

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

Samish Park
673 N. Lake Samish Drive
Bellingham, WA

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Paul Woodcock, Chair at 6:35 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Commissioners: Paul Woodcock, Richard Sturgill and Gordon Rogers, Janet Boyhan, Theresa Sygitowicz and Jeff Margolis

Staff: Mike McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rodney Lamb

GUESTS

Rud Browne, Councilmember, Whatcom County Council
Erin Osborn, Planner, Whatcom County Planning and Development Services. (PDS)

EXCUSED

Commissioners: Kenneth Kiesner

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS / COMMUNICATIONS

A. COMMENTS: The Chair recognized Daniel Probst, founder of Cascade Mountain Runners. Daniel discussed that Cascade Mountain Runners along with other trail user groups have developed conservation and recreation principles for the development of Lake Whatcom Park. These principles were shared as comments at the April, 2014 Reconveyance Planning Meeting.

Daniel provided a handout for the Commission, "Revival of the Toughest Race You've Never Heard Of" which discusses the recently run route of the historic 108 mile Mount Baker Marathon by himself and three other runners. This was done to provide support for reviving the marathon.

In addition to reviving the Mount Baker Marathon, the goal includes constructing a trail system from Bellingham to Baker, separate of the Bay to Baker Trail. Daniel discussed that construction has begun on Ridley Creek portion of the trail with the Forest Service. He stated that a work crew will be meeting this Sunday at 10:00 AM at the Ridley Creek trailhead.

There was a brief discussion regarding the route and connectivity of the trail.

B. COMMUNICATIONS:

1. 10/14/14 Memorandum from Erin Osborn, Whatcom County Planner. – See VIII. Unfinished Business, B. "Preserving a Way of Life" A Natural Heritage Plan for Whatcom County, Recommendation.

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Jeff Margolis commented that the Van Zandt Community Hall was recently been painted and additional landscaping completed to include rhododendrons and blueberry bushes.

Jeff also discussed that the radio station, frequency 102.5 has received its change of occupancy approval for the station to be located in the Community Hall. There will be a fundraiser on November 1st for the station.

V. AGENDA

A. OCTOBER 16, 2014 AGENDA APPROVAL

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers, seconded by Richard Sturgill and passed unanimously to approve the Agenda as written.

VI. MINUTES

A. JULY 17, 2014 MINUTES APPROVAL

MOTION: It was moved by Jeff Margolis, seconded by Janet Boyhan and passed unanimously by those present at the July meeting to approve the July 17, 2014 Minutes as written.

B. AUGUST 21, 2014 MINUTES APPROVAL

MOTION: It was moved by Jeff Margolis, seconded by Gordon Rogers and passed unanimously by those present at the August meeting to approve the August 21, 2014 Minutes with one typo correction to page 9, Item VIII, C to change The National Heritage Plan to The Natural Heritage Plan.

C. SEPTEMBER 18, 2014 MINUTES APPROVAL

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers, seconded by Richard Sturgill and passed unanimously by those present at the September meeting to approve the September 18, 2014 Minutes as written.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE

1. Capital Improvements / Levels of Service (LOS) – The Capital Improvement Project list and the LOS for parks and trails were presented at the September 25th Planning Commission meeting.

The Parks' request for changes in the LOS requirements for trails and activity centers was not approved. Mike discussed the alternatives that were proposed and submitted to Council by the Planning Commission and Council's reaction to the alternatives. The final result is that there were not any significant changes made to the comprehensive plan.

There will be a budget work session with the Council, next Thursday, October 23, 2014.

The Capital Improvement budget will be approved with the County budget in November.

2. Councilmember Brenner's request for reduced rental rates for public school events – Mike discussed the request with County Executive Louws. Because there is a cost for all events held in County parks the Executive is not proposing any reduced rate at this time.

Mike discussed the costs to staff maintenance required in the parks during events of any kind.

3. Senior Centers Proposal – Councilmember Brenner commented on proposing to move the Senior Centers from the Parks Department to the Health Department. This was brought forward by Councilmember Brenner at the last Council work session.

The Parks' Department currently has third party contracts with providers at four of the smaller centers but the Parks' main involvement is the maintenance to the buildings. The Health Department is not in a position to provide facilities maintenance. A possible solution would be to shift the maintenance responsibilities to the County's Facility Maintenance Department.

This has been examined as a possibility some years ago in a brief conversation with the Health Department. At that time there did not seem to be a clear benefit to making the shift. Mike discussed that even though there are some relationships with the Health Department's services and the seniors the primary function of the centers is to provide activities and the majority of the social services that are provided by the Health Department would not be useful to the majority of the seniors.

There was also an issue with the Health Department providing physical space to house the program.

Mike stated that this will most likely be a topic that will come up for discussion at the budget meeting.

4. Property Acquisition Proposals for Council Approval / October, 2014 – Mike spoke to each of the below properties in terms of acquisition size, price, use and development plans and acquisition time-frame.

- a. Birch Bay Property
- b. Maple Falls School Site

Mike also discussed the Galbraith Mountain acquisition efforts. He stated that the acquisition will be extremely complex. There is currently no firm proposal for Council but staff is working with the property owner and other interested parties to develop one.

5. Nooksack River Salmon Enhancement Project – The Department has been notified that the Nooksack Tribe received a Salmon Enhancement grant to complete Phase II of the Enhancement Project. This will include the addition of woody debris on the shoreline, downstream from Hutchison Creek.

This activity is not happening on Parks' property, but because one of our land parcels extends into the river and because this is in-water work, each owner needed to provide consent to allow the work to move forward.

6. Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) Clearing Activities and Easements - The Department continues to work with BPA on the road upgrade proposal in the Reconveyance area.

BPA is in the process of developing a management plan to clear the vegetation under their power lines from the border south and improve roads. BPA is in the early stages of working with the owners on easements and updating their information.

There was some discussion on public use and restrictions of easements, the route of this particular easement and some of the issues that will affect the Reconveyance during clearing activities.

B. OPERATIONS REPORT – CHRIST THOMSEN

1. Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) FARR Grant – Christ provided the Commission with the Firearms and Archery Range Recreation Program Application Project Summary. Staff presented the grant application in late September to the RCO with good results, currently showing WCP&R in third position for funding. In June, 2015 RCO staff presents the ranked list to their funding board for approval and funding. It is anticipated that results will be released in July, 2015.

There was some discussion regarding the possibility of re-opening the archery range and whether or not there has been any recent public demand for an archery range. Mike stated that there is the capability at the Plantation Range but not the public demand.

2. Staffing

a. Conservation and Parks Steward Position – The Conservation & Parks Steward job announcement was shared with the Commission for review.

Internal recruitment efforts have been completed. There was one qualified candidate that decided to remove themselves from the list. There were no other candidates that met the minimum position qualifications.

The job description was released to the County website for external recruitment, will be shared at the upcoming State Trails Conference taking place this weekend and released nationally.

There was some discussion regarding the job qualification and requirements.

b. Temporary Extra-Help Recruitment – Interviews were held and three candidates were offered positions, accepted and will begin working next week. There is one position in the Northwest Region and two positions in maintenance. The maintenance positions will focus on projects such as improvement to areas of public contact such as refurbishing picnic tables, painting bathrooms and other high visibility areas that need sprucing up.

There was a suggestion to explore the use of the Americorp system in the parks.

There was discussion on recruitment and hiring practices and the possibility that an extra-help position will be added in the Reconveyance area to assist with storm damage on the roads and trails.

c. Nessel Caretaker Position – As a result of the recent resignation of the Nessel Caretaker, the Department is recruiting a replacement for that position. Two applications have been received and one of the applications presents a qualified candidate. A final site visit will be conducted and if agreeable to all, a position will be offered.

3. Projects

a. Hovander Walkway – Christ discussed that Rod Lamb is the acting project manager and has completed the design work and that he is managing materials and resources to complete the project.

Excavation work has been completed and concrete work will begin tomorrow. The walkway will provide increase ADA access to the river trail.

b. Parks Fall Clean-up / Winterization – The maintenance staff is gearing up to winterize the trails, facilities and operating systems within the park and cleaning up leaves and woody debris after and in between storms.

4. Revenue – Revenue reports are favorable for meeting budget revenue projections for the year.

Residential rental properties present a challenge as the rental rates were not raised this year.

5. Incidents

a. Injuries - There were four minor employee injuries last month, requiring only minimal on-site first aid.

b. Theft - This month saw an additional equipment theft. An individual or individuals stole a set of lift forks out of a truck bed at Silver Lake Park. The equipment is valued at approximately \$1,000.00. This brings the total loss to theft for the season to \$3,000.00 - \$3,500.00. The Department is making a concerted effort to secure all equipment storage areas and lock all unattended equipment inside their vehicles.

C. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT REPORT – ROD LAMB

1. Lighthouse Dock Renovation – On September 26th a biologist was on-site to perform the surf smelt survey. Results showed surf smelt present but reported that the area would be cleared of fish in approximately two weeks. This puts the timeframe around October 12th and the in-water work window closes October 14th.

The in-water work window was dictated by the Army Corps of Engineers. Rod contacted them and they requested that we provide additional documentation from the biologist that there would not be any free foraging fish present and could therefore allow the work to be completed after the in-water work window is closed. The biologist provided the additional information which was forwarded to the Corps, who forwarded it to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). NOAA agreed with the biologist but wanted input from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Rod contacted WDFW who also conferred with the biologist and stated that they would provide this information to the Corps. Rod called the Corps but they had not yet received the information.

Rod stated that he is fairly confident that the in-water work window will be extended until January 31, 2015. Prior to installing the piles the biologist will be required to clear the site again. This will allow seven days from the date the site was cleared to install the piles.

Rod stated that the delay has caused additional challenges. The tides during this time of year are much different than in July. The tides are higher by between five to eight feet and will require different pieces of equipment to install the last two piles. This equipment was not

anticipated by either the Department or the contractor and so it was not included in the bid documents and therefore may require a \$12,000.00 change order.

Rod discussed that the job could be done with either a crane or barge. Either option will require approximately the same amount of funds. If a barge is used the weather conditions will have an impact on when it can be used so the Department is leaning toward using a crane, considering the weather this time of the year. The challenge with a crane is the border requirements to transport the equipment into Canada. The restroom at Lily Point required equipment transport over the border and the Department was successful with the transport of the equipment required for that job. Rod is checking for any changes or additions in the border requirements.

In order to procure the additional funds Rod contacted the RCO and they have agreed provide all but a 25% match which the Department will be able to fund, for a total of \$16,000.00. Rod did not anticipate needing this full amount.

Rod will update the Commission at the November meeting.

2. Hovander Picnic Shelter Driveway Relocation – This project is complete. Rod discussed that now the vehicle and pedestrian accesses are completely separate.

3. South Fork Park – The engineer is finalizing grading, drainage and paving plans. Additional survey work was needed in some areas to finalize the design.

Rod discussed the meeting that Mike had with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regarding an easement over the DNR property that separates Galbraith Farm from the Overby Farm. They have agreed to grant an easement for the trail but it would have to be located off of any existing logging roads.

The Department has contracted with South Fork Construction, Co. to reflag, GPS and produce exhibits on the route and provide the information to DNR to finalize the easement. This work will begin in approximately two weeks.

Rod provided a map of the South Fork Park Proposed Trail Easement for Commission review and discussed the route. Rod explained that this map does not show the entire trail system, only the trails from Galbraith to Overby Farms.

4. Nessel Farm Building Restoration – The building permit has been issued. Bid documents need to be finalized and published for bid.

5. Silver Lake Road & Electrical Improvements – County Council approved the consultant contract with Pacific Survey and Engineering (PSE) to provide topographic surveys of approximately 80% of the park. This will be beneficial for not only this project but for future projects.

Once the survey is complete the Department will do a park assessment in terms of the condition of the water, electric and road systems. Plan improvements will be developed that will be implemented over a number of years. A cost analysis will be completed and the project will be broken up into phases to prevent unnecessary or repeated land disturbance.

Once the initial phase is identified construction on phase one will begin in 2015/2016 for in-ground improvements.

6. Staffing – Two Special Projects extra-help positions have been filled. One individual is a recent Washington State University graduate who will begin preliminary drawings for the fish

butchering equipment shelter at Semiahmoo. Rod provided the preliminary drawings of the shelter for Commission review. He has also contacted the City of Blaine regarding permitting/construction requirements.

There was a brief discussion regarding the patent name "The Iron Chink" that was assigned at the time it was patented and could now be construed by some to be ethnically offensive. There were suggestions to change the Department's reference to the equipment to the name of the inventor or to contact an ethnically represented organization to obtain indemnification and make note in the exhibit descriptive language.

The second person hired has worked in the Grand Canyon, volunteered for the North Cascades and has extensive work in GIS experience and analysis, particularly with land management and parks.

7. Reconveyance Planning – The new Special Projects employees will be key in moving forward on the Reconveyance planning efforts and catching up on stalled work created by the resignation of the previous Special Projects employee.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. "Preserving a Way of Life" A Natural Heritage Plan for Whatcom County – Paul discussed that because of the objections regarding the decision that was made at the July, 2014 meeting it was decided at the September, 2014 meeting to place the item on the October, 2014 agenda for discussion.

Paul discussed that under Sturgis Rules of Order the July, 2014 motion is valid because even though there was one abstention, an abstention is considered a vote and therefore quorum was met, but because it was a vote in minority of the commission it was the consensus of those present at the September meeting to revisit the issue.

Paul reviewed the task assigned to the Commission by PDS to provide input or Formal Recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Commission regarding whether or not the Heritage Plan should be included in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan (WCCP).

Paul asked if Gordon would like to speak to his objections. Gordon asked if Erin could speak to the extent to which the Heritage Plan is currently a part of or not a part of the Comprehensive Plan and to clarify the request from PDS.

Erin provided a Memorandum to the WCP&R Commission outlining the PDS Request, the Background and Purpose of the request, Recent Activity, Next Steps for the WCCP and General Discussion Topics for Commission and County Parks. Also provided was the PDS revision of Chapter 9 – Recreation, for Commission review.

She discussed that her questions are, what role the Heritage Plan serves to the WCCP, how should it be referenced and if it is still relevant as a guiding document. She suggested that if it is relevant then a section could be reserved for narrative text and a general description to summarize the important goals and values listed in the plan.

The chair recognized Theresa Sygitowicz. She stated that she feels the document is outdated and irrelevant to today's needs, that the pertinent information in the document has been applied, that it should be treated as any historical document and should not be incorporated into the WCCP.

The Chair recognized Jeff Margolis. He stated that the document does need some updating but was written by knowledgeable people, is relevant as a guiding document and provides a groundwork that should be preserved. He stated that the document has much to offer and the point can be made that it supports and informs without being a binding directive.

The Chair recognized Gordon Rogers. He agreed that the work is to be respected and was timely when it was written. His concern is that there were County Council and County Executive requests where never accomplished. Council requested that language regarding how to raise and organize funds to support the tenants was to be removed from the document and the County Executive issued a directive to assign a reviewer to assess the document for current appropriateness and provide periodic reviews for the same. Neither of these tasks has been completed.

Gordon stated that this document has had its time and even though it is fundamentally contributory to current needs, it is because many of the thoughts and ideas have been achieved or are part of the other plans that have been adopted.

Gordon suggested that if the document remains part of the WCCP it should be included as a background document and a source of information, as opposed to a reference document that could have more legal standing. A background document could be listed in an appendix or a designated page and / or called out as appropriate in each chapter.

The Chair recognized Erin. She provided the Commission with the background of her assignment. That the goal for the next few years is to review the WCCP for outdated portions and flag those to be reformulated or deleted.

In Chapter 9 – Recreation her question to the WCP&R Commission is whether or not the Heritage Plan, the Nooksack General Plan and the Bicycle Plan should be incorporated by reference or deleted from the WCCP.

She discussed the background of the plans and read the new proposed language for the WCCP regarding these plans. The new language recognizes that these Plans are referenced in the Comprehensive Park and Recreation Open Space Plan (CPROS), all as background documents.

She stated that PDS is requesting a formal recommendation from the WCP&R Commission how or if the Plans should be included in the WCCP.

Paul asked if there was any additional discussion.

Jeff stated that he would like to make sure that the Heritage Plan is referenced in the WCCP and get a coherent and firm vote on this matter. He stated that he is willing to make a compromise as long as the document remains as part of the body of WCCP for future generation's availability.

Erin suggested that the document should be reviewed by the WCP&R Commission to determine what goals have been adopted into the WCCP. This may be one way of preserving the document.

There was additional discussion regarding the goals and thoughts in the document and that if the document was referenced as background information it would not get lost to future generations.

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers and seconded by Theresa Sygitowicz and passed unanimously that the vote taken on the July 17, 2014 motion to “recommend retaining the document “Preserving A Way of Life”: A Natural Heritage Plan for Whatcom County as part of the County’s Comprehensive Plan.” is declared null and void.

Erin discussed that her memo to the WCP&R Commission requested that the Commission provide input or a formal recommendation regarding Chapter 9. To review and comment on the preliminary draft edit to Chapter 9 as well as input on the references to the Heritage, Nooksack and Bicycle plans as soon as possible.

MOTION: It was moved by Gordon Rogers and seconded by Theresa Sygitowicz and passed unanimously that all other issues for the November Agenda are held in abeyance in order to focus the entire meeting on a response to the PDS request.

Paul asked if this meets with Mike's agenda for the Commission. Mike stated that November is the budget meeting. The budget comes out tomorrow and will be available on-line, the work session will be next week and Mike stated he can provide the Commission with an update which could alleviate the need for much discussion.

The Commission thanked Erin for her time and the efforts that she afforded the WCCP-Chapter 9.

B. Trails Discussion – County Councilmember Rud Browne – Councilmember Browne spoke to the funding challenges for parks and trails and the possibility of employing supplemental funding methods through partnerships with private enterprise. He discussed how it would create an economic base that would tie the trails system into the local economy, reinforcing the value of the community and support for maintaining the parks and trails.

Councilmember Browne stated that he is very supportive of Whatcom County Parks and Trails. He also thanked the Commission for all the work that they do in support of the parks and trails and wanted to plant the seed of alternative funding to be considered during their parks and trails planning process.

There was discussion regarding how and where the revenue would be applied, whether to the general fund or to the Parks' budget. Councilmember Browne asked Mike to speak to this.

Mike stated that the City of Bellingham has successfully applied this alternative method for revenue at the Taylor dock location in Boulevard Park with Woods Coffee. If the Department supplied the location for the private enterprise to set up business it would be through an agreement whereby many options could be worked out. These could include rental income for the park or a facility maintenance agreement to maintain and/or make improvement to the building.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. There was no New Business for discussion

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. MOUNT BAKER FFA – Theresa announced that the Mt. Baker FFA is hosting a benefit fundraiser at the Log Show on November 15th. Theresa encouraged showing support by attending.

Theresa also noted that the Mt. Baker FFA has a national winner in the flora and fauna group and asked that the Department consider the possibility that they may be able to take advantage of their expertise in some way.

B. WCCP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES – Mike provided the Commission with a handout of the 2014 CPROSP Goals and Objectives that were adopted by the Commission earlier in the year.

C. NOVEMBER MEETING DATE, TIME AND LOCATION - The November 20, 2014, will be held at **5:30 PM** at the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Administrative Office, 3373 Mount Baker Highway, Bellingham, WA

XI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:03 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director