

**MEETING MINUTES  
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION  
Thursday, January 16, 2014**

**Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Administrative Office  
3373 Mount Baker Highway  
Bellingham, Washington**

**PRESENT: Commissioners: Paul Woodcock, Jeff Margolis, Janet Boyhan, Kenneth Kiesner, Richard Sturgill, Theresa Sygitowicz, Gordon Rogers**

**Staff: Michael McFarlane, Rodney Lamb, Darla Smith**

**ABSENT: None**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chair, Paul Woodcock at 6:30 PM.

**I. AGENDA**

**A. January 16, 2014 Agenda Approval**

Michael McFarlane asked that an addition be made to insert a staff presentation after Item II – Minutes Approval.

**MOTION:** It was moved by Jeff Margolis, seconded by Kenneth Kiesner and passed unanimously to approve the January 16, 2014 Agenda as modified.

**II. MINUTES**

**A. December 19, 2013 Minutes Approval**

**MOTION:** It was moved by Jeff Margolis, seconded by Gordon Rogers and passed unanimously to approved the December 19, 2013 Minutes and written.

**III. RESERVATION SOFTWARE CHANGE – DARLA SMITH**

Mike provided the Commission with the history and background leading up to changing our reservation software provider. He stated that over the years the current software has not proven to be as user friendly as we would like it to be and, the provider service to Park staff and the advertising options on the web site were found to be lacking.

In addition, the current software does not allow for the public to make online reservations for our campgrounds and cabin sites. This, in addition to the current connectivity problems at Silver Lake Parks and the archaic reservation systems at both Silver Lake Park and Lighthouse Marine Park also led to identifying and contracting with a different software vendor to better meet our needs in terms of staff efficiency and customer service.

Mike explained that Darla Smith, WCP&R Administrative Assistant, has spearheaded this project and will provide Commission members with an overview of the new product.

Darla provided the Commission Members with a handout that outlines the steps that were taken in the product selection process. She explained that any time there is a change in software systems many administrative factors need to be taken into account and that there is a need to partner with the County Information Technology Department to make sure the product will be compatible with the County system.

The first step in the process was to conduct a needs assessment to determine the various components and the individual challenges with each park that the software would need to support.

The second step in the process was to research software providers to determine if they could provide the administrative staff support in terms of accounting and reports while providing good, user friendly customer service to our public.

Several different software providers were contacted and compared to determine if their software could meet these needs. Some of the providers could provide part of the needs and others could provide other segments, but only if certain components were added to the software but would then not be able to meet other needs.

Out of the top five vendors that provided the greatest amount of coverage, the two vendors that were found to meet the greatest number of requirements were Recreation Dynamics and Itinio.

Recreation Dynamics was more expensive and geared for a larger facility with a greater activity load. Itinio is a smaller operation, that works under the name of Rev'd Up and is located in Phoenix, Arizona and was better suited to an agency our size and met our needs.

In addition, Itinio proved to be very responsive; they are excited to work with WCPR and that many of our needs had already been built into the software through their experiences with other recreation departments. It has also been determined that they have the ability to continue to build onto and grow their software as needs are identified.

A major consideration in the selection process was that Silver Lake Park has no high speed internet connectivity. Itinio software works with dial-up internet connectivity where many of the other software programs with other providers did not.

Additional considerations were system availability and rate of down/lag times. All of our reference checks with Itinio users revealed that this company experiences a very small rate of down/lag times and that the few incidents that did occur were not due to a company deficiency but were with the server that was being used and that when they did experience these problems they were able to solve them in a timely manner.

After selecting the software, meetings were held with County IT Department, Park Rangers, Management and Itinio to review the software to confirm that the software did meet all of our requirements and learn how other recreation departments have utilized their product.

The tentative timeline is to bring Lighthouse Marine Park live by March, Silver Lake Park by June, Plantation Range by September and then the shelters and day use facilities by the end of December.

Darla provided a slide show on the Tennessee State Park software program to get a visual on sight navigation for reservations, the various components of the process and discussed how this will be adapted to WCP&R's reservation process.

Mike commented on the amount of work that Darla has done in addition, to assure that the program will be compatible with County cash handling policies, compliant with the State Auditor requirements and to assure the security of the third party provider for credit card payments.

It was discussed that there will be a \$3.00 increase in the reservation fee to offset the costs of the system, the electronic funds transfer fee and technology upgrades. There was discussion on whether or not to break out the individual fees and it was decided that it would be much cleaner to keep those all inclusive in one fee.

In conclusion, Darla provided the Commission members with maps that show each park's layout. Highlighted were Lighthouse Marine Park and Silver Lake Park specifically showing the location of the campsites, restrooms and other public facilities, explaining that these maps will be used in the reservation system to assist the public when selecting a campsite.

#### **IV. PUBLIC INPUT/COMMUNICATIONS**

**A. Whatcom Land Trust Invitation** – An invitation was provided to Commission Members via email regarding the celebration of “The Great Whatcom County Reconveyance” that is being held on January 25<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM at Bloedel Donovan Park.

**B. Plantation Rifle Range** – Gordon stated that he and his son-in-law recently used the shooting facilities at Plantation Rifle Range and wanted to share what a wonderful experience it had been. The Lead Ranger, Jerry Warren and all the Range staff were very knowledgeable in terms of the operations and safety procedures and were extremely courteous and helpful. Gordon wanted it to be known that it was a pleasant day all around.

#### **V. & VI. DIRECTOR'S / OPERATIONS REPORT – MICHAEL MCFARLANE**

**A. Park Attendance – 2013** - Mike provided graphs for Commission members showing parks and trails attendance totals from 2004-2013 and discussed the following points.

**1. 2013** - 2013 has been a record setting year with 862,000 visitations throughout the park system. These totals do not include the senior center attendance numbers or consideration for all the uncounted visitors during times that a park/trail did not have attendance counters on site. This could easily account for an additional 50,000 to 100,000 visitors.

**2. Yearly Number Variations** - The number fluctuations throughout the years can be attributed to many factors such as a change in counting methods, reduced access due to maintenance projects on site or weather incidents resulting in park closures.

**3. Canyon Creek** - Efforts continue in order to establish an alternative access route to Canyon Creek. In 2008 when the road was open the attendance numbers showed that this is a popular trail, especially taking into account and these numbers only reflect half of the year.

**4. Trail Use** – Trail use remains relatively the same over the years. The one exception is Jensen Park which has seen an increase in use. This is a popular trail for walking because the trails are very flat and level. This trail, and others that are easily accessible and usable for older adults and disabled users will see an increase in trail promotion efforts in 2014.

Mike asked if there were any questions. The following park attendances and attendance fluctuations were discussed:

Roeder Home: The cause of the year to year attendance fluctuation was discussed. 2008 was the last year that funding was available for the activity programs, which included the winter arts and crafts show and made up the bulk of the higher attendance totals prior to 2006. The totals from 2009 to present reflect the actual public use and are consistent with previous year's totals when the discontinued activities are backed out. In 2004 and 2005 the attendance numbers were simply not being recorded.

Silver Lake Park: The attendance counter was relocated to capture a more accurate attendance count and there was a year when the counter was disabled for part of the summer season. Some years can fluctuate slightly due to weather reducing or increasing campground use.

The 2013 spike was due to a number of single public events being held at the park, each with an attendance of 5,000 or more participants. 2013 was also the year that the new playground was installed which has become quite popular, both locally and with visiting camping guests.

In conclusion, Mike discussed that attendance numbers are used to show general trends and when used as a general guide, is quite adequate.

The numbers are based on a compilation of monthly totals that are taken by counters and staff. The counters are 24/7 and show attendance at specific times of the day or night and over-all peaks and valleys.

These attendance totals will be included in the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan (CPROSP)

**B. Staff Position Vacancies** – Mike informed the Commission Members that WCP&R is actively recruiting for the recently vacated Operations Manager position. Erik Axelson left employment with Whatcom County in early January. Mike provided the Commission members with a job description and the recruitment brochure that is being advertised on the Whatcom County web site and with various national recreation organizations. It is also being distributed locally through various social networks. The goal is to fill the vacancy by March 2014. Commission members will be updated on recruitment progress.

The Plantation Rifle Range Lead Ranger position that was recently vacated through a staff retirement has been filled by Jerry Warren. Mike provided the Commission with a background on Jerry's lengthy career with WCP&R. He commented that Jerry has always provided excellent customer service and judgment in his previous assignments throughout our parks and is sure that he will continue to provide those attributes at the Range.

When Jerry accepted the Range Lead Ranger position it created an open Ranger position. This position is posted per union agreement, internally first and if there is not a qualified applicants identified in the internal process the position will then be advertised to the public. The goal is to fill that position as soon as possible to be able to provide adequate training prior to the busy season.

**C. Bay Horizon Park – Hostel Building** –Camp Horizon has expressed an interested in the hostel building. Their organization provides disabled youth and adult programs as well as various other youth programs. Negotiations are currently being conducted to update the current agreement which would include the payment of utilities and maintenance and

operations costs and would not require building rental fees. Once an agreement is reached between WCP&R and Camp Horizon the contract will be approved by Whatcom County Council prior to executing.

**D. Public Water Systems** – There are several water systems located throughout our parks that have certification requirements that are regulated by various different agencies such as the Whatcom County Health Department and the Department of Ecology and are continually changing. WCP&R is working to keep up with these certifications in order to complete the required paperwork and update the systems to meet these requirements.

## **VI. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT REPORT – ROD LAMB**

**A. 2013 Capital Projects Power Point Presentation** – Rod provided a slide presentation on and discussed the following completed 2013 Capital Projects.

**1. Lookout Mountain Trail Head and Restroom** – The design work for this project began in 2003 with the permitting/planning process. In 2011 a bid was accepted from Faber Construction. At that time council did not approve funding for the project and it was placed in “moth balls” for a few years. It was re-advertised for bid in 2013 and Faber Construction was again the low bid and awarded the contract and completed the project at the end of 2013.

Rod pointed out that because this location is within the watershed it required a more sophisticated storm water system that is made up of a manifold of underground drainpipe that the storm water infiltrates and cycles through a sand filter that cleans out all the phosphorus, heavy metal and oils and leaves the system as clean water.

There was discussion regarding costs of the building, the water and electrical hookup, the specific water pressure challenges and the resolution of these challenges.

**2. Silver Lake Park Playground** – The overly used, old playground was removed and replaced with a playground that was relatively the same as the one that was previously installed at Hovander Park. The tree fort style was selected because it is a great system, it was within the budget and the Park’s maintenance staff had previous experience with installation. It is also extremely popular with the user group – kids.

**3. Samish Dock** – This was a very complex project in terms of a permitting and construction standpoint. The dock manufacturer delivered the materials to Park’s headquarters that were then moved by Park maintenance to the site. The dock installation and all upland improvements were all completed by the Park maintenance staff.

The project was delayed in order to capture as much of the boat rental revenue as possible and not disturb public enjoyment of the park during the busy season. The project began in right after Labor Day and was finished by October 18<sup>th</sup> in order to complete the project prior to the HPA work window closing. The Park’s maintenance crews are very talented workers that have many varied skills and were able to complete the project inside this very small work window.

The old dock consisted of a great deal of foam material that presented a challenge in terms of capture and disposal. This was accomplished without any in or out of water loss and was disposed of along with all the other materials that could not be recycled or re-used.

There was discussion regarding the construction materials, warranties and dock maintenance requirements.

**4. Hovander River Walk** – The project was contracted to Whatcom Builders, who subcontracted with Stremler Gravel who complete the earth work. The contractors did an excellent job with the large amount of blackberry clearing and levy earth work. Fortunately the weather cooperated and was dry all through this phase of the project.

There are challenges with the vegetation in terms of germination. Due to weather delays the area was seeded late in the season and needs to be reseeded.

The trail construction is a recycled asphalt product and provides a mile and a quarter of excellent trail surface. It is the plan to add another two inches of surface material later in 2014.

**5. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock Renovation** – The contractor attempted to complete the pile work prior to the fish window closing but was not able to finish due to weather. In the mean time they were able to complete all the upland improvements and are now waiting for the water work window to open on July 15<sup>th</sup>.

## **B. Extra Projects**

**1. Mapping** – The extra help employee, Robbie Benson has been working on maps. His first task was to complete the maps that would be incorporated into the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan (CPROSP). These have been completed in a GIS program.

Rod and he are also working on completing a collection of base maps of all the WC Park facilities in one data source with the same graphic style. This will allow additions and overlays to be inserted at a later date with relatively little effort.

These maps will eventually show items such as park water systems, restroom capacity, campground layouts and many other park system features. These maps will be a valuable management tool.

Additional mapping projects included park kiosk interpretive panels.

The ultimate goal is to provide PDF versions of the maps online that can be downloaded and used by the public.

## **VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**A. Hand Drying Methods – Hygiene/Cost** – Mike reported that the current method that is used in many our park facilities and senior centers is the hot air dryers with some sites providing both dryers and toweling. It is common knowledge that this method is not quite as sanitary as toweling but in some instances much be used. Mike stated that costs will need to be revisited at a later date as the information can be compiled but is not readily available.

There was discussion that it would be interesting to have a cost/hygiene analysis for the parks. Mike stated that it would be hard to determine comparisons of the two systems as the analysis goes beyond the cost to run the dryers as opposed to providing only toweling. This is due to the fact that with waste baskets the risk of vandalism and fires must be considered, the disposal and labor, the purchase of garbage bags, etc. all make for a complicated formula.

It was discussed that in the senior centers there is a greater need for toweling as the restrooms are used for a variety of purposes but for convenience reasons they are also

equipped with air dryers. It was suggested to install a sanitary solution dispenser by the restroom doors to minimize the spread of organisms. This is a big concern due to the high risk population that frequents the centers.

Mike discussed that during the influenza and cold season, or if there has been a recent reported incident of MRSA, etc., there are cleaning protocols that are followed and recommended cleaning solutions that are used to kill organisms and/or minimize exposure.

There was further discussion regarding the effectiveness of toweling over air dryers both in terms of hygiene and cost, the Park's staff cleaning regimen and the challenges involved in being stewards of public restroom facilities.

There was discussion regarding the current influenza virus in terms of microbial life span, cleaning methods and the effectiveness of cleaning products.

Theresa stated that she recently talked to various physicians who suggested that the use of bleach water is the most effective cleaning solvent for the current influenza virus and suggested incorporating that into the cleaning regime. She also discussed that the effective and safe distance between a person and exposure to sneezes, coughs, etc., is three feet.

**B. Park Acquisition Priorities** – Per the 12/19/13 New Business Action Item; the Commission members provided the Potential Acquisitions (Park & Recreation Department 2014-2020) document that assigned a level of importance/priority to each property on the list.

There was also discussion regarding the various methods that members could use to rank the individual properties and the many factors that should be considered while navigating the process.

Also discussed was the final timeline for returning the Acquisition ranking form. Mike asked that they be returned by the middle or end of next week in order to be able to include the information in a Council report that he is preparing for the upcoming Council meeting.

After additional discussion regarding ranking definitions and method of compilation the following motion was made.

**MOTION:** It was moved by Gordon Rogers and seconded by Jeff Margolis to rank each property using a 6 number system with 1 being most important and 6 being least.

Paul called for discussion. After some discussion for clarification purposes, Paul called for a vote.

**The motion passed: 6 yeas, 0 nays and 1 abstention.**

**C. Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan (CPROSP)** – Mike provided an update on CPROSP progress. He stated that other than the before mentioned formatting issues and charges that need to be finalized the first draft of the plan will be moving forward for Council Approval.

Mike provided Commission members with a Department Work Plan/Master Capital Improvements list. He discussed there will be two projects added to list but otherwise is complete.

He pointed out that there are projects that are important but not scheduled yet on the Capital Improvements list for a variety of reasons. The projects selection is based on a 6 years needs projection, therefore a project may not currently need to be completed but as a building or park

ages the project will be need to be done or the project requires additional permitting considerations, etc.,.

Mike asked would the Commission members review the list and submit comments on either missing or omitted projects or any questions they may have regarding the listed projects. It was discussed that comments would need to be received as soon as possible as this will be included in the draft copy of the CPROSP.

Mike discussed that Park's staff will provide a briefing on the Comp Plan at the upcoming Planning Commission Meeting in order to include their input and questions into the CPROSP.

Mike reiterated that the CPROSP is an update of the 2008 plan, with improvements made to the visuals and graphics to provide for an easier to understand read, but that overall very little change was made due to the recent public surveys that supported the 2008 data.

The policies and goals from the County's Comprehensive plan have been incorporated, knowing that the Parks and Rec portion of the plan will be utilized in the updated County Plan. The overall goal is to complete the update by 2016.

Mike discussed the content and areas of interest that the Commission might consider when reviewing the Park's portion of the plan.

He stated that the Park's goals and objectives in producing the Comp Plan was to capture and prioritize every item that needed to be changed or included and was pleasantly surprised to discover that a thorough job had already been done to include these changes.

In conclusion, Mike discussed that when finalized, Council will be asked to approve the adoption of this Plan as a departmental planning document.

**D. Washington State Parks and Recreation – Larrabee State Park Long Term Stewardship Planning** – As follow-up to the December Action Item for this topic, Gordon stated that he provided Commission member contact information to WA State Parks and Recreation and was assured that each member would be added to their mailing list for future meetings.

## **VIII. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Parks and Recreation Policy on unauthorized campers and drug production sites in the Reconveyance area** – Theresa asked Mike to speak to Park policy regarding this issue.

Mike stated that is WCP&R policy to remain aggressive in terms of watching for and removing these types of incidents on Park property.

He pointed out that is Parks' staff is also proactive in assisting DNR with identifying the signs of activity and assisting in clean up after incidents that occur on their lands that adjoin Lake Whatcom Park. This is because DNR does not have the staffing or ability to monitor those lands and in many of these incidents the gate or portal where the public accessed DNR lands was off of Park lands.

WCP&R works collaboratively with the various user groups that frequent the trails and parks. This is an excellent avenue to get good information early on to allow for immediate response and resolution.

When these problems are discovered WCP&R works directly with the sheriff's department to assist with physical removal and law enforcement. The Sheriff's Department is aware of past problems and the need to remain vigilant for signs of developing problems.

By keeping these agencies informed and involved this creates an unattractive scenario for those involved in the illegal and transient activities.

Mike pointed out that his experience is that this issue has always been a problem, not only in the Reconveyance lands but all parks both City and County wide.

In conclusion Mike state that WCP&R will continue to be proactive in identifying and removing possible unauthorized transient campers and illegal drug activities.

## **IX ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**A. NEXT MEETING:** Thursday, February 20, 2014 6:00 PM. The first choice for meeting is the Plantation Rifle Range. Mike will need to check the Range schedule for any conflicting schedules. If there is a conflict for the Range the second choice is Samish Park Day Lodge.

## **X. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** It was moved, seconded and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director