

**MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, October 17, 2013**

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

PRESENT: Commissioners: Gordon Rogers, Kenneth Kiesner, Paul Woodcock, Jeffrey Margolis, Janet Boyhan,

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Rodney Lamb,

ABSENT: Theresa Sygitowicz, Richard Sturgill

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chair, Gordon Rogers at 6:00 PM.

I. AGENDA

A. October 17, 2013 Agenda Approval

MOTION: It was moved by Paul Woodcock and seconded by Janet Boyhan to approve the October 17, 2013 Agenda as written. The motion passed unanimously.

II. MINUTES

A. September 19, 2013 Minutes Approval

MOTION: It was moved by Paul Woodcock and seconded by Janet Boyhan to approve the September 19, 2013 Minutes as written. The motion passed unanimously

III. PUBLIC INPUT/COMMUNICATIONS

A. Whatcom Parks and Recreation Foundation – An invitation was shared with the Commission Members to attend a fund raising event, silent auction and social on Friday November 8, 2013, 6:00 PM, at Northwood Hall in Bellingham.

IV. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MICHAEL MCFARLANE

A. Lake Whatcom Reconveyance – Mike met with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) this week. DNR should be sending the final draft of the deed this week. After a final internal review the deed will be forwarded to the Governor's office for review.

Because the State survey crews had previously scheduled commitments they were unable do the survey. The State Survey Chief reviewed the specifications and released an RFQ for services. It is anticipated that a qualified vendor will be selected and the survey completed within the next couple of months.

Mike stated that he is optimistic that the transfer and most of the survey will be completed prior to year end.

A list of individuals is being compiled to serve on a citizen's executive advisory committee for the Reconveyance. The list will be submitted to the County Executive by January or February for approval. It was discussed that there could be representation from the Parks Commission, the City of Bellingham, stakeholders and user groups to assist the plan through the process but that the final decision for participation would be with the Executive.

The committee will need to be relatively small in order to execute a plan and that the issue should not be one of debate but to move forward with a plan that can be implemented both in terms of management and recreational development.

Mike also met with City of Bellingham staff to discuss forest/timber management plans that they are moving forward with to improve the forests in lands that they have inherited or acquired. Also discussed was working together and sharing information on trails connectivity between City and County lands.

The timber management portion of the Reconveyance is the most detailed portion of the plan and will most likely be contracted out. It will be important to identify the desired goals with the contractor.

Mike stated that the trail portion of the plan will be relatively simple to complete.

Mike discussed that the Department is currently not allowing any new trail building on State lands. The closures of trails that pose a public safety or environmental concern have been posted.

Mike discussed a log jam that is located on Smith Creek that he recently inspected. He stated that there is a large rock that keys the jam in at that part of the creek. The jam cannot be removed because the Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) will not issue permits for removal due to loss of woody debris that would affect the fish. In addition it would take a great deal of equipment or perhaps dynamite if the equipment could not access the location to remove the boulder and jam. There are dykes below and the bridge has a clear span in case of a blow-out. Mike stated that the inspection included up to where the stream narrows and noted that there did not seem to be much change in the landscape or creek since the last inspection.

He discussed that the residents by the mouth of the creek are interested in removing the jam however the DFW remains firm on leaving it in place because of the woody debris and difficulty in removal.

The State does monitor the jam each year and provides a report on findings. This is a location that the Parks Department will also be monitoring.

Jeff Margolis stated for interest that there are rather large and museum grade fossils within the Reconveyance properties.

B. Facility Rental – Staff Coverage – The Parks Department is experiencing challenges in staff coverage at our park shelters and rental facilities due to an increase in rentals during off staff hours.

Lack of staff coverage has increased the number of false alarms and risk to buildings, equipment and antiques, especially in the Bellingham Senior Center and Roeder Home, due to building access prior to the rental time and/or not securing the facility properly at the end of an event.

It also creates a problem for our customers when equipment such as a stove or toilet is not working properly and is not discovered prior to the event leaving the customer with faulty equipment and no one available to attend to the problem.

An increase in staff would allow time to open and inspect the facility prior to the event, and secure and clean up the facility after the event. This position will also provide numerous benefits in preserving base staff hours that are needed for the maintenance and upkeep of facilities.

We are looking at model to hire an extra help position to be on location during rental events. An extra-help position is currently at \$13.70 per hour with an upcoming increase to \$14.00 per hour. It was asked if this hourly rate covers additional employment costs such as social security, L&I, etc. Mike stated that is all inclusive in the hourly rate.

Mike explained that there is not a provision in the budget to cover these costs and it is a council directive that each department will need to absorb and recover costs on items such as this.

There are two considerations being explored to recover/absorb the increase to the internal budget. One is that additional staff will provide increased access for public rental which will increase revenue. The second is to increase the rental fee by two hours, one hour before the event and one hour after the event.

This fee increase may impact some of the very small groups but there are numerous, more affordable locations available in the county such as the libraries, City of Bellingham Parks and various community centers which have a large variety of costs. We are currently on the lower end of rental fees in the county and the increase will most likely place us on the middle to upper end, at least initially.

Staff coverage for Special Events has also become an issue, especially with the larger, more commercial events that require a great deal staff time to provide both administrative and onsite support.

Larger athletic event such as Muds to Suds and Ski to Sea require additional on-site staff time for mowing the fields, laying out jumps, climbs and courses as well as pre and post event inspections for site damage. The extra-help position could assist in these instances.

Administratively, the application process requires approval of events, sites and courses. When an event is open to the public there are extra permits, insurance requirements and liability waivers that must be obtained from the event coordinator requiring added support from administrative staff.

If there is equipment such as bounce houses or dunk tanks at the event these items must be inspected, licensed and the provider must show insurance coverage during equipment operation. These also require licensed installers and electricians to verify the connections and safe operation of the equipment.

We are currently looking at software program that will allow on-line reservations. This will be a great time saver and convenience for the applicants as well as Park staff. We are also proposing a \$25-\$50 application fee per event to help cover administrative costs.

Mike will be submitting a proposal to the County Executive for approval prior to the 2014 scheduling season.

C. Bellingham Senior Activity Center (BSAC) –

1. BSAC Phone System – In June 2014 the County will be updating the phone system. At that time the fiber optic switch that serves BSAC will no longer be used which will require them to update their system and find another phone vendor. This is timely as their current system has reached the end of its life and would require approximately \$23,000.00 in equipment to remain status quo. They are being encouraged to look at a business plan through a vendor that would be less expensive and still meet their needs.

2. Membership – The Council on Aging (COA) has begun to experiment with providing activities on Saturdays and evenings to order increase membership at BSAC. With increased use of facilities the cost of utilities will increase accordingly. A budget supplemental has been submitted for an additional \$6,000.00 to cover the increase but if the appropriation of funds is not approved by Council these costs may need to be passed on to COA at some point.

The utility costs will be monitored through the end of the year on a trial basis to determine if the increase is significant enough to do the budget adjustment or remain relatively the same so as not to impact COA as they have experienced declining support on a federal level.

Many of our senior centers are experiencing the same decline in membership and a change in the demographics of participating members. This is due to a change in attitude by seniors and a desire to extend programming beyond the morning coffee socials, cards, pool and meals, etc. Members are showing more of an interest in trips or hikes and sporting events, activities that engage them more physically. This change is forcing centers to review their old model of operation and consider program changes.

There was a discussion on how centers determine which activities they will provide. Mike explained that each center has a board of directors that is comprised of members. It is these boards that determine which activities best meet the needs of the particular center.

There was additional discussion on how the centers attract their membership and advertise their events and the possible need to increased publicity.

Mike explained that each center has its own needs and each does an excellent job in meeting member needs. Where the problem lies is as memberships decline due to attrition how does a center begin to attract new membership in a changing demographic landscape. The centers are all working individually and together to study nationally successful models for increasing membership.

Mike encouraged the Commission to go on the website for each center and view their activities and events.

V. PARK OPERATIONS REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE

A. Light House Marine Park and Plantation Range Parking Lot Repairs/Asphalt Projects – Mike reported that these two projects will be completed in the next two weeks. The Range will be to be closed for one to two days while the equipment is on site.

B. Bellingham and Ferndale Senior Centers Alarm Systems – The most recent bid for the replacement of the current alarm systems in these facilities all came in over budget. The bids will be split into two projects and re-bid individually. If the bids received are still

over budget it has been decided to address the Bellingham Center first and Ferndale at a later date.

VI. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT REPORT – RODNEY LAMB

A. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock Renovation – HB Hansen has mobilized on site and started upland improvements. Pile driving has been postponed until July 2014 due to scheduling conflicts with the sub-contractor. HB will complete the upland improvements by November 2013. The new boarding float will be constructed over the winter and be delivered to the site next spring. The project will be completed by August 1, 2014.

B. Hovander River Trail – Whatcom Builder's sub-contractor Stremmer continues work on the trail. The trail base course is nearly complete and the final surfacing will be placed in the next week. The project will be completed by November 1st.

There was discussion regarding the construction, drainage and materials used and the fact that the cost of this trail has been reduced by the use of some recycled materials. It was discussed that the materials used on this multi-use trail are much more conducive to walking, running and bicycling.

It was asked if this would be a good location for memorial benches. Mike stated that because of the potential water flow in this area during flood season there would be no permanent structures installed. In areas where flooding is not an issue, the trail width would leave no room for benches.

C. Samish Boat Dock and Fishing Platform Project – The Samish Dock replacement project was completed on October 11th. Rod provided pictures of before and after the new dock was in place. He stated that the Park maintenance staff did an amazing job and that the dock has already proved to be very popular with the public.

D. Lookout Mountain Trailhead – Construction is complete. The crew will relocate the main entry gate, install signage and re-route a trail to the parking area over the next few weeks.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (CPROSP) Update – Mike stated that he did not receive any comments on the Plan's Goals and Objective per his request for input at the 9/19/13 Commission Meeting. He stated that this would indicate the report contents were acceptable to the Commission.

Mike provided copies of the updated Demand & Need Analysis for Commission review. He discussed points of interest for each topic, fielded questions from the Commission members and requested that the Commission review the report and provide input in terms of any considerations that may have been missed. He stated that emails sent individually is acceptable and if possible within the next two weeks.

Gordon called for additional questions or Old Business items for discussion. There were neither.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Bay to Baker Connection – Everson – Janet Boyhan stated that it is her understanding that there are three parcels that are owned by the Burlington Northern

Railroad that could possibly be available for acquisition. She stated that if acquired it would provide a connection in the Everson area to the Bay to Baker and Nooksack Trail. She checked the County Assessor's web site and in round numbers the three parcels are approximately 18 acres with a market value of \$108,000.00.

There was discussion to clarify location, connectivity and partnerships vs. individual entity acquisition.

After a great deal of discussion it was the consensus that Gordon would write a letter to Executive Louws stating that acquisition of the said property is recommended by the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission. The letter will be shared with Commission members for input via email prior to forwarding it to Executive Louws.

IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. NEXT MEETING: Thursday, November 21, 2013, 6:00 PM. The meeting will be held at the VanZandt Community Hall.

Mike stated that he would not be at the next meeting. Ken Kiesner also stated that he would be absent. It was suggested that Parks Administrative staff contact each Commission member prior to the meeting to establish whether or not a quorum would be present and if not, cancel the meeting.

A quorum consists of two-thirds majority or five Commission members.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Since there was no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:05 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director