

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, June 18, 2015

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

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Paul Woodcock, Chair at 6:03 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Commissioners: Paul Woodcock, Jeffrey Margolis, Richard Sturgill, Janet Boyhan, Theresa Sygitowicz.

Staff: Mike McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Mark Personius, Planning & Development Services (PDS)

Guest: Wendy McDermott, Associate Director, Washington Conservation Programs- American Rivers

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS / COMMUNICATIONS

A. COMMENTS

1. Daniel Probst – Cascade Mountain Runners. Daniel provided an update on the 2nd run of the Bellingham to Baker Summit. The run took place on June 5, 2015. Four runners left from Bellingham Bay, three runners completed the course. The course was run in 40 hours, a decreased time of 8 hours from the 2014 race. The run was held to promote the proposed Bellingham to Mt. Baker Trail.

Daniel provided a copy of the Bellingham Herald article on the race and that he would be happy to answer any questions regarding the race or the trail.

There was a discussion regarding the mechanics of the race in terms of sleeping, eating and personnel involved in supporting the racers. Also discussed were the route and the future goals in terms of growth. Permits for the 2016 race have been submitted.

There was a discussion on the process that would need to be followed in order to get the previously discussed proposed Bellingham to Mt. Baker Trail on the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan trails map.

2. Karen Brown – Ms. Brown stated that when the Recreation Resource Management Area (RRMA) was added to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan (WCCP), Chapter 9, Map 9-1 property owners that were included in this area were not notified that their property was located within this designated area. She stated that this is not right and that this designation needs to be removed from the WCCP and maps.

3. Cliff Langley – Mr. Langley provided signatures and addresses of Whatcom County resident who were opposed to the RRMA designation in the WCCP at the last Commission meeting. He returned to this meeting to restate his opposition to his property being included in the RRMA and request that the RRMA be removed from the WCCP and corresponding maps.

4. Phillip Multop – Mr. Multop lives at 4331 Saddlestone Drive, Bellingham. He stated that when he bought his property there was no reference in a property title search or made by his real estate agent that his property was included in the RRMA. He stated that there been reference he would not have purchased the property. He is opposed to being included in the RRMA and feels that it will affect the resale value of his property. He is requesting that his property be removed from the RRMA designation.

5. Sharon Westergreen – Ms. Westergreen stated that she spoke to her realtor who stated that now that a property owner knows that their property is included in the RRMA that this should be disclosed when selling. The agent felt that this designation would impact the resale value of property.

Sharon stated that she feels the Commission is taking the comments made regarding RRMA seriously and appreciates the time taken to listen.

She stated that she has not had time to research if any public education regarding the RRMA designation was provided and is asking that the Commission not approve the maps with a RRMA designation on them.

B. COMMUNICATION

1. Memo dated 6/11/15 from Erin Osborn, Planning and Development Services. Subject: Clarification RE: 4/16/15 Minutes Parks & Recreation Mtg., and attachment: proposed amendments to 4-16-15 parks-commission-draft-minutes.docx. Mike provided a copy of the memo and attachment for Commission review. Erin submitted this information for clarification purposes.

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

1. Theresa Sygitowicz – Theresa stated that she would like to see the reference to RRMA removed from the WCCP and maps.

2. Jeff Margolis – Jeff provided information and pictures on his Facebook page regarding a child who was injured on a tire swing and wondered if this was an issue for Commission consideration.

Mike stated that he reviewed the information and reported that the Department does not have this type of play structure in the parks.

Jeff also commented that he was at Point Whitehorn Park and felt that the attention to detail in maintaining this park is excellent.

V. AGENDA

A. JUNE 18, 2015 AGENDA

MOTION: It was moved by Theresa Sygitowicz, seconded by Richard Sturgill and passed unanimously to accept the June 18, 2015 Agenda with the following changes/additions:

1. Move Item VIII., A. and Item IX., A. to follow item VI, in that order.

VI. MINUTES

A. April 16, 2015 MINUTES

MOTION: It was moved by Janet Boyhan, seconded by Richard Sturgill and passed unanimously to accept the April 16, 2015 Minutes with the following correction/clarification:

1. VII., C., 3. Correct the minutes to reflect that the surf smelt survey date is 4/18/15.
2. Mike addressed the question on whether or not Sharon Westergreen referred to any WACs in her comments; Ms. Westergreen's comments were transcribed verbatim and provided for Commission review. There were no references made in any of Sharon Westergreen's comments to any WACs.

B. May 21, 2015 MINUTES

MOTION: It was moved by Jeff Margolis, seconded by Theresa Sygitowicz and passed with 3 ayes and two abstentions to accept the May 21, 2015 Minutes as written.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE

1. **Parks Website** – Staff is currently making progress in updating the new website. There are quite a few glitches that need to be ironed out. It was discussed that inserting a link to the Upper Nooksack River website could not be accomplished at this time as inserting functioning links is one of the issues.
2. **Staffing** – The Department is putting emphasis on filling open positions. The Silver Lake Park and Lighthouse Marine Park Ranger positions have been filled and interviews will be held in the near future for the two Repair Maintenance III positions.

Once those two positions are filled the Department will be fully staffed in full-time positions.

3. **Affordable Care Act (ACA)** – The Department is going to need to re-evaluate the Seasonal Extra-help hours in a different manner. Because of the ACA the County has to alter the definition of seasonal extra-help in terms of hours and seasons worked. Mike discussed the past practice and the current changes. There was a discussion that fortunately this would not impact the senior center coordinators hours.
4. **Lighthouse Marine Park** – Mike met with legal staff regarding the Lighthouse Marine Park lighthouse funding proposal in order to clarify guidelines for donations.

There was discussion regarding the design, the Coast Guard functionality and Planning Department construction requirements and the committee's construction financing plans.

5. **Camp Horizon / Bay Horizon Inspection** – The Fire Marshall's inspection will take place tomorrow to ensure the Camp Horizon Foundation has completed all the upgrades and modifications to meet fire code for this year's camp, which starts next week. There will be a re-assessment in the fall to determine the additional upgrades required. This will provide the Foundation with information they will need to determine whether or not they will be willing to fund the required upgrades for next year's camp.

6. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock Fees – The Department has decided to request donations for dock use as opposed to a set fee structure because it would be cost prohibitive to have staff on hand to collect the fees in light of the low volume of use for that structure.

7. Maple Falls Park – The Department has received a request for a bicycle pump track. Mike discussed that he has yet to meet with the group proposing the track but will keep the Commission informed.

8. Y Road Access Agreement – The agreement with the Back Country Horsemen has been completed for another 5 years with renewal options. The Whatcom County Health Department is now responsible for the land fill but has continued much the same way as Public Works, requesting that the Parks and Recreation Department continue managing the access agreement.

B. OPERATIONS REPORT – CHRIST THOMSEN

1. Staffing

a. Maintenance & Construction Supervisor – Shami Campbell, Maintenance and Construction Supervisor will attend next month's meeting for an introduction.

b. Silver Lake Park Ranger – The Silver Lake Ranger position has been filled in-house by Jill Jacoby who comes to us from the Whatcom County justice system.

c. Point Roberts Ranger Position – The Point Roberts Ranger position has been filled and will begin July 9th. He comes to us from a federal military recreation program and comes highly recommended.

d. Seasonal Staff – Recruitment continues to bring our seasonal staff numbers up to 100%.

e. Repair Maintenance III Positions – The Department will be interviewing next week to identify candidates for the two vacant positions, with second interviews scheduled for the following week.

2. Projects

a. Lighthouse Marine Park Boardwalk Demolition – This project will be contracted out because of the travel time for staff to the park and waste disposal transportation from the park. The bids for this project have been returned. Staff visited the site to evaluate the scope of work and timelines. Bid selection will take place next week with demolition of the condemned portion of the boardwalk following soon after. Conceptual renovation ideas are being refined, with preparation work to begin this fall for construction in 2016.

b. Birch Bay Community Park Building Demolition – The asbestos inspection identified asbestos on-site. An asbestos abatement vendor has been contracted to begin work next week, completing the removal by 6/29/15. Demolition will begin on the portions of the structures that have no asbestos present. It is the goal to have the demolition and the site stabilized by July 1st to allow for the Sheriff's Office and the Fire Department to use that area as a staging area for the Fourth of July holiday weekend.

c. Silver Lake Park – Grills have been installed at all the cabins at Silver Lake Park.

d. Special Events – The two major seasonal events, Ski to Sea and Highland Games are complete and were a great success. Extra efforts were made by staff to prepare the parks and provide a clean and well maintained venue for these events.

e. Trail Maintenance Activities – Christ provided pictures for Commission review on the trail restoration and drainage features in Chuckanut Mountain Park. The area of focus is water control.

3. Bay to Baker Trail – A meeting was held with Glacier area citizens and business owners to discuss the Bay to Baker Trail. The general focus was the Glacier area, extending down to Maple Falls and the broader concept of the Bay to Baker Trail. A large part of the conversation involved the existing trail conditions, trail location in terms of identifying the best location for certain sections and connectivity issues. After review of the current terminus there were questions regarding the narrowness and vagueness of ownership and boundaries and staff was unable to make a recommendation on how to proceed at this time. It is planned to have staff walk the entire length of the trail in order to get a better sense of the area and a bigger picture of priorities.

4. Stimpson Family Nature Reserve – A tree fell on a vehicle in the parking lot. Fortunately there were no injuries. The Sheriff's Department was called on site and the Public Works Department heard the dispatch over the radio, self-dispatched and removed the tree. The tree was a live tree and fell under unknown causes.

The Department does not own the land that the tree fell from or the parking lot where the vehicle was parked but is helping to facilitate gathering the parties together needed to close the incident with his insurance company.

5. Chuckanut Mountain Area Wildfire – The Department of Natural Resources was dispatched to the Chuckanut Mountain area in response to a reported wildfire. The wildfire was not on County property but on a private in-holding inside Larrabee State Park.

C. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT REPORT – CHRIST THOMSEN

1. Silver Lake Park Road and Electrical Improvements – Due to a larger budget than originally anticipated, Rod is negotiating a change order with the consulting firm to accelerate completion of the design drawings. The consultant indicated they are very close to wrapping that up and will be able to move forward with the construction drawings.

2. South Fork Park – There has been little movement in the permitting process. The wetlands portion of the application review is complete and is moving forward to the shorelines review. The Hearing Examiner's review cannot be scheduled until the application review is closer to completion.

As a result of the delays it is highly unlikely that the Department will begin construction this summer. Updates will be forthcoming.

3. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock – Recently surf smelt survey indicated that there were eggs present and that in-water activity could not proceed. Rod discussed this information with the parties involved and it was agreed that if the high-quality habitat where there might be eggs was cleared by hand and relocated that in-water work could occur. Additional surf smelt survey was done and no eggs were found. The piles were driven, and a week later the dock installed and completed.

Many congratulations to Rod were shared by the Commission member for a long and arduous job well done.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. WHATCOM COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN – CHAPTER 9 MAPS – Mike discussed that a meeting was held with himself, County Executive Jack Louws and Mark Personius, Assistant Planning Director to discuss the RRMA's. It was discussed that the RRMA's was the designation used in 1989 and 1991 in the planning documents to identify areas for public recreation and were incorporated into the WCCP. The current Whatcom County Park and Recreation Open Space Plan (WCPROSP) no longer uses this designation. The Department does not use it for planning purposes, does not coordinate or manage the RRMA's and it was not in the WCPROSP in 2008.

It was determined that removing the RRMA designation would have no impact to the County's acquisition of future lands as the Department's approach to key parcels of interest is to identify them individually. He discussed that trail corridors are adopted with acquisition only from willing property owners, that the Department does not use the RRMA's for planning purposes and that the designation is dated and that there would be no harm in removing them from the WCCP.

The RRMA's were referenced in the draft WCPROSP at the request of the County Council for definition as the WCCP did not provide a complete definition and if it is the recommendation of the Park Commission to remove the RRMA's from WCCP, the Department will also remove them from the draft WCPROSP prior to submitting it to County Council.

Mark Personius discussed the history of the RRMA's in terms of the WCCP and WCPROSP. He discussed that the Growth Management Act (GMA) does not require that a recreation segment be included in the WCCP but one was added by choice and mirrored the WCPROSP at that time. The plan was updated in 2009 and at that time no changes were made to the WCCP even though they had been removed from the WCPROSP. The County is now in the process of updating the WCCP as required by State Law.

Mark explained that the 1989 WCPROSP was adopted by reference in the WCCP. This legally requires both documents to be consistent and are therefore proposing as a part of this update removing the "adopt by reference" and simply reference the current WCPROSP. Mark stated that based on conversations with the Department and the Executive's office that taking out the policies and maps that support the RRMA's in the recreational element of the WCCP would not have an effect on the Parks Department Levels of Service, Capital Facilities Planning or funding capabilities, or on the ability of the Parks Department to voluntarily enter into public recreational or access easements or agreements with any willing property owner. In that sense from the Planning Department's perspective and based on public comment, there is no opposition to a recommendation from the Park's Commission to remove the RRMA's.

MOTION: It was moved by Theresa Sygitowicz and seconded by Janet Boyhan to recommend that the RRMA's be removed from the WCCP Map 9-1 and secondly that the paragraph from Chapter 9 of the WCCP that is headed Recreation Resource Management Areas and the Goals 9-F and Policies 9-F. 1., 2. and 3., should be removed.

Discussion was called. The Chair recognized Jeff Margolis. Jeff discussed that an important planning tool is being removed and that the Planning Commission should be the body that makes the decision to remove the RRMA's from the WCCP. He discussed that by doing so it could have consequences that this Commission would not know about and that it may give way to the removal of other important tools.

Paul discussed that the Park's Commission is only making a recommendation, not a decision.

There was discussion that the motion regarding the removal of the RRMA's did not pass in the May meeting for lack of a second.

Question was called. The motion passed:

Four Ayes - Theresa Sygitowicz, Paul Woodcock, Janet Boyhan and Richard Sturgill

One Nay - Jeffrey Margolis

B. LAKE WHATCOM RECONVEYANCE PLANNING UPDATE – A Power Point presentation was provided for Whatcom County Council Planning and Development Committee on June 9, 2015. A copy of the handout "Update on Planning for the Lake Whatcom Reconveyance Lands-6/9/15", that was provided at the Planning and Development Committee update meeting was provided to Commission for review.

Mike discussed the impact that was made on expenditures and revenues due to the fact that staff had not been hired yet. He also discussed how expenditures are distributed for payment and revenues received from the three on-site communication towers that are located in the area.

Meetings were held with the mountain bike coalition's board of directors. The topics of discussion included illegal trails, trail design, desires and the overall planning process.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. Presentation – Upper Nooksack River Recreations Plan. Wendy McDermott, Associate Director, Washington Conservation Programs – American Rivers, provide a Power Point presentation on the Upper Nooksack River Recreation Plan. Wendy provided a pamphlet that provides a brief overview of the presentation and a copy of the plan was provided for Commission Review in the June Commission Meeting packet along with a web site link to American Rivers and the Recreation Plan.

There was a discussion and question/answer period provided after the presentation. Discussion and questions included; the demographic representation of the of the advisory committee members, the involvement of the Department of Natural Resources and the local first nations, the genesis behind the study boundaries, river buffer impacts on river access, County River and Flood concerns, the middle fork dam removal, the purpose of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and public outreach avenues. Also discussed was that the plan is not a legal document, Whatcom or County plan but rather a visioning document.

Wendy concluded with a request that if the Commission members have any thought or input on the plan to communicate these with Mike McFarlane who will forward them on to her.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS – Theresa Sygitowicz shared that the Deming Log Show was a big success this year and the Women in Timber Tour was well attended. The Show included the largest display of industrial equipment in five states.

Theresa also announced that she will not be able to attend the July 16, 2015 meeting.

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE AND LOCATION

The July 16, 2015 Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting will be held at the Welcome Senior Center at 6:00 PM.

It was discussed that an invitation will be extended to Recreation Northwest to provide a presentation on the economic contribution of outdoor recreation to Whatcom County.

XII. ADJOURNMENT – The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director