

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION**  
**Thursday, September 17, 2015**

**Van Zandt Community Hall**  
**5465 Potter Road**  
**Deming, WA**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Paul Woodcock, Chair at 6:02 PM.

**II. ROLL CALL**

PRESENT:

Commissioners: Paul Woodcock, Jeffrey Margolis, Theresa Sygitowicz and Richard Sturgill,

Staff: Mike McFarlane

EXCUSED:

Commission: Janet Boyhan, Kenneth Kiesner

Staff: Rod Lamb, Christ Thomsen

**III. PUBLIC COMMENTS / COMMUNICATIONS**

**A. Daniel Probst – Cascade Mountain Runners** – Daniel provided a draft Resolution for Commission review requesting that Whatcom County Council include the Bellingham-Mount Baker Trail corridor in Chapter 9 of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan and the Whatcom County Park and Recreation Open Space.

He also provided copies of an article featuring Cascade Mountain Runner that was recently published in the Adventures Northwest Magazine.

He suggested that in terms of the Reconveyance Plan the Commission members consider how other cities and counties have developed master plans that are both visionary and implementation plans. His concern is that the Parks Department's plan for trails is not actually a plan but a baseline on intention. He specifically referenced the Duluth Minnesota Park plan as a primary example and that this plan won the 2014 Outdoor Magazine's trail destination. He stated he would send the Commission an online address to review that article.

Jeff Margolis commented that he would like to state for the record that sky running is becoming a world-wide phenomenon, is a growing industry that is bringing people from all parts of the globe to participate in high altitude marathons and feels it is the sort of thing that Whatcom County can benefit from.

**B. Mark Buritus, Mount Baker Trail Association** – Mark stated that the Mount Baker Trail Association recently hosted a gentleman from Pennsylvania to address the County Planning Commission, supporting the economic impact of pedestrian pathways that the Mt Baker Trail Association has been working to establish in the Mount Baker corridor.

He stated that it is the Trail Association's understanding that the Planning Commission has removed all trails from the County's Comprehensive Plan and would like to question the Commission if that is correct and what that means for Whatcom County.

Mike McFarlane stated that he will address this in his staff report.

There was some discussion on the organization that Mark represents and the support and/or lack of support that he has received in the Glacier area for his request for pedestrian pathways in the Mt. Baker corridor. There was a recommendation that he increase his community outreach and provides an update on the results for the Commission.

#### **IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

**A.** Jeff Margolis stated that he would like to extend his compliments to Randy Corris and his crew on the good job they do on the Van Zandt Park properties. He stated that the team takes initiative beyond mowing the lawns and grounds keeping and that the Van Zandt community appreciates their efforts.

**B.** Jeff Margolis stated that he attended the Hearing Examiner's meeting at South Fork Park and that there were citizens that have property by the south end of the park who are concerned about the impact of the park on their property. Jeff discussed that Rod was cordial and attentive to their concerns, informative about the park plans and deserves a commendation for the way he addressed the situation.

**C.** Theresa Sygitowicz provided a letter from Melissa Jo Genson, CPA/CIA discussing money laundering in Thurston County and would like to discuss the possible impact that a similar situation could have in Whatcom County.

**D.**

#### **V. AGENDA**

##### **A. SEPTEMBER 17, 2015 AGENDA**

**MOTION:** It was moved by Richard Sturgill, seconded by Theresa Sygitowicz and passed unanimously to accept the September 17, 2015 Agenda with the following revision: To address Agenda Item IX., A. immediately following Minutes approval.

#### **VI. MINUTES**

##### **A. AUGUST 20, 2015 MINUTES**

**MOTION:** It was moved by Richard Sturgill, seconded by Jeff Margolis and passed unanimously to accept the submitted August 20, 2015 Minutes with the following correction; Item VII A., 2., fourth paragraph, first sentence to read: "He stated that there have not been any major adjustments since the last review."

#### **VII. STAFF REPORTS**

**A. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE** – Mike explained that he will be covering all staff reports as Rod Lamb and Christ Thomsen could not attend the meeting.

**1. Whatcom County Planning Commission Meeting, 9/10/15 Update** – There will be a final public hearing in County Council chambers on October 22, 2015 and then on November 12,

2015 there will be a meeting to discuss the findings and recommendations that are based on input from the public.

The written minutes from the meeting were not yet available but the audio version of the meeting is posted to the County's web site.

Mike stated that Policies 9C, 23-27 were removed from the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Policy 9C, 23 discusses the provision for bike lanes or wide shoulders where appropriate at major road improvements. The Planning Commission felt that even though there is a recreational element to bike lanes and that they do provide connectivity to the parks this could be better handled in the Transportation Chapter.

Policy 9C, 24, 25, 26 and 27 were removed with a vote of three to four in favor of removal from the County's Comprehensive Plan. These policies include the Coast Millennium Trail, the Hertz North Lake Whatcom Trail, the Bay to Baker Trail and the Nooksack River Trail and the trail maps.

Mike explained that there was a great deal of discussion regarding this and that the discussion can be reviewed in the meeting's audio version is on the County's web page or the written minutes of the meeting when they are posted. Mike briefly touched on the major reason for removal; that these trails are visionary and that portions of these trails may never come to fruition therefore are irrelevant in this level of detail.

Mike explained that even though these trails and maps are carried in the Park's Comprehensive Open Space and Recreation Plan, the County Comprehensive Plan is the driving document. The changes are subject to Council approval and/or amendment but that he wanted to get this information to the Commission as soon as possible as it is a new development.

Mike was asked for his opinion on what effect this will have as a practical matter and will the removal of these policies from the County Comprehensive Plan have any lasting impact since it is included the Park's Comprehensive Plan.

Mike stated that it carries more weight if it is in the County's Comprehensive Plan than it does to just be in the Park's plan. Even though the two work together, independently if a non-profit or park district wanted to apply for funding it would carry more weight if it is in both.

There was additional discussion regarding this development and the impacts this could have on the trails in Whatcom County. Mike stated that the process can be followed on the Planning Commission's web site and that input can be expressed at the October 22<sup>nd</sup> public hearing and will be considered in the findings that will be forwarded to County Council.

Mike stated that he has a meeting with the County Executive and this development is on his agenda for discussion. He will update the Commission on the outcome of the meeting.

It was asked if a recommendation from the Park's Commission would be appropriate at this time. Mike stated that it would and suggested if that were the wishes of this Commission it would be good to include the Planning Commission, the County Executive and the County Council.

**2. Stimpson Family Nature Reserve** – The Department is working on a revised easement for the additional acreage and parking lot. The revision was returned from Whatcom Land Trust and is being reviewed by the Department prior to scheduling it for County Council action.

**3. Lummi Quarry Easement Proposal** – The Lummi Heritage Trust is moving forward with an acquisition which looks likely for purchase by the end of September. The County has committed \$400,000.00 toward this acquisition. The action has not been approved by County Council but it is anticipated that the proposal will be completed in the near future. There was additional discussion regarding the possibilities for park use.

**4. South Fork Park Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Trail Easement** – The trail easement from DNR has been received and being reviewed and revised as necessary. There were several items that were included that are subject to change based on Department comments. The requested Department changes will be submitted to DNR early in the week which will determine if additional meetings are required or if DNR agrees to the changes.

**5. Glacier Park Property Encroachment** – A lot line adjustment was agreed on. The owner will compensate the County for the property value and any additional costs to finalize the adjustment.

**6. Galbraith Mountain** – The Polygon proposal meeting will be held tomorrow and next week to discuss liability and insurance issues. Until these issues are worked out there is not a viable proposal to submit to Council.

**7. Puget Sound Energy** – The Department has received a request for a temporary easement that will facilitate Puget Sound Energy to install a sub-station back-up battery array on Park property in Glacier.

Mike discussed that the Department also received a request from Puget Sound Energy to relocate a power line. The request is pending a reply on changes that were made by the County's legal department.

Mike will update the Commission as these developments move forward.

**7. Park Attendance** – As of the end of August park attendance is 10% ahead of last year's attendance. That is an additional 66,340 visitors with total visitations at last count of 735,386. This year to date total does not take into account that for several months of 2015 there were not working counters in some of the parks and that there is additional data yet to be collected. Last year's total attendance was 880,000.

**8. Opportunity Council** – The Opportunity Council has a new director, Greg Winter. The Department will be working with Greg on the block grant that will be used to build an addition at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center to house a food bank and if additional funds are procured, an indoor or covered, three season youth recreation area.

**9. Plantation Range HVAC Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) Grant** – The \$145,000.00 grant contract was received yesterday and will be reviewed for approval. The Department has requested those funds to be carried over into 2016 in order to allow for contract approvals, construction and facility closures. Time is short as there was a delay from the State in awarding the grant.

There was some discussion regarding the Plantation Rifle range contracts with Skagit, Snohomish and King County police officer weapons certification use. Mike discussed that our major users are Snohomish and Skagit counties. King County uses the Range for this purpose but only occasionally as it proves too expensive in terms of travel and because there are more options available for them locally.

**10. County Updated Telephone System** – The County’s new phone system went live on September 9<sup>th</sup>. Mike stated calls that went to voice mail in the last few days were archived in the switch and were discovered after the fact. The Department made every effort to catch up on these voice mails.

All County departments will have new phone numbers that will be distributed publicly between now and January 2016. Until then the old numbers will work.

**11. Conservation Futures Funding** – The Department and Planning and Development Services will be making a presentation to County Council on Conservation Futures. The presentation will discuss the fund’s total amount, projected fund use and fund distribution for all projects that are currently lined up. The presentation will also provide insight on the Department’s plans.

Mike discussed that these funds cannot be used for Capital project but can be used for maintenance on properties that were purchased with these funds. On the Planning and Development side there are staffing costs that are paid for the administration of the purchase of development rights for the Agricultural PDR Program.

Distribution of the funds is complicated but Mike wanted to bring this topic up as it may be an item that the Commission would be interested in discussing at the November meeting in order to review the importance of this fund for park acquisitions, easements, etc.

## **B. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT – MIKE MCFARLANE**

**1. South Fork Park Hearing Examiner’s Meeting** – The hearing for the shoreline substantial development permit was held September 16, 2015. It is not expected that the Hearing Examiner will rule adversely. There are a few minor design modifications that will be made through the Engineering Department but otherwise all requirements seem to be in place and the Department expects to receive permit approval next week.

**2. Samish Park Playground** – The playground is currently under construction. The Department is trying out artificial turf as there is a natural gas pipeline close to the surface and this will minimize disturbance around the pipe. If there is a need for repairs to the pipeline in the future the playground equipment can be unbolted and moved.

**3. Silver Lake Park Electrical and Water System Upgrades** – It was brought up at the pre-construction meeting that the Fire Marshall would like the Department to include the installation of fire hydrants in the upgrade. The concern is that this would require the installation of a storage tank to meet established water pressures to the hydrants and would add several hundred thousand dollars to only one campground upgrade and over one million dollars to the entire project for the additional water lines and hydrants.

This development will require additional meetings with Planning and Development Services and the County Executive to discuss that the reality of the impact would require more money for the fire hydrants and additional water lines than for the project as a whole.

The Department does understand the importance of fire hydrants however it is a rural fire department that is prepared to bring water to fires, there is a lake close by to pump water from and it is felt to be somewhat unrealistic to supply hydrants to campgrounds. It is hoped with this in mind that requirement will be waived or modified to focus more on specific areas of need.

It was suggested that another possible consideration for addressing fire safety would be to have staff trained in firefighting and/or purchase a tanker truck or install ponds.

**4. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock** – There have been changes made to portions of the original wave specifications.

In the original bidding process there was a reference to an 8 ft. rogue wave that was a concern and was removed. Research is being done to determine if this is a consideration in the failure as there was not a major weather event at the time the dock failed. This brings up the question of how robust the design actually is, and is the fact that the chambers are filled with sand and rock material a failure in the design, in addition to the fact that other minor items were failing.

When Rod returns next week he will be meeting with the engineering firm and the dock company to discuss solutions and who will assume responsibility for the additional costs.

In terms of solutions to the failure there are two diagrams that are being considered that have a more robust frame.

In terms of the additional costs it is possible that the Department will share some of the responsibility because the 8 ft. rogue wave specification was waived, even though there was not an incident at the time of the failure that met the rogue wave specifications.

In the event that there will be additional costs to the Department there are currently grant funds for this project that were not used and it will be requested that those funds be carried forward into 2016 to cover those costs.

There was some discussion regarding the conditions of the dock failure, the dock specifications and design, and the financial responsibilities for repairs.

## **C. OPERATIONS REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE**

**1. Storm Damage** – Silver Lake Park experienced a two day power outage but had no significant damage to the park or park structures and throughout the entire park system the damage was minimal with only two problems.

The Birch Bay Community Park had a public event planned on the weekend of the storm. Some of the tents were unable to be disassembled in time and were destroyed in the wind.

The Muds to Suds event at Hovander Park was held that weekend and after an assessment of the number of branches that were being blown down it was decided to cancel the event. This was the right decision because after the area was cleared a rather large branch broke off and fell through the registration tent which would have most likely caused physical injury to the participants.

In all the damage to the parks was minimal considering the damage suffered throughout the rest of the county.

**2. Staffing** – The last vacant staff position will be filled next Monday. This is the electrician position and is a pivotal position for the maintenance team. This hire will bring the Department to full staffing level.

**3. Rental Leases** – The rental leases for the Department of Natural Resources located in the Headquarters Annex and the Sunset Farm House at Sunset Farm Equestrian Center were approved by Council.

**4. Hovander Roof Bids** – The bid was awarded to Mount Baker Roofing who came in with a bid of \$136,207.00.

The Department will continue to research bat abatement for the Hovander House. The concerns are the danger of histoplasmosis exposure to the public, the volunteers and staff and the potential of damage to the house and artifacts.

**5. Seasonal Road Maintenance** – Staff is currently in the process of completing the seasonal road maintenance on Stewart Mountain and the Plantation Rifle Range roads. This job includes cleaning up shoulders and cleaning out and repairing culverts as needed.

## **VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**A. LAKE WHATCOM RECONVEYANCE PLANNING UPDATE – MIKE MCFARLANE** – Mike reported that Rod Lamb has had individual meetings with Washington Trails Association, the Mountain Bike Coalition, Cascade Runners, Mount Baker Trails Association, Sudden Valley Community Manager, Glenn Haven Lakes Association, Whatcom Land Trust and Conservation Northwest. He will report on these meeting when he returns.

Christ Thomsen will be sharing the updates on the trail standards.

## **IX. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Presentation – Economic Contribution of Outdoor Recreation to Whatcom County – Todd Elsworth and April Claxton, Recreation Northwest.**

Todd introduced April and himself and thanked the Commission for the opportunity to share their presentation.

He provided the Commission with a background of and the history behind Recreation Northwest and their objectives, events and accomplishments to date.

April provided a power point presentation discussing the statistics, funding and methodology of a recent study regarding the economic impacts of outdoor recreation in Whatcom County on the ecology, local businesses, potential business growth and property values.

Theresa asked April how many of the jobs created by recreational based business in Whatcom County were part time and/or family wage jobs. April replied that wages were not included in this study and that would need to be researched. Theresa asked if this information could be provided to the Commission.

Jeff Margolis discussed that businesses in the eastern portion of Whatcom County depend a great deal on east county recreational destinations and that the businesses in the area could suffer if these destinations are not considered. April stated that one of the main reasons that they are presenting to agencies around Whatcom County is to gather this sort of information so that when the study is repeated it can be expanded to include these considerations.

Todd discussed that the main objective is have the words “Recreation Economy” be define locally, be a part of our vocabulary in economic development strategies and to have the statistic that show the value of recreation to the business community as a whole.

There was a recommendation to include and couple outdoor physical recreation with cultural recreation for an increased economic impact.

April invited the Commission to visit Recreation Northwest's website for additional information on the study and to review updates that will be forthcoming.

Todd thanked the Commission for the opportunity to share their presentation and Paul Woodcock thanked Todd and April for the information.

**B. Letter – Melissa Jo Genson, Thurston County** – Theresa Sygitowicz discussed that Ms. Genson's letter discusses money laundering concerns with Conservation Futures and illegal operations involving a family in Europe funneling money through the Nature Conservancy Fund.

Theresa stated that she will provide the Commission with a copy of the letter which explains the operations and involvement by other county agencies and that she brought this forward for the Commission and Department's awareness.

Mike explained that when the Department receives grants through the Recreation Conservation Office the Department is audited at the state and local level to determine that the funds applied for are used and matched as mandated and that the paperwork is in order.

In addition the Recreation and Conservation Office is also audited on a regular basis as the Department receives calls from the state auditors to determine whether or not the funds were received, when they were received, was the reimbursement sent, etc.

**X. ANNOUNCEMENTS – NONE**

**XI. NEXT MEETING DATE AND LOCATION**

The October 15, 2015 Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting will be held at Samish Park in the Day Lodge at 6:00 PM.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** It was moved by Jeff Margolis, seconded by Richard Sturgill and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:08 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director