

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, November 17, 2022

Lummi Island Grange Hall
2215 North Nugent Road
Lummi Island, 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: Frank Boteler, Joe Hashmall, Terry Terry, Sonja Max

Commissioners Absent: Brian Estes, Pete Coy, Kristen Fagen

Staff Present: Christ Thomsen, Bennett Knox

Guests/Public Present: Greg Hall, Lane Davis-Coury, Susan Hutton, Rebecca Rettmer, Alan Krum, Doreen Richmond, Daniel Probst

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Joe Hashmall moved to approve the November 17, 2022 agenda as written. Frank Boteler seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Frank Boteler moved to approve the October 20, 2022 minutes as written. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

Someone asked when the next update was for the county's comprehensive plan. Sonja Max advised it is in 2025. The individual asked where the community would have input into the comprehensive plan as regards to parks. Bennett advised he would get an answer and email it to the individual.

4. Director Update

Bennett Knox advised the council would be voting on the capital improvement plan and the 2023-2024 budget at the November 22nd council meeting. The only change parks had to the capital improvement plan is a request to move the Birch Bay Park master plan up in the budget cycle to help facilitate a restroom facility in Birch Bay. The 2023-2024 operating budget focused primarily on increased staffing. WC Parks has requested a Field Operations Supervisor and a Capital Projects Manager to help complete the backlog of projects the department has incurred because of vacancies over the last year and a half. The budget also includes some minor cost adjustments to absorb the increased costs of utilities and requests for some fleet vehicle additions.

Bennett has been introducing himself to and learning more about the community. He thanked the Lummi Island residents for their tour of the island. Bennett has met people

who have a vested interest in the parks department, but wants to be cognizant of folks who haven't come to any of the meetings. Bennett wants to reach all communities so that everyone is a part of updating the comprehensive park and open space plan for 2024.

The Design and Development Supervisor position was upgraded to a Design and Development Manager and was posted today. This position is key to the department and necessary to update the comprehensive plan, as well as address new issues, such as forest management in the watershed.

2023 facility and campground reservations open December 1st at 9:00am.

5. Operations Manager Update

Christ Thomsen advised the Regional Park Supervisor for the south region left the department to finish building his house and then move on to other endeavors. That position was filled from within by a highly qualified employee who has worked for the department for 25 years, both in the parks and on the maintenance crew. Recruitment opened a little over a month ago to fill his position on the maintenance crew as a journeyman plumber. Recruitment for a Field Operations Supervisor and a Parks Project Manager will begin as soon as the budget is approved.

Staff finished winterization efforts for the year and normal operations continue.

The Silver Lake Shower and Restroom Facility is almost complete. Puget Sound energy will connect the building to power next week and then the septic pumps will be installed. The Department of Health will inspect the septic field and test the pumps on November 30th and the building will be ready for next year.

The final funding has been secured to finish the Plantation HVAC and roof project. Assuming the remaining details and drawings can be completed, the project will be finished by the end of February; if everything goes really well, it will be finished by the end of the year.

Whatcom County Parks has entered into an expedited settlement agreement with the Department of Ecology regarding the Plantation Rifle Range. The high-power range was closed November 1st to all use so the department can assure there isn't any additional lead deposited in the range until it can be cleaned up. A letter of agreement has been signed for waste stream analysis and designation; that work is ongoing. A draft settlement and erosion control plan has been developed to control sediments and guarantee lead is not being transported into the stream or wetlands at the range. Two staff members at the range have been certified through Certified Erosion & Sediment Control Lead (CESCL) to monitor these efforts. WC Parks is working on the contract for surface debris cleanup and hopes to finalize an agreement tomorrow to evaluate risks to human health associated with lead in surface water. A community information meeting was held last night at Samish Park to share the history, services, and current issues of the Plantation Rifle Range. The meeting was well attended and staff fielded

some good questions. Staff learned more about the community interests at the range, including environmental concerns, neighborhood concerns, and user concerns and desires. Christ advised it was a productive meeting and there would be additional meetings in March or April to follow up as the process continues.

Sonja Max shared that there was a motion in the October 20th meeting to acknowledge Christ Thomsen for going above and beyond while the parks department was in-between directors. Christ held down roughly three high level jobs at one time and the commission wanted Christ to know that his work did not go unnoticed and was very appreciated by the commissioners.

6. Old Business

a. Senior Centers – Heat and Smoke Concerns

- i. Senior Centers with AC** – Lynden, Blaine, Everson
- ii. Senior Centers without AC** – Bellingham, Ferndale, Welcome, Point Roberts. Bennett Knox initiated a conversation with the Council on Aging regarding the HVAC system at the Bellingham Senior Activity Center; that work is scheduled to start in two years.
- iii. Senior Centers unknown** – Sumas (under construction)

7. New Business

- a. Lummi Island Residents’ Presentation** – Greg Hall, President of the Lummi Island Community Association (LICA), introduced himself and LICA. Lane Davis-Coury welcomed the commission to Lummi Island and introduced Susan Hutton, who spoke about the Lummi Island Heritage Trust (LIHT). Rebecca Rettmer spoke about the Lummi Island Congregational Church. Alan Krum shared about Friends of Island Library (FOIL). Doreen Richmond shared about Lummi Island Beach Elementary School & PTO.
- b. Bellingham to Baker Trail** – Daniel Probst asked the commission to update the previous letter of support for the Bellingham to Baker Trail. He advised the biggest hurdle for the trail is the lack of communication with the tribes. Daniel would like the county to reach out to the tribes (local and statewide). Daniel has been working with some of the council members on how best to do increase communication with the tribes. Daniel also advised that prior to the pandemic, the Whatcom Council of Governments was set up for interagency transportation planning and was willing to negotiate and be a place for all parties to come together (city, county, state, federal, and all other management jurisdictions that fall within those areas). Frank Boteler asked what precipitated the document included Daniel’s packet of information regarding Recreational Impacts to Wildlife and Implications for Treaty Tribes. Daniel said it was initiated by the Tulalip Tribe and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission during the pandemic after DNR shut down a lot of trailheads and people began going other places for recreation. Joe Hashmall suggested branding a trail like the Lummi-Nooksack Trail to maybe

get support from the tribes. Sonja Max asked Daniel what the advantages would be to the tribes of having the Bellingham to Baker Trail. Daniel said the two largest advantages were conservation and the opportunity to apply for grant funding. Sonja Max didn't see any reason not to support the trail. Frank Boteler thought it would be good to support the trail because then it could be managed and taken care of. Terry Terry thought it would be great to support the trail because it fits the mission and goals of the department; she spoke about the Coast Millennium Trail in Oregon and how it has created a wonderful relationship with all of the tribes.

MOTION: Frank Boteler moved to have the commission write an updated support letter to reaffirm the interest in developing a trail system to Mount Baker and to highlight the opportunity for Whatcom County government to engage with tribal neighbors. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote. Sonja Max advised a draft letter would be presented at the next commission meeting.

- c. **South Fork Nooksack River Recreation** – Daniel Probst gave background information on tubing on the South Fork of the Nooksack River. Tubing has been occurring on the river for decades, but it's been unmanaged and has kind of gotten out of control over the years. The tribes proposed an ordinance to ban limb propelled flotation on the South Fork to protect the chinook salmon (there is already one section of the South Fork that has this ban). The ordinance was rejected by the County Council. The council would like to know the effects of river recreation on the salmon. The community is split on support of the ban; rafters want to continue rafting and property owners along the river want it banned. Whatcom County Parks has one property along the river, which happens to be in the section of river where tubing is already banned. The commission decided to draft a letter that requests the State Department of Fish & Wildlife to study the situation and provide recommendations to the county council on the possible effects on salmon, so that there is data and science behind deciding on whether or not to restrict and/or ban tubing. Frank and Daniel will work together to draft a letter to share at the December meeting.

8. Open Discussion

- a. **Future Agenda Items** – Frank Boteler asked about an update on the letter of support from the commission for the Stewart Mountain Community Forest Project and if there was anything else the commission could do to help work the project along. Sonja Max would like to discuss multi-modal trails in the county that might not be constrained to a specific park property, but might connect parks and communities. Terry Terry asked for an update on the Lake Samish bridge replacement project. Christ advised it is still slated for construction in 2023 and he would have more details at the January commission meeting. Sonja Max also asked for an update on the Raptor Ridge Trail.

- b. Winter Recreation Opportunities and Needs** – Sonja Max asked the commissioners what opportunities there were in Whatcom County for winter recreation other than the ski area and sno-parks. Sonja asked that the commissioners reach out to their respective communities, friends, teachers, etc. so that a more formal conversation can be had in January.

9. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

- a. November 16, 2022 at 6:00pm – Public Information Session on Plantation Rifle Range Samish Day Lodge, 673 N. Lake Samish Drive, Bellingham, WA**
- b. November 18, 2022 at 8:30am – Parks Foundation Meeting Fairhaven Sycamore Square Building, 1200 Harris Ave. Suite 408, Bellingham, WA**
- c. December 15, 2022 from 8:30am – 3:30pm – WC Parks All Staff Roeder Home, 2600 Sunset Drive, Bellingham, WA**

10. Meeting Input/Evaluation

Christ Thomsen commented that the turnout for the meeting was impressive and thanked the community members for coming. Bennett Knox would like to invite community members associated with whatever neighborhood the commission meetings are being held at. Sonja Max said it was really helpful to hear from the Lummi Island community members.

11. Next Meeting: December 15, 2022, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on December 15, 2022 at the Roeder Home, 2600 Sunset Drive, Bellingham, WA.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director