

DRAFT
MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, September 15, 2016

Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Administrative Offices
3373 Mt. Baker Highway
Bellingham, Washington

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Paul Woodcock, Chair at 6:00 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Commissioners: Paul Woodcock, Kenneth Kiesner, Janet Boyhan, and Theresa Sygitowicz and Vern Yadon

Staff: Mike McFarlane, Christ Thomsen and Rodney Lamb

EXCUSED

Richard Sturgill, Jeff Margolis

PUBLIC COMMENTS / COMMUNICATIONS

A. COMMENTS

Daniel Probst – The Chair recognized Daniel Probst. Daniel discussed the 2016 Mt. Baker Run. There were a total of 12 participants which is the maximum number allowed. Due to permitting constraints the run's starting point was relocated to Concrete, WA

He discussed that volunteer work on the trail continues and that the number of volunteers continues to increase in number.

The City of Bellingham is adding the Bellingham to Mt. Baker trail into their comprehensive plan. The permitting process continues with the Department of Natural Resources to run parts of the trail through their lands.

B. COMMUNICATIONS –

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Theresa Sygitowicz – Theresa announced that there was a wolf kill in Skagit County in the Cascades that involved killing domestic animals. She wanted to bring this information forward in concern for hiker safety and awareness.

III. AGENDA

A. September 15, 2016 Agenda

MOTION: It was moved by Theresa Sygitowicz and seconded by Vern Yadon to accept the September 15, 2016 Agenda as presented. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

IV. MINUTES

A. August 18, 2016 Minutes – Mike McFarlane commented that the minutes were created from memory and notes as the recording device malfunctioned on the night of the meeting.

MOTION: It was moved by Vern Yadon and seconded by Kenneth Kiesner and to accept the August 18, 2016 minutes as written. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

V. STAFF REPORTS

A. **DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE**

1. Budget – The Executive has begun reviewing the Parks and Recreation budget. We are expecting to hear back by next week if there are any questions or requested changes.

2. East Whatcom Regional Resource Center – A planning session regarding the food bank proposal was held. Mike provided a preliminary schematic of the proposed location and size of the building. The estimated cost of the project is 2.5 million dollars, however this is a high end estimate and several items included in the cost projection may not be required or changed in the final design.

There was discussion regarding the location of the proposed building and what the building will house, and the outdoor covered recreation area and its versatility and use. It was suggested that with the resulting increased activity at this facility that the parking lot size should be increased and that this should be done at the time of construction because it would be more expensive to do it at a later date.

It was pointed out that there will be outside access to the restrooms.

There was discussion that there are changes being considered to reduce the cost. One of the items being recommended is to eliminate the skylights and use LED lighting and other translucent ceiling panels to allow in more light in the covered court area.

There was a suggestion that the outdoor covered area could double as a triage area during a community emergency as the local volunteer fire department will not be building in this area as was previously thought, and that there may be some funding options available for this use.

3. RCO Grant Proposals – Mike and Rod Lamb made their grant proposal presentations for Birch Bay Community Park and the South Fork trails projects.

Mike spoke to the Birch Bay Community Park proposal. He stated that Whatcom County did not score well. This is due to the fact that Whatcom County has a very difficult time competing on a population basis as they do not score points for population of 250,000+. This results in an off-the-top loss of three points. In addition the County is out of compliance with Growth Management Act (GMA), which is a loss of an additional point. This loss of points will place Whatcom County in the middle, or just above the middle of the group as a whole; however funding is usually available to the top two to three highest scoring projects.

Rod spoke to the South Fork trails project presentation. The South Fork Park trail is not considered a major regional trail and could not compete with other regional trails on the list.

However, there is a second opportunity in November to apply for funding with the Washington State Non-highway and Off-road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) program.

4. Galbraith Mountain Acquisition – Mike discussed the unique sales conditions, legal steps and other acquisition issues that need to be resolved with the purchase of Galbraith Mountain.

The owner has indicated that one of the conditions of the sale is that the purchaser must pay the compensating taxes. Mike discussed that compensating taxes are taxes that are paid when a property is removed from timber lands as the result of a sale and are normally paid by the seller. Research is currently being done with the Whatcom County Assessor to determine the amount.

This will most likely go before Whatcom County Council for a decision in late October.

Additionally, the access issues will need to be resolved legally, an estimate of the maintenance and operations costs will need to be determined and, the capital project improvements that would be required for park development need to be identified.

Mike will update the Commission as this project moves forward.

5. Little Squalicum Park - Oeser Company Super Fund Site – A five year review was completed on the site. The review results are available on the City of Bellingham website. Some of the toxin limits have been changed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency however the site's clean-up parameters are much lower than the new limits and remains in compliance. The next review will be conducted in five years.

Mike stated that he does have a copy of the review and if any of the Commission members would like a copy to let him know. He pointed out that the review covers the complete superfund site and is very technical in content.

6. Blaine Birch Bay Park and Recreation District – The Department has received an informal request from the District to construct a storage building on the west side of the gymnasium at Bay Horizon Park. This is not a new request. An initial request was submitted some time ago to construct an addition to the building, but then was shelved. It has surfaced again as there is currently a storage container on-site for this purpose that eventually must be removed. Mike will update the Commission if this moves forward.

The District is working with a community group to explore the possibility of extending the trail system around the park. In the past a path would be mowed during the dry season and they would use the trails for park and camp activities. They would like to make that permanent.

B. OPERATIONS' REPORT – CHRIST THOMSEN

1. Staffing

Lead Ranger Recruitment – Interviews were conducted the week prior to Labor Day. The Department is currently checking references and will conduct a second round of interview with the top preferred candidates.

Seasonal Employees – Many of the summer seasonal employees have come to the end of their employment term or left before their expected termination. Consequently the parks are experiencing staff shortages and even though the peak season is over there is still a great deal of residual clean up to be done and with the nice weather the number of park visitations is up. The gaps will be filled in soon as the Department is currently recruiting for the fall season extra-help staff.

2. Projects

Hovander Office Roof Replacement – The Park staff is currently replacing the roof on this facility.

There was some discussion regarding bat abatement efforts and progress at the Hovander House. Christ stated that there seems to be only a small area where this continues to be a problem and efforts to close this off continue.

Plantation Rifle Range HVAC – The contractor submitted a 50% design and the Department returned their comments on the design back to the contractor. The cost estimate has been received and Christ is reviewing for comment.

South Fork Park Trailhead Development – The Department is gearing up to do our part of the project.

Lighthouse Marine Park Dock – Christ met with the Lighthouse Marine Park Ranger who stated that last weekend was a good test for the dock in terms of the wave activity. Waves were cresting the dock and it held up very well.

The dock will be removed for the season the week of September 25th.

3. Events

Hovander Homestead Park Bluegrass Festival – Christ discussed that Park staff assisted with the set up for the Parks and Recreation Foundation in terms of fencing and the parking lot and camping layout. After the event Christ held a de-briefing meeting with the event promoter to discuss the Park staff involvement in terms of how it went this year and how the Department could have been of more assistance. The Foundation was very pleased with our efforts and quite appreciative. There were suggestions for some minor changes in the layout and a request to increase staff availability, especially first thing in the morning on each day of the event to smooth out any overnight issues.

Also discussed was how the Foundation perceived the success of the event on a whole. Camping capacity was at 50%, which was greater than was expected based on presales. Over the course of the weekend activity increased and by Sunday there was a good crowd. There were a great deal of Park visitor survey cards returned with mostly positive comments and good suggestions for improvement, mostly in the event layout and vendor issues, but that the event was very successful and it is anticipated that the event will return next year.

Final attendance and revenue numbers have not been submitted to the Department to date. These will be shared at the next Commission meeting.

4. Trails – Photo Presentation – Christ shared a presentation of digital photos showing examples of the maintenance/restorative trail work that has been accomplished over the season at Lookout Mountain Park.

C. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT – ROD LAMB

1. South Fork Park Trailhead Development – Dirt Works Bellingham mobilized on-site Tuesday, September 6th. Construction staking was completed on Wednesday and the contractor is currently brushing the project area. The initial construction effort will be installing the new vault toilet that is scheduled for next Friday, September 16th. The trailhead will be completed this fall.

We've applied for Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) grant funding, but due to statewide competition, securing the finding appears far from guaranteed. The Department will also apply for funding with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Non-highway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities Program (NOVA), in which South Fork Park Trail Development might be more competitive.

Trail improvement is pending easement and final critical areas permitting.

- 2. Silver Lake Road & Electrical Improvements** – The engineer has completed the bid document set. There are some issues with the initial cost estimate and some creative bid alternatives will need to be developed to remain within the project budget. Rod is working with the Operations Manager and Director to discuss these alternatives. It appears the initial phase will include installing upgraded electrical and water services, modest earthwork for campsite upgrades / relocation.
- 3. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock Renovation** – The dock was installed on August 4th and seems to be stable and working well. The Department will be removing it in the last week of September when there are favorable tides.
- 4. Lake Whatcom Reconveyance Planning** – The final edits to the plan are completed and the SEPA checklist was submitted to Whatcom County Planning and Development Services on August 20, 2016 for a threshold determination. A second work session with Whatcom County Council is scheduled for September 27, 2016 and will provide an update on the revised recreational trail plan.
- 5. Lighthouse Marine Park Boardwalk Renovation** – Reichhardt & Ebe Engineering has been selected as the consultant team for this project. They are evaluating the stability of the existing portions of the structure to establish a complete understanding of the project scope. Initial design ideas have been developed, but need additional work to clearly identify the entire project approach and direction. The design should be completed by early 2017, permitting in the spring and construction to begin next fall.
- 6. Birch Bay Community Park** – The first community meeting was held on August 6th and it was well attended. The project landscape architect was introduced and kicked off the planning effort. There was a good exchange between the project team and community members. Two hours were spent discussing the project and answering questions. The community members then broke into four teams and was asked to work together to produce park designs. At the end, each group selected a team representative to present their plan to the whole group.

The second meeting was held on August 31st and was also well attended. Two alternative conceptual park designs were presented and there was a question and answer session that followed. Afterwards, the community members were asked to form four groups of about ten each to critique each concept, identify pros and cons and also make suggestions that they might want to include in a final and preferred option. Each group then made a presentation of their group's findings. The meeting was wrapped up with next steps and identifying the next meeting date of October 18th, 6:00 PM at the Birch Bay Bible Community Church.

There was a suggestion to make an effort to discuss the upcoming segments of the project and the County bid process at the public meetings to encourage local business participation. Mike commented that if any Commission member knows of a business that would be interested in bidding on any elements of the park development to contact the Whatcom County Finance Department for the steps to take to submit a bid or to pre-qualify to be placed on the bid notification list. Mike discussed some of the elements required for pre-qualification.

Rod discussed that the current design contract is with Robert Droll, Landscape Architect. He discussed the scope of work for this contract, what elements of the project are included and what still needs to be funded.

There was a suggestion to install an electrical line at the same time the water line is laid and locate them together at each spigot site and to provide numerous spigot sites throughout the park. Rod discussed that there is not going to be any construction for some time but that this is a good suggestion for when the preliminary engineering phase begins, as ultimately the park plan is to provide a location for local events, which always need lots of electrical and water support.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Semiahmoo Trash Receptacles – Christ Thomsen – Christ provided information on appropriate trash receptacles for the Semiahmoo area. These consisted of one each for recycling and trash, are 32 gallons in size, at a cost of \$1,700.00 - \$1,800.00 each.

Research has shown that these receptacles are similar to those used in many public parks. Those parks that do not have receptacles are running on the “pack-in/pack-out” system.

The current thought is, and past experience has shown that if they are placed in the parking lots you will experience increased use by private citizens for their household trash. Placing the receptacles close to the restrooms should reduce this activity and provide trash deposit for our park visitors.

Mike discussed all the costs involved in providing trash receptacles and the benefits of the “pack-in/pack-out system”.

Janet asked about the request last month from the individuals that wanted trash receptacles available on the Semiahmoo spit to reduce litter. Mike pointed out the trail maintenance along the area they were talking about is the responsibility of the City of Blaine, the area that the Parks Department would be considering is only Semiahmoo Park.

There was discussion that the expectation is that the public is going to litter, and that what they are willing to pack-in/pack-out is low. Christ commented that his experience is that when there are no trash cans supplied visitors are more prone to pack out their trash, keeping the area cleaner. When trash cans are supplied visitors would tend to set trash next to the can if it were full or they don't put the lid back on the cans and wildlife/birds would spread the trash around. He discussed that our staff make regular rounds in the parks to clean the area and remove trash and that another consideration is that park visitations has increased this year by 30,000 visits.

The Department will be looking into this request further to investigate more cost effective receptacles and preferred receptacle placement. Christ will update the Commission at the next meeting.

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Mt. Baker FFA Booster Club Auction – October 15, 2016 – Deming Log Show Museum, 5:00 – 9:30 PM.

B. Deming October Fest – Deming Log Show Grounds – October 7 – 9, 2016 – Deming Log Show Grounds.

C. The Columbia Valley Parks and Recreation District – The formation question will be on the upcoming ballot. Five applications have been received for the district commissioner positions.

D. Semiahmoo Birding Field Trip — First Saturday of the month, 9:00 AM – Semiahmoo Park parking lot. Paul discussed that the October 1st field trip will be the 10th anniversary for the monthly birding field trips and that he has made all but five field trips in 10 years and only cancelled the trip once due to non-participation.

E. Weekly Bike Ride - Janice announced that she is leading her 26th bike ride of the year. The rides take place every Thursday from March until October and are different every week. Next Thursday' ride includes a microbrewery.

IX. NEXT MEETING DATE AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission meeting will be held on October 20, 2016 at 6:00 PM in the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center, Activity Room #2, 8251 Kendall Road, Kendall, Washington.

X. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: It was moved by Kenneth Kiesner and seconded by Vern Yadon to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Mike McFarlane, Parks Department Director