

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, October 20, 2022

Bay Horizon Park Gym
7467 Gemini Street
Blaine, Washington

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Sonja Max at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Joe Hashmall, Kristen Fagen, Sonja Max, Frank Boteler

Commissioners Absent: Brian Estes, Pete Coy, Terry Terry

Staff Present: Bennett Knox

Guests/Public Present: Daniel Probst, Shane Colsen, Dora Lee Booth, Danielle Gaughen, Ted Morris, Billy Brown, Deputy Derek Jones

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Joe Hashmall moved to approve the October 20, 2022 agenda as written. Kristen Fagan seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Kristen Fagan moved to approve the July 21, 2022 minutes as written. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

- a. **Daniel Probst** – Daniel Probst, the race director for the Mount Baker Ultra and the project lead for the Bellingham to Mount Baker Trail, wanted to welcome Bennett to the parks department. Daniel received support letters from the parks commission in 2015 and 2018 and is hoping to get a letter of support from the current commission. He will provide information at the next commission meeting.
- b. **Steve Colsen** – Steve Colsen lives in Birch Bay and is active with the Bellingham Pickleball Club. Steve would like to arrange a formal discussion with the commission to see if the county is interested in building a 12-court covered pickleball pavilion on county park land. Sonja Max advised the commission would welcome a proposal to be placed on a future agenda.
- c. **Doralee Booth** – Doralee Booth is the County Liaison on the Board of Directors for the Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce and has worked with the county for the past 20 years. Doralee went to the planning commission's meeting a couple of weeks ago and in looking at their Capital Improvement Program for 2023, said there was \$3 million for the beach park, but in the new CIP for the next six years, she thinks there is only \$200,000 for 2028. Doralee would like to know where that money went; Sonja Max advised they would look into it. Doralee spoke about the increased amounts of visitors at Birch Bay because of the new berm

and the need for a restroom. Port-a-potties are currently being used, but get pushed over, dumped, blown over in the wind, etc. and are no longer working for the amount of people that are coming to the bay. This only bathroom contract in Birch Bay is at Alderson Road end and ownership has changed, leaving the bathroom closed. Doralee advised the chamber would be happy to partner with the funding process. She advised there was one million dollars set aside by Executive Louws to begin developing the park bathrooms and that the park also received an RCO grant of one million dollars. She would like to know where that money is and if it can be funded into the park.

- d. **Danielle Gaughen**– Danielle Gaughen, the Executive Director of the Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce, reiterated that bathrooms and parking are an urgent need in Birch Bay.
- e. **Ted Morris** – Ted Morris is involved with the Blaine-Birch Bay Park & Recreation District. The BBBPRD has been functioning for about 15 years and has built the gym and pickleball courts at Bay Horizon Park, is working on trails to connect Birch Bay and Blaine, and also received \$1.3 million in grants from RCO to build California Creek Estuary Park. Ted shared that he had a really good relationship with Mike McFarlane and looks forward to having a good relationship with Bennett. He would like Bennett to know that the BBBPRD would like to support WC Parks however they can to help get a restroom in Birch Bay.
- f. **Billy Brown** – Billy Brown is a Blaine-Birch Bay Park and Rec. Commissioner. He would like to see the money that is budgeted to demolish some of the buildings at Bay Horizon spent on the park and new bathrooms instead.

4. **Introductions (New Director/Commissioners) – Question Prompt: Why do you serve?**

Bennett Knox introduced himself to the commission and said that he is very excited about what Whatcom County has to offer in terms of outdoor recreation. One of the biggest draws for Bennett to Whatcom County was the sense of community and how the community makes it a wonderful place to live. Bennett is embarking on a process to learn about the different communities and stakeholders in Whatcom County, the needs of those people, and how to work together to fulfill the needs of the community.

Joe Hashmall is interested in the senior centers and is an active user of the parks and trails. Joe applied to the commission not only to support his interests, but to also support the needs, interests, and activities of other citizens.

Kristen Fagan is a part of several communities and in being in those communities, hears people talk about what they're missing in the area and what they feel they're lucky to have. Kristin joined the commission in hopes of representing some of the user groups that may get overlooked or aren't well represented.

Sonja Max is a huge outdoor recreator who loves the parks and all of the amenities that Whatcom County has to offer. When Sonja uses the trails, she often thinks of ways to

change them and make them better so that they are accessible to everyone equally and easily.

Frank Boteler joined the commission because he wants to see people remain happy using Whatcom County parks. Frank lives close to Lookout Mountain and walks there 3-4 times per week with his dog. When he steps onto the trail, he feels like he's stepping into a different world. He said that 95% of the people he encounters on the trails and in the parks are happy, even with all of the unhappiness going on in the world. Frank has sensed that over the last several years, that not everyone is as positive. Frank would like to get that positivity back and wants to do what he can to support that.

5. Director Update

Bennett Knox, the new director, has been hosting a series of "meet and greets" to meet the community and has been working to visit all park properties. Bennett is very impressed with the professionalism and knowledge of department staff. He recognizes the culture shift that happens with a new director, especially with his focus on community engagement. Bennett would like to build the staff and the department's sense of mission. Bennett believes that developing a sense of mission will generate buy-in from the staff and that buy-in is necessary because a department can only be as successful as its staff will allow it to be. Bennett plans to prioritize updating the Comprehensive Park & Recreation Open Space Plan. This plan was supposed to have been updated a year and a half ago, but because of staff vacancies and transitions, it has not been completed. Bennett also wants to work on getting the backload of projects completed. A budget request was submitted for a project manager, a new position, that would report to the Design and Development Manager, and help build the department's capacity to do more work.

6. Operations Manager Update

Christ Thomsen was on vacation. Bennett Knox shared that the Department of Ecology has found a couple of violations regarding lead at the Plantation Rifle Range. The county council has signed an expedited settlement agreement with the Department of Ecology to give WC Parks 120 days to resolve the issues. Public announcements will be coming soon. The Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility at Silver Lake is almost finished. The camping season ends at the end of the month and planning for next season will begin. Bennett would like to focus on being sure there are enough extra help employees next season.

Frank Boteler moved to recognize Christ Thomsen for his outstanding service to Whatcom County Parks in serving as acting director in addition to his current position for three months. Sonja Max seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

7. Old Business

None.

8. New Business

- a. Senior Centers – Heat and Smoke Concerns** – Joe Hashmall discussed the unprecedented heat and smoke that the county has endured the last four summers. Joe is concerned about the seniors living in Whatcom County and their ability to find a place to go during the heat and smoke. Joe is wondering if the senior centers have air conditioning and if maybe they would be a place that could provide this sort of relief to seniors. Bennett advised that the county does not own all of the senior center buildings, but will find out if they have air conditioning.
- b. Parks Budget Report (Frank Boteler)** – Frank Boteler presented a document on Whatcom County Parks System Budget Trends and Opportunities. Frank believes that county parks doesn't have a budget that enables them to keep up with increasing demand and that most of the budget is completely absorbed by maintenance. Frank recognized that the park staff have gotten stretched trying to cover everything because responsibilities have increased, but staffing has not. The commission discussed options to help find additional funding to support Whatcom County Parks.
- c. Fall and Winter Meeting Locations** – The commission decided on 2022 and 2023 meeting locations.

9. Open Discussion – Question Prompt: What are your main park issues?

Issues discussed were funding, parking, crime in parking areas, people not picking up after their dogs, and trash at trailheads.

10. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

Bennett Knox shared the dates and locations for the upcoming community meetings:
Saturday, Oct. 22nd, 2:00 pm – Hovander Homestead Park, Group Picnic Shelter
Wednesday, Nov. 2nd, 4:00 pm – Point Roberts Community Center
Wednesday, Nov. 9th, 6:00 pm – Josh VanderYacht Memorial Park, Community Hall

11. Meeting Input/Evaluation

Bennett Knox expressed his gratitude to the commissioners for volunteering their time. Bennett would like to use this time on the agenda to get feedback from the commissioners as to what he can do make serving on the commission worth their while. Bennett recognizes that the commission is an advisory group, but thinks there is potential for the commissioners to be as helpful as they want to be in other ways and wants them to feel like they're contributing to the growth of the department. Bennett is looking forward to a wonderful partnership with the commission.

12. Next Meeting: November 17, 2022, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on November 17, 2022 at the Lummi Island Grange Hall, 2215 North Nugent Road, Lummi Island, WA.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director