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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
Special County Council

February 7, 2006

Council Chair Laurie Caskey-Schreiber called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. in the Council Chambers, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Present:

Barbara Brenner
Dan McShane
Sam Crawford
Seth Fleetwood
Carl Weimer
L. Ward Nelson

Absent:

None

1. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE COMPREHENSIVE PARKS AND RECREATION OPEN SPACE PLAN (AB2005-201)

Mike McFarlane, Parks and Recreation Department Director, stated this is an update of where they are at in the planning process. They have had meetings with the steering committee. They are revising the parks inventory. There are concurrent projects to reassess the need for some properties. They are working on trail easements and other areas they will need to acquire in the future.

They are in the draft planning stage. The steering committee is working on goals and objectives. The Parks Commission will meet to deal with various park proposals. They will review the original plan for undeveloped parks when those parks were originally purchased. They have tried to deal with environmental and other restrictions that have occurred over the years on properties that have not been developed. They will schedule out a plan for development that fits into the six year capital improvement plan.

There was a work session with the Planning Commission a week ago. They will post the first final draft on the website for discussion with the public when it is done. There will be meetings with the public. They will also discuss with the draft plan with the Public Works Department and Planning Department, which have been heavily involved in the process.

Tom Beckwith, Beckwith Consulting, submitted the Whatcom County Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan dated 17 January 2006 (*on file, exhibit A*). The first six chapters will be what the public will use the most. They talk about the purpose, goals, planned proposals, and financing. They moved the discussion of environmental facts, inventory, opportunities, demand projections, finance projections, and public opinion into the appendices. They are still editing the draft plan. The group meets every two weeks until it is done with the editing.

He submitted the survey completions (*on file, exhibit B*). He reviewed draft and methodology of the survey with the Council, but not the results. The actual statistical results are on the front page. He submitted Appendix F: Public Opinion (*on file, exhibit C*). They sampled registered voter households, not the population at large. They mailed 600 surveys, then called until they got 300 responses. All 600 then sent in their written survey responses. The respondents tend to be most motivated, a little older and more established,

1 and those with strong opinions one way or another about parks. The middle ground is
2 under-represented. He read the results.

3
4 Brenner stated there is a high percentage of Bellingham respondents. She asked if
5 people were clear about the difference between Bellingham's park facilities and Whatcom
6 County's facilities. Beckwith stated the survey tried to be clear, but some people may not
7 know what program they are using. Bellingham facilities are included in the countywide
8 survey.

9
10 The survey asked the participants to rank recreational programs in priority sequence.
11 The highest recreational programs was rental of campsites and cabins. He read the list of
12 priorities on page F-2 of the handout. The high-ranked programs aren't difficult programs
13 to provide. The lowest-ranked priorities are family excursions with the County.

14
15 Crawford stated his interpretation of the results is that people want to be able to
16 spontaneously use facilities. Beckwith agreed.

17
18 Regarding program costs, the number one item was to charge user fees for non-
19 residents. He read the list of program cost options in priority sequence.

20
21 Crawford stated Washington Park in Anacortes is a prime example of resident
22 benefits. There is logic to giving priority to folks who pay through their taxes.

23
24 Beckwith stated multi-use parks are typically national parks, but there will not be
25 any more national parks created. As those areas become stressed, the local residents can't
26 depend on them any more. There is a sense of protectionism from the citizens. They want
27 the facilities built locally to be for the local residents.

28
29 The existing facility inventory was rated in terms of quality and quantity. Both
30 received high marks.

31
32 Facility projects in general were rated from low to high. He read the list of generic
33 project proposals in priority sequence. The top five are some kind of conservancies. There
34 is a clear concern about protecting the environment. The next six are facilities and age-
35 based activities. Those don't usually receive high numbers. A higher priority is unique to
36 Whatcom County. Youth, teen, and senior centers are important to the community.

37
38 Brenner stated it seems unusual that youth and teen sports aren't important.
39 Beckwith stated league sports are a very heavily used youth-oriented activity. They don't
40 engage all youth or youth during the off-times. It's the same users that use the activity all
41 the time. There is a large, untapped group of people who don't use the programs.

42
43 Nelson stated 60 percent of those polled are over 50. Beckwith stated he agreed.
44 There is a blended mix of proposals. Generically, they want to conserve the environment
45 and protect youth and senior centers. That's the message. He read the list of the items
46 that ranked low. Most are facilities used only by special interest groups. Don't pay for
47 those items with general taxes. Charge user fees.

48
49 Brenner asked if the Boys and Girls Club activities are included in the survey.
50 Beckwith stated they are not.

51
52 He read the list of high ranking specific project proposals on appendix page F-4 and
53 the list of low ranking specific projects. Enterprise facilities didn't sell well. The county is

1 conservative when it comes to joint ventures and private players. Urban areas are more
2 comfortable with deal-making partnerships. Rural areas or less stressed urban areas aren't
3 as comfortable with partnerships. If it is going to happen, a project has to be vetted more
4 so everyone is comfortable.

5
6 Nelson asked about off-road mountain bike trails being a lower priority. He asked if
7 that is because the public perceives there is already an adequate number of trails or
8 because there is a lack of interest in those trails. Beckwith stated the results reflect user
9 interests and general priorities. When a mountain bike was listed for a multi-purpose trail,
10 it was ranked high. Single use off-road mountain bike tracks don't get a lot of marks. The
11 County has well developed that use.

12
13 Nelson stated the multi-purpose trail is ranked only two spots higher.

14
15 Caskey-Schreiber stated the participants didn't rank hiking trails highly.

16
17 Brenner stated the participants are an older population. Older people are more
18 inclined to hike than ride a bike.

19
20 Caskey-Schreiber stated the multi-use trails aren't easy to navigate. Calling out the
21 special areas cause people to separate their interests.

22
23 Beckwith stated the graphic in the handout includes only the multi-purpose trails.
24 When they did the single-use trails for uses such as hiking or horse riding, they duplicated
25 the multi-purpose trails. Multi-purpose trails that include hiking ranked high.

26
27 Brenner asked if the questions in the survey are questions asked of the participants.
28 She's surprised that the all-terrain vehicle (ATV) item scored low in the category of private
29 ATV parks. She asked if that means that people want ATV parks to be public or if people
30 don't want ATV parks at all. Beckwith stated 14 percent of people are saying they will
31 support the existing private ATV areas, but most people don't want public ATV facilities.

32
33 Beckwith read the roles and responsibilities on page F-6. There are two approaches
34 for facilities and programs. He read the ranked items under park facilities. The County's
35 role is to see that regional facilities are built and to be the local operator.

36
37 Caskey-Schreiber stated she hears from citizens that they don't like the County to be
38 landlords because it takes away from local businesses. Beckwith stated there is a lot of
39 skepticism about that in the abstract.

40
41 The public is okay with public and non-profit joint ventures and partner options, but
42 not for-profit joint ventures.

43
44 There are questions about whether the public would support revenue sharing with
45 other jurisdictions for regional park facilities and programs. The response was positive.

46
47 Caskey-Schreiber asked if it would be okay for the County to support a small town's
48 park development as long as it was marketed regionally. Beckwith stated there must be a
49 benefit for the region. If the County raises money for open space and trails across the
50 county, with a segment coming from the cities, then the cities will want to see a project that
51 benefits their region or money that benefits their facilities.

1 McShane asked if that is done through interlocal agreements. Beckwith stated this
2 plan needs to define what is regional, then determine the funding sources to implement the
3 regional trail.

4
5 Brenner stated Hovander Park is a County park inside the City of Ferndale. She
6 asked the kind of agreement there is with the City of Ferndale. McFarlane stated there is no
7 agreement with the City of Ferndale.

8
9 Beckwith stated there is a proposal to link Hovander Homestead Park and Pioneer
10 Park and create trails through both. That's a way to create regional assets. It would be a
11 regional project.

12
13 The mean amount of a levy the public would approve is \$79 per year, but the County
14 wouldn't ask that much. That's a pretty high amount.

15
16 When the survey asked about local facilities, such as Birch Bay or Kendall, it asked
17 about the creation of recreation service areas. The public response was a wash.

18
19 Nelson asked if two recreation service areas can generate fees for the same general
20 purpose area, if the two areas overlap. Beckwith stated the service areas are bound by the
21 language in the referendum. Both areas can collect a levy according to the language in the
22 referendum, but money can't be shifted back and forth between the two service areas.

23
24 The public was not sold on the idea of excise taxes or dedicated fees. He read
25 appendix page F-9 on optional dedicated fees and taxes, a general obligation bond option,
26 and population growth impact management options. The park value per new house is
27 valued at about \$2,000.

28
29 Brenner asked if there would be an increase from impact fees on new housing for
30 people who already live here. Beckwith stated a new house doesn't care who it sells to.
31 The presumption is that a new resident is in a new house. Get the fee because the new
32 house is adding to the population. New, additional houses are linked to additional demand,
33 so they acquire more facilities. The survey participants are comfortable with a new
34 development fee that pays a proportionate share, but not equal to 100 percent of the cost
35 of the new facilities.

36
37 In general, the survey participants are interested in impact fees and a countywide
38 approach using levies for countywide projects that are clearly identified and shared across
39 jurisdictions. They are interested in maintaining the environment with certain kinds of
40 amenities, such as hiking trails, and maintaining senior community center balances. Those
41 are the features that lead into the draft plan.

42
43 Caskey-Schreiber stated the City of Bellingham passed a park impact fee. She asked
44 if that is available to the County. Beckwith stated fees can only be charged by the
45 jurisdiction that uses them.

46
47 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape one, side A.)*

48
49 Beckwith stated impact fees can be harder for a county to impose than a city.

50
51 Caskey-Schreiber asked if the County can use impact fees from Birch Bay to build a
52 park there or to enhance current facilities. Beckwith stated impact fees have to be used on
53 something that increases capacity. The impact fees have to be obligated within six years.

1 Use them to buy land. Use other funds to develop the land. Buy land and put up a sign
2 that says "future park." Then, collect a levy to develop the park.
3

4 Caskey-Schreiber asked if they have to spend the fees in the area in which they are
5 collected. Beckwith stated there must be a nexus of benefit. If the fees distinguish
6 between regional and local, the fee can be split between regional and local projects.
7

8 Brenner asked if the County could collect impact fees countywide if they do a
9 countywide park district. She asked if the impact fees are collected only for unincorporated
10 areas. Beckwith stated that if there is a metropolitan park district, the County could charge
11 impact fees in a city. The County could charge a County impact fee for unincorporated
12 areas. For all over, then there would have to be a metro park. If the County wants to do a
13 levy for trails and open space, it can be a countywide levy for cities and unincorporated
14 areas. Impact fees are jurisdictional.
15

16 They are incorporating the survey results into the draft plan and financial strategies.
17 There will be much emphasis on hiking trails and environmental conservation.
18

19 He submitted the current proposed park properties (*on file, exhibit D*). The draft
20 plan talks about current projects. People have different ideas of the purpose of
21 undeveloped park areas. The handout includes regional properties. He went through and
22 assessed their conditions and potentials. As they look at each project, there are maps and
23 graphics and a list of possible improvements. Eventually, they will all have a graphic that
24 shows how an area can or can't be used and developed.
25

26 Fleetwood asked if the list is exhaustive. Beckwith stated the handout includes just
27 regional facilities. Some of the smaller facilities aren't included. These are conceptual, and
28 are not the result of a master plan or discussion with area property owners. This has to be
29 included in the plan so everyone is clear about the current inventory assets and plans of the
30 current inventory.
31

32 Weimer asked if there has been discussion of a metro park. He asked how someone
33 paying a local Greenways levy would be willing to fund a countywide levy. Beckwith stated
34 the issue with a metro park is how to absorb different levels of service within the area. A
35 countywide regional park is another option different from a metro park. The advantage to a
36 regional approach to Bellingham is Lake Whatcom and Chuckanut Mountain. People in the
37 city see those areas as their backyard parks, but the City doesn't control the areas and they
38 are not City parks. Nevertheless, the City includes those areas in their trail and open space
39 proposals. The County can protect those areas if they truly take a regional stance. A
40 disadvantage is that the public may not want to pay for another regional approach they
41 believe they are already taxed on.
42

43 Brenner asked if the metro park could absorb the Greenways levy. Beckwith stated
44 that if the County and City adopt a metro park area, everything in the county is included.
45 Existing elected officials would be the board. He will bring those options to the Council. It
46 is tricky to do politically. Pierce County and the City of Tacoma Park District is a prototype,
47 but they've never convinced the rest of the county to join the district.
48

49 Brenner asked who is the Northwest Park and Recreation District. McFarlane stated
50 the area is the Blaine School District, and includes Blaine and Birch Bay.
51

52 Brenner asked if the district was formed as a result of a ballot measure. Beckwith
53 stated it was, but they've never been able to pass any tax levies to fund anything.

1
2 The Council will see a more complete version of the draft plan when the committee is
3 done with editing.
4

5 McFarlane stated the draft plan includes areas planned for proposed acquisitions.
6 The conservation areas are not all in that exhaustive list of regional facilities. That is a park
7 list. However, there are a number of smaller conservation areas that aren't purposely set
8 aside for development and recreation, but have an important purpose and regional function.
9

10 Caskey-Schreiber asked if the plan will have a section that is a vision statement
11 resulting from the study, including projects on the horizon. McFarlane stated it will.
12

13 Caskey-Schreiber stated they have many opportunities for land acquisitions, and the
14 Council struggles with how it fits in the master plan and the County's priorities. Something
15 like a vision statement and list of future projects will help the Council make decisions.
16 McFarlane stated they are working on a master capital plan. They are doing the same thing
17 with prioritizing acquisitions based upon timing and opportunities, knowing they may need
18 to take advantage of certain opportunities.
19

20 Caskey-Schreiber stated they have done so much watershed purchasing that people
21 in other areas might complain if they continue to do more through a metro park district.
22
23

24 **OTHER ITEMS**
25

26 Caskey-Schreiber stated she was approached by County Executive Pete Kremen and
27 the Bellingham Bay Foundation, who want a public meeting to present their ideas on the
28 development of the Bellingham waterfront. She heard that the public comment period
29 would end February 16, but public comment can be made in March. She asked if the
30 Council is interested in joining the Bellingham City Council and Port Commissioners on
31 having a public hearing to hear visions for the waterfront.
32

33 ***The Council concurred.***
34

35 Crawford asked why it's County business, and if it's just informational.
36

37 Caskey-Schreiber stated it is County business. The City and Port have come to the
38 County in the past for money, and may in the future.
39

40 McShane stated there are County impacts to the use of the waterfront. It's a federal
41 waterway and a major shipping port for the county.
42

43 Weimer stated it's fine to hear from them. He wants to hear from all sides, including
44 the Bellingham Bay Foundation. The County has not been involved in this issue yet.
45

46 Caskey-Schreiber stated her intention is to give an opportunity for both sides to give
47 a presentation. There will have to be a public meeting. She will extend invitations to the
48 City Council and Port Commissioners.
49

50 Nelson asked if it is proper protocol for the County Council to facilitate this meeting.
51 He assumes the Port should facilitate the meeting, since it undertook the project.
52

1 Caskey-Schreiber stated she can ask Mr. Darling to facilitate something like this.
2 She will suggest dates.

3
4 McShane stated he believed Executive Kremen was thinking about scheduling a
5 meeting like this in March.

6
7 Caskey-Schreiber stated the tentative date is March 30.
8

9
10 **ADJOURN**

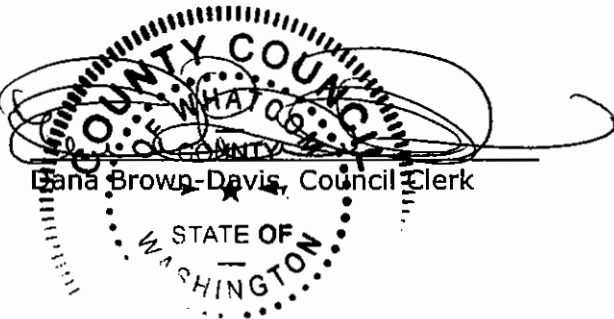
11 The meeting adjourned at 11:08 a.m.

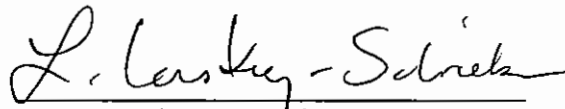
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16 Jill Nixon, Minutes Transcription

17
18 The Council approved these minutes on February 28, 2006.

19
20 ATTEST:

21 WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
22 WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

23
24
25 
26 Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk


Laurie Caskey-Schreiber, Council Chair