

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, January 21, 2021

Virtual Meeting

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Committee Vice Chair Sonja Max at 6:00 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Commissioners: Sonja Max, Brad VanderWerff, Pete Coy
Staff: Michael McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

EXCUSED

Commissioners: Richard Sturgill

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

None

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None

V. AGENDA

A. January 15, 2021

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the January 21, 2021 agenda as written. Brad VanderWerff seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VI. MINUTES

A. December 17, 2020

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the December 17, 2020 Minutes as written. Brad VanderWerff seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. Director's Report – Michael McFarlane

- i. Funding Assistance Requests** – WC Parks received a funding assistance request from the South Fork Valley Community Association because they are having difficulty paying utility costs and mandatory inspections with no revenue coming in. Mike is going to talk with the Deputy Director about the issue. WC Parks also received a financial

assistance request from the Whatcom Sports Commission for the Phillips 66 Soccer Park. Mike has reached out for clarification on what they are needing.

- ii. **Forest Management Plan** – WC Parks is embarking on the early stages of a Forest Management Plan for the forest lands around Lake Whatcom. This will begin with a request for proposals and then the hiring of a firm to bring all of the data together. This will be a long planning process and the Park Commission will be key in moving it forward.
- iii. **Park Commission Appointments** – The Park Commission appointments are going to the County Council on Tuesday, January 26th. Sonja Max and Pete Coy are being reappointed and all of the vacant positions have been filled. Mike will reach out to the new candidates to notify them of their appointments and the Executive’s Office will follow up with the applicants that were not selected. Elections of Chair and Vice Chair will be held next month.

B. Operations Report – Christ Thomsen

- i. **Seasonal Staff Recruitment** – Seasonal staff recruitment will begin in February. Christ is hopeful that the amount of positions to fill will be closer to a normal year than it was in 2020, where it was very minimal.
- ii. **Dittrich Park** –WC Parks staff removed a couple tons of debris and material from a residential rental unit in Dittrich Park that has been vacant for several years.
- iii. **Tomyhoi Cabin Remodel** – WC Parks staff began the remodel of the Tomyhoi cabin at Silver Lake Park. The remodel includes electrical and heating system upgrades, as well as cosmetic improvements.
- iv. **Weather Damage** – WC Parks staff have done a great job of clearing up windthrow from the recent high wind events. There was a landslide at about the 1.25-mile marker on the Hertz Trail that occurred sometime on the evening of January 19th or the morning of January 20th. The slide had very little mud and sediment and was predominately large boulders with a couple of large trees. Staff is assessing the slide and making plans for cleanup next week. Christ shared pictures of the slide.

C. Planning & Development Report – Rod Lamb

- i. **Silver Lake Park** – The contractor is making good progress on the shower and restroom facility at the Red Mountain Campground. The foundation and masonry work are complete and framing will begin on Monday, January 25th. There are a few items that have come up in the last couple of weeks that have increased the contractor’s cost and resulted in a contract amendment amounting to less than 1% of the cost of the contract. Substantial completion of the building is on schedule for late May with opening to the public in mid or early June. Entryway improvements are planned to allow for two-way traffic and illumination at

the campground entrance. Rod shared drone footage of construction progress. Design and development of the Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility is complete (Rod shared a diagram). The configuration is very similar to that of the Red Mountain facility with two buildings under a single roof. The men's restroom is in one building and the women's restroom is in the other. The buildings are separated by an open breezeway with exterior entrances to six unisex showers, two of which are family friendly and include a toilet and sink. The Maple Creek facility will be a little larger than the Red Mountain facility and located in close proximity to all of the newly renovated Maple Creek campsites. Construction will begin after the Red Mountain facility is completed.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

IX. NEW BUSINESS

- A. 2022 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan Initial Review: Policies Goals & Objectives** – Rod presented the existing goals and objectives for both the County's Comprehensive Plan and the Department's Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan. The Department's Comp Plan is being updated this year and the County's Comp Plan will be updated in 2023. The two plans are complimentary, but the departmental plan is more specific. Rod would like input from the commissioners on whether or not the goals and objectives are still pertinent and appropriate. Mike advised there will be new commissioners at the February commission meeting. He would like to review the plan then, so that a formal action can be recommended at the March meeting. The commission will need to decide if they want to go through the goals and objectives virtually or submit written edits to be dispersed and reviewed by everyone.
- B. 2021 Agricultural Licenses** – Christ shared a PowerPoint presentation of the properties being considered for 2021 RFP agricultural licenses. They include: Deming Eagle Homestead Park, Hovander Homestead Park, Silver Lake Park, Nugent's Corner, South Fork Park, and Sunset Farm Equestrian Park. Typically, these licenses are issued for one year with an option on four more years. If nobody bids on a property, then WC Parks staff maintain those fields (mowing, managing blackberries/fire hazards/etc.). Pete asked about extending the trail at Nugent's Corner River Access to the property bordering it; Mike believes WC River and Flood is already talking with the property owner regarding the purchase of this area.
- C. 2020 Parks & Trails Visitation** – Mike shared a graph showing Whatcom County Parks year end attendance, as 2020 was a banner year for park use. Park visitation was up 16.4% from 2019, with 1,263,138 visitors. There were 625,000 users on the trails, up 35% from 2019. Overall, 1,888,138 visitors used

the parks and trails, up 22.1% from 2019 (the average statewide increase for state and county parks use was 21%). 2021 is expected to see similar numbers in park use. Lighthouse Marine Park numbers were lower because the border was closed. The Plantation Rifle Range numbers were down because it was closed part of the year and then had restrictions when it was opened. These numbers will be posted to the website in the next several weeks. Mike will have Kristin mail the last three years of trail attendance logs to the commission.

D. 2021 “Healthy Washington – Roadmap to Recovery” – The Governor’s Office has issued a new reopening plan that consists of Phase 1 and Phase 2 (there isn’t a Phase 3 or 4, nor are they actively working on a Phase 3 or 4). All counties have been grouped into regions and each region begins in Phase 1. Whatcom County is grouped with Skagit, San Juan, and Island counties. Mike is expecting that the region will not move to Phase 2 until late spring or early summer. The US/Canadian Border remains closed and opening will be reassessed in February. It likely will remain closed, but if it opens, the campground will be opened at Lighthouse Marine Park in April. WC Parks is waiting for 2021 Ski to Sea staff to meet with various entities to decide if the race is going to be held this year. There have been a number of groups that have called to ask about hosting events and races; WC Parks will handle these on month by month basis. Administrative staff is looking at allowing group camps to open and limited events/races to be held in Phase 2, if restrictions can be met in. The restrictions bring many new challenges, including: COVID plans (including monitoring and enforcement), signage for restrooms, continuous cleanings, no rest/aid stations, traffic/parking plans, detailed starting plans, and retaining participant information for contact tracing. Much of this will be the responsibility of the organizers. Camp Horizon, a camp for young adults with disabilities at Bay Horizon Park, will not be opening enrollment in quarter one. They plan to open enrollment in the second quarter or third quarter for camps to be held toward the end of the summer. The Whatcom Council on Aging is feeling the impact of additional meals being delivered and the meals on wheels program. WCOA has received additional funding for these programs, but is having to lay off some employees and make operational changes.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held virtually on February 18, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:01 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk III
Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director