

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, June 20, 2013

Silver Lake Park
Silver Lake Park Day Lodge
9006 Silver Lake Road
Maple Falls, WA

PRESENT: **Commissioners:** Jeffrey Margolis, Janet Boyhan, Paul Woodcock, Theresa Sygitowicz, Richard Sturgill
Late Arrival: Gordon Rogers
Staff: Michael McFarlane, Erik Axelson, Erika Miranda

ABSENT: **Commissioners:** Kenneth P. Kiesner

GUESTS: **Public**

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Commission Vice-Chair, Paul Woodcock at 6:00 PM.

- I. **AGENDA: June 20, 2013 Agenda.** It was moved, seconded and passed unanimously to approve the agenda as written. Abstained: Richard Sturgill.
- II. **MINUTES: May 16, 2013 Minutes Approval.** It was moved, seconded and passed unanimously to approve the minutes as written. Abstained: Richard Sturgill and Theresa Sygitowicz.
- III. **PUBLIC INPUT/COMMUNICATIONS:**

A. Laura Smith – Recreational use of the South Fork of the Nooksack River – The Chair recognized Laura Smith, public citizen. Laura stated that she represents the Raney family regarding this issue. She stated that it is understood that the County Executive has recognized and is addressing the issue. They are requesting that the community is kept informed regarding the communication and discussion of this issue.

B. Vander Yacht Park – The trimming of trees around the site for the upcoming installation of the memorial stone at Vander Yacht Memorial Park was discussed. Public Works staff is checking their work schedule to determine if they can complete the work prior to the event. If Public Works cannot complete the task prior to the event Whatcom County Parks will complete the work.

There was a brief discussion regarding the responsibility of Commission members in terms of conflict of interest. Theresa Sygitowicz referenced a document on the County web page that discusses the expectations of Board and Commission members. Mike asked if Theresa could send him that information to share with the Commission. She stated that she would. It was suggested that this should be a future Agenda topic and reviewed annually.

ACTION: Theresa Sygitowicz to provide above referenced materials to Mike McFarlane.

There was discussion regarding public announcements of the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan Visioning Sessions. There seemed to be a missed connection in public awareness for the Acme session as it was unattended and that this meeting should be rescheduled. It was suggested if anyone misses a session there are several upcoming sessions that could be attended.

Mike discussed the steps that are being taken to increase public awareness. Additional press releases of the full schedule were issued again today to many of the outlying local Community Centers and papers, and to the Bellingham Herald. There is also a full schedule on the Parks website. An announcement was made on KGMI and individual meeting information is being posted daily on Facebook.

Mike stated that he would email an updated copy of the full session schedule to the Commissioners and to feel free to share it in any way.

ACTION: Mike to email an updated copy of the full schedule of the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan Visioning Sessions to the Commissioners.

IV. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MICHAEL MCFARLANE:

A. Nessel Foundation – The Nessel Foundation approved funding in the amount of \$250,000.00 to remodel the Nessel home and outbuildings and \$15,000.00 for additional maintenance equipment. Once approved by Council, the work will begin, purchases will be made and the Foundation will reimburse the County.

The Foundation also donated a generator for farm use.

B. Lake Whatcom Reconveyance – The Department of Natural Resources will meet in Olympia on July 2nd. Mike will provide a presentation at that meeting.

The Reconveyance Growth Management Hearing will also be held on July 2nd.

The Commission will be updated as information becomes available.

C. East Whatcom Regional Resource Center – An amendment to the Opportunity Council contract was approved by Council. The amendment will allow the Opportunity Council to utilize Center rental fees from private rentals and the Head Start program to purchase amenities for the Center and provide additional programming.

D. Canyon Lake Community Forest and South Fork Access – Negotiations continue with the Department of Natural Resources for alternate access to this area. There have not been any new developments to date but as meetings occur updates will be shared with the Commission.

E. Back Country Horsemen – The Back Country Horsemen have committed to the construction of two miles of the North Summit Trail. This trail is part of the original Chuckanut Trails Master Plan. Once the permits are in order and the financing in place, construction will begin.

F. Lily Point Marine Park – The grant for the project has been closed. The total cost of the project was \$2,499,778.00. Rod Lamb was the project manager. The job was well managed and results are excellent.

V. OPERATIONS REPORT – ERIK AXELSON:

Erik provided the Commission with a copy of his Operations Report.

A. Special Events – In May and June Hovander Park hosted four major events: Civil War Education Days in early May; canoe-to-mountain bike transition for Ski to Sea on May 26th; Highland Games on June 1-2 and Cub Scout Day Camp this coming week.

It is thought that the Highland Games event was more heavily attended this year than last but final accounting is still being conducted. Accounting result will be shared with the Commission. Civil War Education attendance was over 600 students.

Upcoming Special Events include; Hovander Park Muds to Suds and Whatcom Skill Share Fair, Pt. Roberts Arts & Music Festival, and a cross bike event at Silver Lake Park (a fundraiser for Deming Public Library).

Several of the more popular trails provide locations for marathons and foot races that are hosted by various in-county and out-of-county running clubs.

B. Promoting County Parks – We are pursuing several avenues to market our parks and trails to increase the numbers of park users and revenue:

1. Event donor option – We negotiated with Muds to Suds the option to donate to Whatcom County Parks as part of their on-line registration process. It is anticipated that there will be over 3,000 participants at this 2-day event. Erik provided the Commission with a copy of the Muds to Suds web page. Whatcom Events is offering this donation option for the American Red Cross, as well as for Whatcom County Parks.

The option to offer this easy form of donations is being explored with other event sponsors, especially with trail event planners as their participants have expressed a high interest in supporting the parks and trails.

2. Pacific Northwest Camping Guidebook – Both Silver Lake Park and Lighthouse Marine Park will be featured in the upcoming 2014 edition. This guide has a large circulation and covers camping venues throughout Washington and Oregon.

3. Official County Parks Facebook Page – The County Parks Facebook page is now live. This will provide a media outlet that will help promote parks and trails to a wider audience.

C. Silver Lake Park – The Park hosted a one-day film shoot for a Chevy Silverado truck commercial. The Silver Lake Park staff worked together to host the film crew, which generated over \$1,400.00 in fees to County Parks.

The Canada geese resident flock continues to grow. USDA Wildlife Services surveyed the flock earlier this month and reported that it now numbers over 200 birds. Efforts are being made to implement a volunteer herding dog program to discourage birds in the picnic areas, the docks and beach. Work is also being completed to discourage geese from nesting in the

area by removing vegetation and by grooming the beach to restore it to a predominately sandy beach. Parks will continue efforts to discourage and monitor the geese population.

Cabin renovations are underway. Propane heating stoves will replace the outdated wall heaters in cabins 3, 4 and 7. In October maintenance staff will apply cosmetic siding upgrades to cabins 2, 5 and 6.

The Commission is scheduled to tour the recent renovations to the Overnight Lodge and view the current work in progress at the playground after the meeting.

Volunteer Campground Hosts are now in residence at Silver Lake Park and Lighthouse Marine Park. These are the first hosts in many years at Silver Lake Park. The agreement allows for 28 hours per week at Silver Lake Park and 20 hours per week at Lighthouse, for periods of 30 days. The hosts will provide assistance with camper check-ins, and routine cleaning and maintenance in the parks, in exchange for a complimentary RV camping site. The 30-day periods can be renewed for up to 90 days, a procedure similar to that of Washington State Parks.

D. Plantation Rifle Range – Patronage and revenue at the Range, especially the Pistol Range, remains strong with a current week's revenue of \$5,000.00. This is unusually high for June as use typically tapers off during the summer months.

E. Staffing – The 2013 hiring process for seasonal staff is complete. All staff is working at respective assigned parks and trails.

The gardener at the Fragrance Garden has been on site since early May. Due to the on-site gardener and the volunteer assistance from Lions Clubs the garden looks terrific. Commission members were encouraged to visit.

Erik opened the floor for questions.

There was some discussion regarding royalties, fees and charges for commercial filming. Erik explained that the park receives an established fee for the use of the park with a sliding scale fee based on park impact.

There was discussion regarding the event donor option and if the donation is tax deductible. Erik explained that the funds are collected by the event planner / organizer and remitted to a fund for Whatcom County Parks established at the Whatcom Parks and Recreation Foundation, a non-profit organization.

The Bay-to-Baker culvert repair was discussed. Erik explained that this repair has not been completed to date but is scheduled on the work calendar.

There was a request for clarification regarding the removal of the fecal matter that is left behind by the goose population at Silver Lake Park and the possible fines that could be incurred from the Department of Ecology as a result of poor water quality. Erik stated that he has not received any communications from the Department of Ecology but will research their standards for water quality and fines.

ACTION: Erik to research the Department of Ecology water quality standards and fines.

Erik explained that Parks is working with the Washington State Department of Health to develop protocols for monitoring water quality through testing at the public beach area, and may undertake a testing regimen.

VI. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT REPORT – Michael McFarlane:

A. Lookout Mountain Trailhead – The trailhead is currently under construction. The vault toilet has been ordered and will arrive in late August / early September. The area has been cleared by the contractor.

There is a change order in to the contractor regarding a section in the parking lot that had softer soils than expected.

A phosphorus filter is being installed under the parking lot that should result in a zero phosphorus level runoff. The filter information will be included in an interpretive panel for public information.

B. Hovander Trail Bid – The bid for this project has been released. Bids are expected to be received by July 4th for opening.

C. Silver Lake Park Playground – The project is expected to be completed in the next 10-14 days with a completion target prior to the July 4th holiday.

D. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock – It is expected that the bid request will be re-released. All bids submitted on the previous release were over the budgeted amount. One contractor was unable to bid at the time due to current projects constraints but is expected to submit a bid if it is re-released.

If all bids received after the re-bid are over budget the project may need to be reassessed as neither the State nor the County have additional funds available for this project.

E. Samish Park Dock Replacement – The components for the new dock have been delivered to Park Headquarters and will be installed after Labor Day.

Mike called for questions.

There was discussion regarding the disposal practices for old playground equipment. Mike explained when playground equipment is replaced it is usually out of compliance with required code and in such disrepair that there would be liability issues if donated or given away. The practice is to salvage and reuse as many parts as possible, and recycle or dispose of parts that cannot be reused.

There was discussion regarding the playground at Josh Vander Yacht Memorial Park in terms of using any of the playground equipment from Lighthouse Marine Park and if not, possible options for new equipment at that park.

Mike stated that the Lighthouse Marine Park playground structure would not be used at any other location because it is at the end of its lifespan. Parts of the structure may be recycled to enhance existing equipment at Lighthouse Marine Park.

Mike explained that if there is any expansion or installation of playground equipment at Vander Yacht Park there would first need to be an approved site design and the selected

equipment would have to meet the Consumer Product Safety Commission guidelines. Along with these guidelines, the site would need to provide an adequate fall zone.

On initial inspection, Mike stated that the current site may be able to accommodate such items as a climbing rock or a few spring toys but is a very limited site due to the existing curb that inhibits a safe fall zone.

It was also discussed that playground equipment is purchased through the Capital projects budget which has been approved through 2014. Parks would not be able to consider new playground projects until the 2015/16 budget was being developed.

There was some discussion on playground equipment prices and vendors. Mike stated that Rod Lamb could provide some help with this information based on past purchases. There are also catalogs available for loan at the Parks and Recreation Headquarters office.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

A. Discussion on the recreational use and management of the summer activities at the South Fork of the Nooksack River. Mike distributed email documents that were sent to him by Jeff Margolis regarding this topic.

Jeff stated that it was his understanding at this time that the issue has been address by County Council and Executive Louws and would like to table discussion until a later date.

Mike stated that he would like to clarify the Council / Executive decision.

The Council has asked the Executive to research this issue as a result of the number of concerns that were outlined by the Sheriff's Department both in terms of the department and local residents. The Sheriff's Department would need to hire more deputies to increase enforcement in the area.

The Executive did not ask County Departments to manage tubing.

The County Executive is going to research the issue in terms of the County's involvement in the area. Involvement may be very limited as the only county owned property in the Acme area is a stretch of flood property that is owned by Public Works but is on the opposite side of the bridge from the river rafting access area. There is no other County owned property in the area of discussion.

The riverbed and river bars are the jurisdiction of Washington State through the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Highway 9 is also State property and the pullouts are on the State right-of-way. The remainder of the area is private property.

The Parks Department does not have enforcement authority or the law enforcement credentials required to provide enforcement on State lands. Unless the Executive and Council decide to pursue the purchase of an access site in that location the Parks Department involvement is non-existent.

Mike went on to discuss that there are a number of issues that the executive and administration need to lay out and discuss with the agencies and individuals who actually have jurisdiction over or own property in the area.

Identifying what the County can and cannot do in terms of resolution is in the very early stages of discussion. It has not been determined yet who will be involved in these discussion or what the solutions are.

Mike stated that the Commission will be updated as the issue moves forward.

B. Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (CPROSP) – Mike provided the Commission with a copy of the on-line survey. He also invited the Commission to review the survey on the Parks and Recreation web site.

The random phone survey qualifying will begin this evening. It is anticipated that 300-400 calls will be made to contact 200 individuals in the County who will complete the survey.

The survey questions in both surveys are the same. The phone survey results will be kept separate from the on-line survey results in order to provide a comparison between the two surveys. The random phone survey will give a better cross section of the county whereas the online survey can be completed by anyone who accesses it from the Parks' web page.

There was some concern expressed about the length of the survey. The questions were kept the same on both surveys to insure that the public would be able to weigh in on all issues whether they took the survey on-line or were involved in the random telephone survey.

There was discussion that the City of Everson was not included on the survey regions. Mike explained that it was the intention to break the County into sections with Everson included in the Nooksack / Sumas area.

The random survey will give a cross section in terms of public opinion on funding, general priorities, etc.

There are sections of the survey that address the public perceptions of resources within the county as the survey discusses all the county resources, not just Whatcom County Parks. This will provide a comparison for the State survey that was done for this region.

It was discussed that the survey is available to anyone that visits the Parks and Recreation web site and could be completed by non-county residents. This is not considered a concern as there are non-county residents that regularly use our resources. The survey does have questions that ask if the participant uses Whatcom County parks and recreation and how many years they have lived in Whatcom County. It also discusses the participants' area of residence. These could offer the option to identify and screen these participants in order to separate results from in-county participants.

Mike stated that there was a good user-group turn-out in Bellingham. This meeting was designed specifically for the Friends organizations, user groups and various clubs and organizations that we currently have leases and agreements with, to discuss the issues specific to them.

Mike discussed the public visioning sessions in terms of turn out, meeting content, future meeting locations and meeting promotion. It was suggested that meeting information could be posted at the local post offices, grocery stores, coffee shops, etc.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Budget Supplemental – Plantation Range – A budget supplement request was submitted for increased funds to provide additional hours at the Range. This has been approved by Council. Prior to using these funds the current budget must be expended and additional revenue generated to offset the operating costs incurred with increased hours.

The ventilation system at the Range was discussed in terms of replacement. Mike explained that because the Range is considered a facility and not a park, per se, it is not eligible to utilize REET II funds to replace the system. He stated that there could be some funds available through a Firearms & Archery Range State grant. If available, the grant applications would be accepted after the first of next year.

Other funding avenues are also being considered as the ventilation system will need to be replaced at some point. With continued maintenance and repair the system continues to provide the ventilation required to keep the air inside the range clear of lead. Without an air cleaning system indoor shooting could not occur.

IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

A. NEXT MEETING: Thursday, July 18, 2013, 6:00 PM. The meeting will be held at Semiahmoo Park A.P.A. Museum Building.

X. ADJOURNMENT: Since there was no further business the meeting was adjourned at 7:28 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director