

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, October 21, 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: Kristen Fagan, Brad VanderWerff, Pete Coy, Sonja Max, Terry Terry, Brian Estes

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Christ Thomsen

EXCUSED

Joe Hashmall

GUESTS

Heidi Baxter, Jackie Yereance, Katherine Smith

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

- A. Heidi Baxter** – Heidi Baxter said the dog park at Lighthouse Park in Point Roberts is very much needed for energetic dogs to run around and dogs to be able to socialize with other dogs. She realizes not all dog owners or all dogs are suited for it, but thinks it would really help out the community.
- B. Jackie Yereance** – Jackie Yereance wanted to thank the commission for backing her proposal to upgrade the Raptor Ridge connection. She was very appreciative of the time, attention, and thought that went into it.
- C. Katherine Smith** – Katherine Smith wanted to reserve comment until after input from the commission and staff members on the dog enclosure proposal for Point Roberts.

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None

V. AGENDA

A. October 21, 2021

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the October 21, 2021 agenda as written. Brian Estes seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VI. MINUTES

A. September 16, 2021

MOTION: Brian Estes moved to approve the September 16, 2021 minutes as written. Brad VanderWerff seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. Director's Report – Michael McFarlane

- i. Everson Senior Activity Center** – Staff met with the City of Everson regarding the Everson Senior Center Program, which operates in the multi-purpose room at City Hall. The contract with the City of Everson expires at the end of the year. The City renewed the contract for another year, but has asked WC Parks to look for another location to host the program, as they need the space for their employees. Mike will keep the commission apprised of the situation.
- ii. Staffing Update** – WC Parks is continuing to recruit for the Design & Development Supervisor position. Interviews are being completed for the vacant Ranger position. The Maintenance and Construction Supervisor position has been posted and closes on Monday. The department has had to scale back in terms of projects being worked on. Projects under contract continue to move forward. The Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan has been placed on hold until staff time is available. Christ and field staff are working hard to complete projects before the weather turns.
- iii. Lake Whatcom Trailhead** – MacLeod Reckord LLC, the design team selected for the preliminary design and engineering services for trailhead improvements at Lake Whatcom Park, has been working on plans for expanded parking. The site is challenging and limited because of the lake, wetlands, topography, stormwater, shorelines, cultural trees, animal habitats, etc. Mike expects to have several options to share with the commission within the next couple of months.
- iv. Capital Projects** – The Lummi Island Heritage Trust contacted WC Parks regarding cost sharing of development on the Aiston Preserve. Improvements would include restrooms, trails, and signage. Mike will be meeting with the County Executive this week to discuss the possibility of moving forward with it in the next budget cycle.
- v. Playgrounds** – A request has been received from neighborhood citizens to reinstall a playground at Ted Edwards Park. The previous playground was removed a number of years ago because it was noncompliant and not being used. The neighborhood has since changed and there are a lot of children living in the area. The playground at Josh VanderYacht Park also needs to be replaced. Playgrounds are relatively expensive because of accessibility, surfacing, and code requirements. Commercial playground equipment is also expensive because of the risk involved with the

structures. Both are priority projects that will be discussed in the near future as to feasibility.

- vi. **Van Zandt Hall** – WC Parks had a brief conversation with the South Fork Valley Community Association about improvements on the Van Zandt Hall. The association is looking to procure state funds for the improvements, but community halls are not eligible for funding from the sources that are typically used for park projects. WC Parks is currently short staffed and will need to rely heavily on the association to move forward with procuring grant programs and funding. The project most likely won't take place until the 2023-2024 budget.
- vii. **Camp Horizon** – Mike sent the first draft of the agreement for Lions Camp Horizon to Whatcom County legal staff. The Camp Horizon Foundation operates Lions Camp Horizon, a summer camp for teens and young adults with disabilities, at Bay Horizon park. During the off season, the foundation rents the buildings at Bay Horizon Park to help offset heating costs. The foundation has maintained the structures and completed capital improvement projects at Bay Horizon Park since 1987. The current agreement doesn't expire until December 2022, but the foundation wanted to have another contract in place before the existing one expires, as they plan to fundraise for some major capital improvement projects. The agreement will be presented to the commission for approval in January/February 2022 and then will go to the county council for approval before it is forwarded to the National Park Service for approval.

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

- i. **Staffing** – Most seasonal employees will be done at the end of October. Park Ranger first round interviews were last week and second round interviews are tomorrow. The Maintenance and Construction Supervisor position is vacant and recruitment closes Monday. Applications will be reviewed and staff will move forward in filling the position.
- ii. **Operations** – The parks continue to be busy on good weather days. Boat rentals are finished for the season and the boats are scheduled to come out of the water. All campgrounds close at the end of the month. Staff is preparing to respond to windstorms, rain events, and the hazards that come with fall and winter weather. There have been multiple break ins at the new shower and restroom facility located in the Red Mountain campground at Silver Lake Park. The coin operated showers have been targeted.
- iii. **Maple Creek Campground Shower and Restroom Facility** – The Maple Creek Campground Shower and Restroom Facility is progressing on schedule without substantive changes. The utilities are stubbed in, the foundation slabs are poured, and the masonry work begins Friday.

- iv. **Plantation Rifle Range** – The range project is behind schedule. The contractor has been ordering supplies and materials, but hasn't started working onsite. There is a meeting Monday with the contractor and all of the sub-contractors to get the project moving and complete.
- v. **Lake Whatcom EH1 Trail Construction** – The contract was returned from the low bid contractor. As soon as the performance bond paperwork is received, the project will move forward.
- vi. **Birch Bay Beach Park** – Permits were received last week for the Birch Bay Beach Park improvements. WC Parks is still waiting on approvals from the state. Once those approvals are received, the project will go out to bid. WC Parks staff will begin replacing the frontage fence this month.
- vii. **Nugent's Corner** – The bid package to demolish the building at Nugent's Corner opened this week. Several bids within the project budget were received. Christ will work on bid certification so that the contract can be awarded.
- viii. **Silver Lake Cabin Remodel** – The Shuksan cabin remodel will be going out to bid, but the project is being moved to 2022 because of staffing shortages.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. **Proposal for Dog Park at Lighthouse Marine Park (tabled from September 16, 2021 meeting)** – The proposal for a dog park at Lighthouse Marine Park was presented as a solution to the problem with off-leash dogs. However, in looking at parks that have off-leash areas (Hovander Park and Lake Padden), problems still exist with dogs not being leashed in the leashed areas. Mike shared an aerial map of Lighthouse Marine Park showing the proposed dog park in relation to the non-motorized campsite, group campsites, picnic sites, bathrooms, pathways, boardwalk, and playground. The area is currently open space with a picnic area and is the only undeveloped area in the park. It is less than 60 feet away from campsites and blocks a main travel route through the park. There have been many requests for additional campsites at Lighthouse Marine Park and the requested location would be the ideal spot. The administration estimated the cost of the project would be closer to \$59,000 - \$60,000, of which there is no funding in the budget. Mike talked with the Point Roberts Park and Recreation District about their experience with a dog park and found that it was discontinued after conflicts with other users of the field and the primary school. Mike received calls from citizens who were not opposed to a dog park, but thought there were better locations in Point Roberts than Lighthouse Marine Park. He also received calls from a number of people who indicated they would not use a dog park, even if one was available. The administration does not think a dog park is compatible at Lighthouse Marine Park with the noise, pet waste, and additional staff time required for putting the dog park in.

MOTION: Brian Estes made a motion to not approve the proposal for the dog park as presented. Pete Coy seconded. The motion carried with five votes for not approving (Estes, Coy, Terry, Fagan, VanderWerff) and one opposed to not approving (Max).

Katherine Smith wanted to clear up some misconceptions about the dog park proposal and site. She advised the distance from the proposed site to the campground is greater than 60 feet because of terrain relief and absolutely does not cut off any trails or affect views or other park users. She advised there is literally no other place for a dog park in Point Roberts and that the committee did a lot of work in talking with all other possible property owners. She said there is an enforcement problem with off-leash dogs and Point Roberts residents can't just cross the border into Canada to go to an off-leash dog park. Katherine wishes the proposal would be considered more openly with a fuller review. She advised the primary users of the park are dog walkers and said the fecal matter would get picked up. She said the residents know the Point and the park and she wishes Director McFarlane would come walk the site with them. She advised she offered drone footage and no one was interested. She had three photographs she wanted to share with the commission that included a panorama and an aerial to illustrate the site better. Brian Estes told Katherine that the information had already been heard and he was sorry that the group did not consult with the department before putting so much work into the proposal, but that the commission had decided to not approve the dog park and needed to move on with the meeting. Katherine reiterated that she didn't feel as though the proposal was given just and due consideration or an honest appraisal. Sonja Max told Katherine she appreciated her passion for the project and thought that it was great to have dog parks. Sonja suggested that when it's easier to cross the border, the commission could revisit the proposal. Sonja said that maybe the commission could have a meeting at Lighthouse Marine Park in the summer and see the area, but that right now the commission needed to base their decisions on the advice of park staff.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. 2021 Third Quarter Visitation – Mike presented the 2021 Third Quarter Visitation numbers. The visitation numbers should be available online by the beginning of 2022.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held virtually on November 18, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director