

**From:** [WENDY HARRIS](#)  
**To:** [PDS Planning Commission](#)  
**Subject:** pc review of comp park plans  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 23, 2022 7:19:43 AM

---

## March 24 Planning Commission Public Hearings and Work Sessions Focus is on Park Plans

Virtual meeting at 6:30 PM

On March 24, the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing and work session on two issues involving the capital facilities plan for Parks, 1a) Hovander Park Tennant Lake Flood Repair and Mitigation Improvements and 1b) Lookout Mountain Road & Culvert Repair and Mitigation Improvements and 2) providing the county more jurisdiction over forestry land formerly jointly managed with DNR.

**None of these items have been explained or discussed at all. This involves the Lake Whatcom watershed, Nooksack River, and Tenant Lake, all of which have ecological importance.**

Lake Whatcom watershed and Nooksack River are Shoreline of Statewide Significance (SSWS) entitled to the highest level of prioritized environmental protection. Lake Whatcom is under a TMDL and water quality continues to decline, forcing the use of greater amounts of cancer-causing chemicals to sterilize the water for safety. I suspect the request pertaining to DNR management involves land from the Reconveyance, which was intended to be managed as a low-impact, low-use park for water quality and old-growth forest. (They refused to accept the first park plan provided by the Parks Director because it failed to adequately address wildlife and habitat protection and it had to be revised.) Tennant Lake, under county ownership, is part of the larger 80 acre WDFW Tennant Lake Wildlife Area Unit, which contains a rare and important peat-bog lake (highly valued for sequestering CHG). It has healthy biodiversity that needs to be protected.

For the capital facilities plan, it is not appropriate to hold a public hearing on these issues without providing even basic of information regarding the nature and extent of the damage and the proposed mitigation or improvement. The public must be provided with this information in order to exercise their due process rights to participate in the public processes, and to articulate a position at the public hearing, particularly where it involves projects in or near sensitive waters and forests. The Planning Commission hearing may be the public's only chance to speak and you are asking us to sign a blank check. **I request that this be rescheduled for a later date after the needed materials are made public. Alternatively, I ask**

**the Planning Commission to recommend against these changes.**

### **Capital Facilities/Park Plan**

- Where did the damage occur, where it is located on the property? What is the nature of the damage in Lookout Mountain?
- How can we be assured that a change in park use or park management practices might not be a better approach? At Hovander, the pruning and cutting of trees and vegetation in the riparian zone has been extreme. Native vegetation and trees are the best form of flood protection available at no cost. The new IPCC report highlights the importance and the need for natural climate solutions for issues such as floods and water. The mountain bikes are doing extensive damage along trails, which is more likely to result in landslides and erosion. In one trail video, the biker tells us that the Brown Pow trail in the Lake Whatcom Watershed feels like "surfing the soil."
- What is meant by "mitigation improvements"? This is not a term that exists in ecology because it combines two different things. Mitigation applies to repairing what has been damaged while improvements exceed the scope of the repairs needed and an expanded scope of work beyond repairs and replacement. Are you exceeding the scope of the mitigation that was sustained? If so, what justification exists for this? You have provided no specifics on what the improvements entail and how or if it deviates from what previously existed.
- The park plan for Lookout Mountain and Lake Whatcom Park includes tree thinning and vegetation removal as habitat improvements. Exactly how is altering the natural environment and reducing the amount of natural habitat an improvement for wildlife? Please show us the science as I do not believe that any exists. Thinning trees is done to enrich foresters, not wildlife. We live in temperate rain forests that are intended to grow densely and retain moisture. By opening up and drying out a forested area by bringing in sunshine, the only thing that you are inviting in is a greater risk of forest fire.
- The ordinance as drafted indicates that the SEPA Official (that would be the Planning Director) determined on February 28, 2022 that the determination of non-significance (DNS) issued in 2020 for the Six-Year CIP update is sufficient for the subject amendments. Without information regarding the subject amendments that has not been established. Clearly, in the Lake Whatcom watershed, which is reviewed annually, it is clear that we are not meeting SEPA no net loss standards.
- I am concerned that a culvert is required for Lookout Mountain. Was the culvert there before the planned park development? Has the county done a proper review of the culvert impacts, including consideration of

the Puget Sound Biological Opinion, which always seems to escape any consideration? Was the culvert considered as part of the 2020 SEPA review?

- It is true that the amendment of the capital facilities element of a comprehensive plan that occurs concurrently with the adoption or amendment of a county or city budget can occur at any time, but that is not the preferred approach under the GMA, which is to have all proposals considered by the governing body concurrently to ascertain the cumulative effect of the various proposals. There is no time expiration of REETS 2 funding that applies to these kinds of repairs. Why is there a pressing need to handle this in a manner that fails to allow for a coordinated, comprehensive review

### **Jointly Managed Forestry Land With DNR**

Again, the public was not informed of the need for this amendment and some justification needs to be provided. Has this matter already been discussed with DNR? With the tribes? My preference would be to leave joint jurisdiction with both the county and DNR because county programs for biodiversity and habitat protection have been lacking and DNR has corrected this problem once already.

Thank for allowing me to submit my comment on this proposal.

Wendy Harris

[https://www.whatcomcounty.us/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/\\_03242022-3090](https://www.whatcomcounty.us/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_03242022-3090)