

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, August 19, 2021

Virtual Meeting

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Commissioners: Terry Terry, Sonja Max, Pete Coy, Brian Estes, Joe Hashmall

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Christ Thomsen

EXCUSED

Kristen Fagan, Brad VanderWerff

GUESTS

Jackie Yereance, Cindy Piccolo, Daniel Probst

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

A. Jackie Yereance – Jackie proposed that a short stretch of trail in Chuckanut Mountain Park be upgraded to a multi-purpose section. She walked the Raptor Ridge Trail with Arlen Bogaards, the Northwest Regional Manager for the Washington Trails Association. Arlen thought a short realignment would be a better option to create a connection for horses and people. The Washington Trails is willing to work on the alignment of this trail to make sure that it is properly built.

B. Birch Bay Berm Dedication – 8/21/21 – Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce – Mike presented a flyer for the berm celebration and ribbon cutting.

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None

V. AGENDA

A. August 19, 2021

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the August 19, 2021 agenda as written. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VI. MINUTES

A. July 15, 2021

MOTION: Joe Hashmall moved to approve the July 15, 2021 minutes as written. Pete Coy seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. Director's Report – Michael McFarlane

- i. Employee Recognition Day** – Rick Jacoby, the departments welder and heavy equipment operator, was recognized for 20 years of service.
- ii. Staffing Updates** – WC Parks is recruiting for the Design and Development Supervisor. The recruitment period has been extended and the hiring process most likely won't begin until November. This will impact a number of projects. Christ Thomsen, Ben Houpt, and Mike McFarlane have each taken on some of the current projects and will try to keep the projects moving. The Park Ranger position was posted internally, but none of the applicants were qualified. The position will be posted externally next week.
- iii. Mid-Biennium Adjustment** – WC Parks is beginning work on the mid-biennium adjustment, an adjustment to the budget that allows staff to present unexpected costs. These costs include utilities, new projects, solid waste, seasonal labor cost, and fuel prices. Another item that will be presented will be a decrease in expected revenue resulting from the closure of some park facilities for a portion or all of 2022.
- iv. Squires Lake Park** – Mike got a 60-day extension on the Squires Lake property purchase. The purchase will go to closing as soon as the Phase I environmental assessment is complete.
- v. COVID Updates** – Masks are required again in the administrative office and for all staff working closely together. Senior centers are masking and have limited services. Mike expects tighter restrictions to be imposed over the next couple of weeks and thinks commission meetings will continue to be virtual through the end of the year.

B. Operations Report & Design and Development Report – Christ Thomsen

- i. Staffing** – Seasonal staff members are beginning to leave employment as the season comes to an end. Recruitment is ongoing to backfill seasonal positions that are being vacated.
- ii. Operations** – The parks continue to be very busy. Silver Lake campground is routinely full. Lighthouse Marine Park has seen some US visitors, but the Canadian visitors are still unable to cross the US border.
- iii. Red Mountain Shower and Restroom Facility** – The contractor is working on a few warranty items and troubleshooting some equipment issues in the Red Mountain Shower and Restroom Facility so that the project can be closed out.

- iv. **Maple Creek Campground Shower and Restroom Facility** – The Maple Creek Campground Shower and Restroom Facility was awarded to Tiger Construction. Work will begin September 7th.
- v. **Lake Whatcom Trail EH1 Development** – The Lake Whatcom Trail EH1 Development contract was awarded to Northwest Trails Incorporated and work will start when the contract is signed.
- vi. **Tennant Lake Walkway** – Work has begun to replace the gravel walkway between the Fragrance Garden and the Wildlife Viewing Tower and Boardwalk with concrete. Staff is also working to reinstall the kiosk that was removed a couple of years ago for totem repair.
- vii. **Nugent’s Corner** – The Humane Society vacated the building at Nugent’s Corner and shortly thereafter, it was set on fire. The fire caused structural damage that will make it more difficult to complete abatement work. The building has also been broken into six times. WC Parks is moving forward with the demolition of the building.
- viii. **Birch Bay Beach Park** – Rod was working on improvements to Birch Bay Beach Park. Christ is working to get a portion of the project out to contract. WC Parks crew will be removing the old fence and installing a new rail fence along the frontage in September.

VIII. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

A. Samish Park – Bridge Replacement Project – Recommendation for Park Closure – The wooden bridge in front of Samish Park is decaying and needs to be replaced. Whatcom County Public Works procured funding for the design and engineering to replace the bridge. The area surrounding the bridge is problematic to the project, as it is very restrictive in size and includes utilities, a gas pipeline, overhead wires, and a sewer line. The parking lot at Samish Park is the only viable option for the staging area necessary for the project. In order to accommodate the replacement of this bridge, the recommendation is to close Samish Park beginning May 1, 2022 through July 2023. This will be an inconvenience to the public from a recreational standpoint, but it is essential that the bridge be replaced. During the time that the park is closed, staff will be able to do turf restoration, landscaping renovations, and shelter upgrades.

MOTION: Brian Estes made a motion to recommend support of the closure of Samish Park during the bridge replacement project (May 1st, 2022 through July 2021). Pete Coy seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

B. Jackie Yereance – Proposal to Upgrade Chuckanut Park *Raptor Ridge Trail* and Open Fully to Horse Use – Discussion ensued regarding trail dimensions and the concerns of all trail users regarding this proposal.

MOTION: Pete Coy made a motion to postpone a recommendation until more information could be provided and research could be

completed. Brian Estes seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Monetizing Opportunities** – Brian Estes went to Hovander Park and was able to tour the area with a staff member. Brian was curious as to whether some of the artifacts could be sold and if the barn could be turned into an event space. Mike advised that most artifacts on the property were either county assets or on loan from private collections. As far as repurposing the barn, the barn and the house are on the National Register of Historic Places and it would be very difficult to change. The barn is not energized because it's a large structure and by not providing power to it, it adds a level of fire protection. The house is usually open for public tours, but because of COVID, it hasn't been. The blacksmith shop has bellows that will be on display, but that has been delayed because of COVID as well. Brian wanted to make a point to share that he agrees more shelters are needed at Hovander to meet the demand.
- B. Labor Options** – Brian asked if WC Parks ever partnered with Americorp or similar groups. Christ advised that the Washington Conservation Corp had worked with WC Parks on trail construction for numerous seasons, but were not on the current project. WC Parks partners with other organizations on a volunteer basis to supplement staffing and projects (Master Gardeners, garden clubs, the Whatcom Chapter Backcountry Horsemen, various running clubs, the Whatcom Mountain Bike Coalition, fishing groups, etc.). There are also volunteers that provide daily care for the animals at Hovander. Brian asked about programming opportunities at Hovander for families and children. Mike advised that there have been numerous programs in the past that were run by volunteers and that programming relies heavily on how active and engaged volunteers want to be.
- C. EWRRRC – Covered Sports Court Update** – The covered sport court project at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center is being put on hold. Whatcom County had been granted \$350,000 from the state to help fund the project and the Opportunity Council had come up with matching funds. The project was set to cost \$500,000 to construct, but has now risen to \$900,000. The county can't commit to the grant now, but because it scored so high with the state, WC Parks can submit another grant in a year or two.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held virtually on September 16, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director