

**MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, January 19, 2017**

**Bellingham Senior Activity Center
315 Halleck Street
Bellingham, WA**

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Commissioners: Paul Woodcock, Kenneth Kiesner and Jeff Margolis.

Staff: Mike McFarlane, Christ Thomsen and Rod Lamb

EXCUSED

Richard Sturgill, Janet Boyhan, Vern Yadon and Theresa Sygitowicz

GUESTS

Susan McClendon
Mary Carlson

The meeting was inquorate. Information is provided for discussion purposes only.

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS / COMMUNICATIONS

A. COMMENTS – NONE

B. COMMUNICATIONS – NONE

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS - NONE

V. AGENDA

A. January 19, 2017 Agenda – Because the meeting was inquorate it was the consensus of those present to continue the meeting with an informational only discussion of the January 19, 2017 agenda items.

VI. MINUTES

A. December 15, 2016 Minutes – The December minutes were not approved as the meeting was inquorate. December 15, 2016 and January 19, 2017 minutes will be approved at the next quorate meeting.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE

1. **Commission Appointments** – Mike introduced Susan McClendon who has been recommended for appointed to Parks Commission. Appointment recommendations and 2nd term applications will be on the next County Council Agenda for approval. An updated Commission member listing will be distributed to the Commission once all appointments have been approved.

2. **Senior Services Agreement** – All senior services agreements are currently pending approval by the various city/county government and agency participants.

Mike discussed the changes that were made in the senior services contracts. Also discussed were the ownership of the buildings and lands where the centers operate.

3. **Little Squalicum Park** – The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted soil samplings at the proposed estuary to ensure that no leaching is occurring from the superfund contaminated area.

The area was previously sampled and showed no contamination other than a small amount of fuel residue which was suspected to be a surface contamination.

If contamination is detected the City of Bellingham would be responsible for resolution.

4. **Puget Sound Energy (PSE) Request for Easement – Glacier Substation**

Mike has responded to PSE that a license is preferred. It was decided that this will allow PSE access to the property to accomplish their task and keep the property unencumbered for future development.

5. **Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)** – The WDFW is requesting a permanent easement in order access County property to complete necessary improvements for fish passage and for ongoing equipment access to maintain operations of the hatchery located at Brandon Creek, South Lake Whatcom Park. Based on the information received, staff has determined that an easement would result in minimal impact on the park.

6. **Birch Bay Berm Project** – The Department will be requested by resolution to grant access over Park properties for this project. This will be on the Park Commission agenda for recommendation next month and then forwarded on to County Council.

There were discussion regarding the berm project in terms of structure, erosion mitigation and the basic functions of the berm, and that more in-depth information regarding the project is available on the Whatcom County Public Works web site.

7. **Columbia Valley Trail** – Since the initial cost estimate was received meetings have been held to discuss the project in terms of reducing project cost, plans, funding and how to move forward.

Meetings were held with the County and the Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT) to discuss that a major portion of the trail could use the DOT right-of-way.

The County is supportive of the project but is not currently in a position to take on or fund it. There is the possibility that grant money could be available. The project will continue in the planning phase to a point where it could be ready for grant applications, and work continues to reduce overall project cost.

8. Cedar Point Trail Closure – Department staff and the Whatcom County Public Works geologist met on-site to re-evaluate the status of the trail. It was discovered that another section has eroded since the last visit and that the span is too large to reasonably install a bridge, given the type of soils. The Department will decommission that portion of the trail and loop the trail back to the trail head. This will allow continued access along the bluff.

9. January Commission Agenda Posting – There was a problem posting the agenda to the Park's web page due to a computer glitch. The problem was resolved and the web page updated.

10. Parks and Recreation Chair Election – Mike reminded the Commission that the Election of the Chair would take place on February's agenda.

B. OPERATIONS' REPORT – CHRIST THOMSEN

1. 2016 Year-In-Review

- **Itinio** – 2016 was the first full year the Department used Itinio for public online camping reservations and facility reservation requests, and staff use for concession and boat rentals point-of-sale at Silver Lake Park.

The statistics are currently being computed to show the difference between on-line reservations as compared to being taken over the phone or in person by Department staff. Those statistics should be available at next month meeting. It is thought that there is a major increase in cabin and camping rentals, and that if this is the case it will result in a tremendous saving in staff time and costs.

- **Initiated Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS)** – Operations initiated the CMMS rollout which consisted of populating the system with information on all high level facility assets, enabling the system to receive work orders request from Department staff in the field and Bellingham Senior Activity Center staff. The Department staff continues building the data with intra-structure information on our facilities.

There was discussion on how the system reduces maintenance costs by providing information to make better decisions on when to replace equipment as opposed to continuing to maintain it, tracking staff time on projects and staff involvement in events such as the Hovander Blue Grass Festival. This information is beneficial when determining costs for a particular project, task or event.

- **Successfully operated the parks while down roughly 2 full time staff members due to vacancies** – Christ stated that although there were challenges, staff was able to keep the parks clean and moral high in spite of the fact that there were vacancies due to retirement and extended leaves of absence. Over all it was a successful year due to staff teamwork and seasonal and part time extra help staff.

- **Silver Lake Park Record Revenues** – Silver Lake Park looks to have had a record year in terms of park revenues. This is felt to be largely due to bringing the reservation software system on-board and opening cabin and camping reservations to the public.

Christ stated that last year's numbers still need to be looked at, but the ability for the public to actively make reservations on-line seems to have driven that revenue up and allowed the Department to meet overall budget revenue projections in spite of revenue shortfalls that were experienced in other Department revenue based facilities.

- **Completed A Number Of Small Projects** – Operations was able to complete a number of small projects, most recently is the remodel of the Larrabee Cabin at Silver Lake Park. This was finished a little before Christmas and the feedback from both first time visitors and long term returning visitors has been one of overwhelming pleasure with these changes.

- **Budget Process** – Christ reflected on the budget process in terms of the amount of time involved with budget preparation and the funding successes that were achieved for both Operations and Department-wide. These included an increase in the maintenance and operations funding for Senior Services which will allow for catch up on the maintenance backlog at our senior facilities, an upgrade in equipment to better suit the Department's needs, and most importantly the addition of the Park Attendant position.

2. General Operations

- **Staffing**

Park Attendant - Internal recruitment for the Park Attendant position has closed. There was one internal applicant. Their application is scheduled to be reviewed tomorrow.

Extra Help - External recruitment has begun for extra-help for Point Roberts Senior Services, Bellingham Senior Activity Center maintenance, the Plantation Rifle Range, and parks and trails seasonal maintenance.

- **Current Projects**

Regulatory Compliance – Staff are evaluating programs, particularly the maintenance programs, and reviewing labor and industries and health rules for Department compliance. This reorganization will be ongoing and could take up to two years to complete.

Efforts began last November by purging old and outdated chemical products, and continue presently with crafting chemical hazardous communication plans for each facility/park, beginning with the Bellingham Senior Center.

Samish Bridge Replacement – Whatcom County Public Works is replacing the bridge on North Lake Samish Drive just outside of the Samish Park entrance.

The most recent inspection of the bridge revealed increased amounts of rot in the wood of the bridge superstructure over the water. The bridge is currently restricted to one lane while designs are prepared for a replacement structure that will allow access for all vehicles.

The project will impact Department operations and visitor access to the park. Christ, Rod and Lead Ranger, Don Hunger attended the most recent public meeting and will continue to be involved in the planning process in order to be informed of, and if needed, involved in the process.

C. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT – ROD LAMB

1. Year-In-Review

- **South Fork Park Trailhead Development** – This project is shut down for the winter. The contractor's equipment has been moved off site as the majority of the earth work, base rock and gravel paving are complete. The contractor will return when the weather allows and finish the grading and asphalt paving.

Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has completed the paperwork for the trail easement. We received a signed document, and once it has been recorded we will have an established route in which to construct the necessary trail connection from the trailhead at Galbraith Farm to the Nessel Farm.

- **Silver Lake Road & Electrical Improvements** – Since it was determined that the planned aggressive project scope for campground improvements was beyond the level of available funding, the project is being re-scoped to identifying what portions can be completed and/or identifying other smaller needed improvements that can be completed with available funding.

Smaller improvements that are being considered are electrical upgrades at the campsites, including electrical pedestal replacement level where users are interfacing with that utility, and upgrades/improvements of old infrastructures that are eroding around the Day Lodge day use area.

A big component that is being considered is the shower and restroom facility in proximity to the cabins. It is expected that restroom building would exhaust a major portion of the available funding.

- **Lighthouse Boardwalk Renovation** – Rod and the Department carpenter met with the consulting engineer on site to expose a section of the existing boardwalk and inspect the posts of the existing picnic shelters. The project was installed in 1973 and there

were concerns that the ground post connection could have similar degradation to that discovered at a Silver Lake Park structure. It revealed that the posts that were exposed to inspection were in they are in excellent condition, with no visible being structurally compromised.

Small sections of existing decking were also removed. It is a large structure, but the areas that were inspected appeared to be structurally sound and provided a great deal of good superstructure underneath the deck surface that can be maintained and used to sister in structural lumber and joists to be able to support the new the decking material. The new decking materials will consist of composite decking that will reduce on-going maintenance costs. The construction cost will also be reduced because the contractor will only need to reinforce the existing structure.

The project also includes replacing the playground.

- **Birch Bay Community Park** - Rod provided copies of the Birch Bay Community Park Preferred Alternative and a DRAFT cost estimate that was developed by the contracted landscape architect. Further review is required but it appears to be acceptable. Rod provided handouts of the proposed plan and possible project phases.

The critical elements of this project consist of a restroom facility and parking lot. It is likely that this project would be constructed in phases, however certain critical elements have been identified for phase one making it the most costly, but would result in a park facility that would be functional on day one, and not dependent on future phases to be of use.

The cost estimate provides detailed list of approximately \$4 million to complete the project, most of which is in phase one. Funding strategies include investigating the possibility of matching Economic Development Initiative and Recreation Conservation Office grant funds. The next grant cycle for these funds occurs in 2018 for funding that would be allocated in 2019, allowing for project ground breaking in 2020.

Rod stated that he will have a draft of the master plan available for the next Commission meeting, and requested a recommendation from the Commission to include in the plan presentation to County Council at the second Council meeting in February.

It was discussed that there are currently no development funds for the park, that it is not programmed in this budget cycle, nor are there any grant funds available at this time. The available funds for this project were dedicated to completing the direction of County Executive and County Council to complete the community conceptual plan and develop a budget and are exhausted. The Blaine Park District does have approximately \$80,000.00 dedicated to this park, but that amount will not complete a project of this size.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. 2016 PROJECTS

1. Samish Playground, The final elements of this 2015 project was completed in 2016. The installation was completed entirely by our maintenance crew, who did an excellent job. The old wooden playground structure was replaced, all of the wood fiber chips were replace with artificial turf and wood retaining walls were replaced with concrete ones. In addition, a concrete approach ramp and a no-steps access path were also installed, making this feature completely ADA compliant and accessible.

2. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock Repair – This project spanned from 2010 to 2016 when the dock was launched and available to the public.

After a great deal of permitting challenges and restrictions related to construction the project was completed in June of 2016. Unfortunately after approximately four weeks the newly installed structure began to fail resulting in removal of the dock. This resulted in a new effort to rectify the issue. A great deal of time spent with the engineer and manufacturer to redesign and manufacture a new grounding system for the dock. Finally, after months of coordination and collaboration the dock was successfully re-launched in August of 2016.

The dock is a seasonal launch and is in the water from the end of May until sometime after Labor Day, weather permitting. The new design was in the water for approximately six weeks before the season ended this year.

3. Silver Lake Park Improvements - As mentioned in the Planning and Development Report the Department has spent many hours on improvements proposal for Maple Creek Campground. Although we've secured all necessary county permits, we still need approval from the Department of Natural Resources and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife before the project can begin. The permits are relatively easy to secure but as mentioned earlier, we lack adequate funding to complete the proposed improvements.

4. Lookout Mountain Forest Preserve and Lake Whatcom Park Recreational Trail Plan - The Lookout Mountain Forest Preserve and Lake Whatcom Park Recreational Trail Plan has been successfully completed. It was done entirely in-house with existing staff resources. Reid Parker, Park Conservation Steward deserves credit for his extensive efforts on the success of this project.

Rod and Reid worked together with several recreational groups, engaged the community in three different meeting over the course of 18+ months and submitted for Council approval in November. The project was approved with funding for the first eight miles of trail.

5. Birch Bay Community Park – The master plan for this project is nearly complete. Main component of proposed park will include a public restroom, a multi-purpose shelter and off-street parking. A primary driver in the development of the plan was to design the facility in such a way as the park could service as platform for community events.

The planning process included a site analysis by the contracted landscape architect who was also involved in three community visioning sessions.

The average attendance for these sessions was between 25 – 40 members of the public. The meetings included a short presentation of the proposed park plan, opportunities and constraints and proposed design elements. Following the initial presentation attendees were asked to breakout in groups, were given markers and tracing paper and asked to critique and add their wish lists to the initial plan in order to develop a community preferred, alternative plan.

A draft of the plan should be submitted from the landscape architect in the next few days and will be brought to the next Park Commission meeting for review.

6. South Fork Park

- **Trailhead** – It is anticipated that the trailhead will be completed this spring, followed by the completion of the initial trail segment and anticipated to be opened to the public in May, 2017.

The trail connector to Nessel Farm will require additional funding. The Department has applied for grant funding and in the interim a loop trail will be created for public use.

The trail head consists of two parking lots and a vault toilet facility. The parking lots provide a single unit vehicle parking area for hikers and a separate truck and trailer parking lot for equestrian trail users.

- **Nessel Farm Structures** – In preparation for the planned trail connection to the Nessel Farm, restoration has begun on the Nessel Farm house and machine shed.

The Department contracted with a structural engineer who created plans and assisted with the permitting process. The plans and permitting were funded through the Nessel Foundation.

The project was released to bid last summer and a local construction firm was contracted to complete the restoration.

This portion of the project is expected to be completed next summer at which time the next phase will be to replace the roofs.

7. Lighthouse Boardwalk Renovation – Rod provided pictures of the boardwalk as it existed in 1973 when it was initially constructed, and pictures as the site looks now. He pointed out where portions of the deck were removed, and discussed some of the structural problems associated with the deck.

The design plan is to create a smaller footprint by reducing the size of the deck, and using durable composite deck materials in the renovated structure which will reduce the project costs ongoing maintenance.

The existing restroom, concession building and picnic shelters will remain, and incorporated in the renovation project.

The renovation project will also include installing a new play structure. Rod is working with the firm that has installed the playground structures at other park facilities for the past nine years. The company provides an excellent product and warranty, and offers a program that provides installation consultation to the Park maintenance staff during the installation process.

Rod stated that he will bring an example of the 2017 playground products that are being considered to the next month's meeting for Commission review.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. 2016 Senior Services Survey Review – Mike provided a draft copy of 2016 Senior Center Participant Survey Results for Commission review.

He discussed that the survey is done on an annual basis and can be completed by participants online or at the senior centers.

The survey provides feedback information on how the centers are doing, what changes are needed and shows an overview of general trends.

Mike discussed each center's operational costs, funding, and ownership, and provided an overview of each center's activities. He also discussed that a breakdown of the County's contribution is available in Senior Services section of the online publication of the park budget, and that questions can be directed to him with a phone call or through email.

B. Cultural Entities and Venues – Jeff Margolis

Jeff stated that he would first like to say that the Department has done a great job in the past year and that he would like to see more public information on these accomplishments and the parks in general through news articles and visitor centers in order to promote eco-tourism and enhance the eco-cultural experience.

There was discussion regarding how Whatcom County Parks could generate greater interest through programmatic activities such as wildlife and flora/fauna tours and other interactive activities much like other state and federal parks are engaging in with the public.

There was discussion on how the Department's reservation software and local tourism agencies could be better engaged to provide a broader eco-tourism package by creating a system of guides that include the activities of the local, state and federal parks and identify cultural entities and venues such as the local museums, theatres and symphonies, making it easier for the public to have a broader experience and develop an eco-cultural tourism initiative.

It was also discussed how web site links and QR codes could be utilized and how QR codes can direct visitors to interpretive information through other venues. Christ discussed how the QR codes are utilized in the Chuckanut trail system at the kiosk to download the geo-referenced map, put it on your phone and use while walking the trails.

It was agreed that creating the system would need to be spearheaded by one entity as it would take a great deal of effort, not only reaching out to gather the information but in keeping the information current.

Because local tourism and convention bureaus have access to networks and are tasked with marketing the community, bringing in visitors and working with the various business and recreation providers that it would be reasonable for them to be the point agencies in creating the eco-tourism experience. Mike stated that there may be funding through a lodging tax to implement the project or help supplement a position if a nexus could be shown for head to bed benefits.

It was discussed that meetings with the visitor bureaus and the possibility of creating a brochure that encompasses City, County and State parks, and show community interests in one map or publication is a good idea. This, in addition with the electronic side of marketing, it is becoming much easier to go to one place where information is combined through links, etc.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Jeff Margolis said that the South Fork Valley Community Association is sponsoring a bi-weekly film series. On January 29th the feature film is "Sometimes A Great Notion". The next bi-weekly film is "Breach", which is a documentary on the preservation of salmon. The film schedule can be found on The South Fork Valley Community Association Facebook page.

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission meeting will be held on February 16, 2017 at 6:00 PM at the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Administrative Office, 3373 Mt. Baker Highway, Bellingham. There will be a tour of the Administrative campus at 5:30 PM.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Mike McFarlane, Parks Department Director