipes and low water pressure issues. All problems were resolved and the system was operational in January 2014.

The trailhead development was completed with the relocation of the tower road gate, completion and installation of an auxiliary generator for the restroom water pump and the installation of an information kiosk, with park maps and rules.

7. Reconveyance Planning – Planning for the park began with public outreach and user group meetings.

Meetings were held with allied agencies to collect background mapping data such as sensitive species, existing road/infrastructure and LIDAR. The information has provided a foundation to make sound decisions in developing a sustainable recreational trail network.

The next user group meeting will be held in March, 2015. It is anticipated that the trail planning portion of the project will be completed in the spring of 2015.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. WHATCOM COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (WCCP) CHAPTER 9 – Paul Woodcock asked if the Commission had any additional comments and were they ready to move forward to approve the WCCP Chapter 9 as amended or if there was more discussion needed.

The Chair recognized Theresa Sygitowicz. Theresa stated that she would like to request and explanation or background on the reasoning behind including Page 9-13, Policy 9E-4 in the Comp Plan. Her concern is that there is a great deal of open space/ag lands in the Nooksack corridor and with the build-up of sediment it is changing the land classification with a decisive increase in land along the river. If one of the levees failed and the river floods into an ag-producing area it does not seem appropriate that the County should be taking control of that land.

There was discussion that the paragraph states that when the County acquires property for flood storage or fish and wildlife purposes that it can be considered for secondary use for park and open space purposes during non-flood times, not that the Parks Department is acquiring the property.

Mike stated that there are properties that the county has acquired for off river storage purposes during flood periods and there are areas along the river that are purposely under water when it floods so that not everything goes down stream. During non-flood, low water times those areas are sometimes used by the public for recreational purposes. An example of that is in Acme where there is a limited recreational use area for parking and public river access during non-flood times but during floods and high water events it is used for flood water storage.

Theresa stated that was not her interpretation of the policy and sees no reason for it to be included in the document.

MOTION: Theresa Sygitowicz moved that Policy 9E-3 be removed from Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan (WCCP) Chapter 9. Gordon Rogers seconded the motion. After discussion was called, Gordon withdrew his second. Motion failed for lack of a second.

It was the consensus of the Commission Members to make the following changes/additions:

On Page 9-15/16 Activity Centers:

In the first paragraph remove the words “full scale” and “and indoor aquatic facilities” and change the sentence “Five of the eight senior/community centers...” to, “There are eight senior/community centers. They are located in Bellingham, Ferndale, Blaine, Everson, Lynden, Sumas, Point Roberts and Welcome”.

From the third paragraph remove the words “and serves as the center for cultural arts programs” and insert “special events and classes”.

On Page 9-16 Activity Centers

The sentence beginning “East Whatcom Regional Resource Center...” will begin a new paragraph.

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers and seconded by Kenneth Kiesner to approve Chapter 9 of the WCCP with the revisions as presented in the Pre-Draft December 2014 document or noted changes made at this meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

The Commission members thanked Matt Aamot for his patience and hard work in this matter.

Mike provided the Commission with Map #22 Plan Recommendations – Whatcom County Park and Open Space Plan and Map #23 Shoreline Access Opportunities – Whatcom County Park and Open Space Plan for Commission member’s review and asked for recommended changes to the maps and to please reference the map number when making suggested changes.

After a great deal of discussion regarding the inaccuracy or incomplete information on the maps it was decided to form a sub-committee of Janet Boyhan, Gordon Rogers and Kenneth Kiesner to work with Department staff to create new map information. Mike stated that new work maps would be provided and a date scheduled once the maps are received.

Matt stated that it would be acceptable to publish Chapter 9 as accepted at this meeting and publish the map(s) when they are completed.

Some of the changes and inclusions/exclusions discussed were:

Recommended Sites should be shown on a separate map.

Add all new property acquisitions.

Change all inaccurate information.

Change the map identifier's color to correspond with the Legend, i.e., Public Shoreline-Developed shown in blue, Pubic Shoreline-Underdeveloped, green, and so on.

Municipal parks will not be referenced on the maps.

Mike discussed some of the challenges that were experienced when developing the past maps in order to avoid the same challenges with the new maps.

There was additional discussion on the identifier marks and the number of maps required and the deadlines to complete the maps. It was discussed that a draft version of the maps will be completed for approval prior to the February Commission Meeting.

B. LAKE WHATCOM RECONVEYANCE PLANNING UPDATES – See: Item VII: Staff Reports, C. Design and Development Staff Report, #8 Reconveyance Planning

In addition, Rod provided maps of proposed primary multi-use trail corridors as identified by the user group work sessions. There were three maps, one showing both the east and west sides of the area and additional maps providing details for each section. The details also include a combination of existing and abandoned logging roads and trails. All this information will be used in the trail construction strategy.

There will be additions to these maps to show trail spurs, campsites and points of interest along the trails and spurs. Additional modifications will be made once public interest and input has been received and compiled.

There was some discussion regarding the maps legends and identifiers.

IX. NEW BUSINESS - NONE

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. FEBRUARY MEETING DATE, TIME AND LOCATION - The February 19, 2015 Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting will be held at the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Administrative Office, 3373 Mount Baker Highway, Bellingham, Washington.

XI. ADJOURNMENT - The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director