

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION**  
**Thursday, October 15, 2020**

**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, Richard Sturgill, Brad VanderWerff, Pete Coy

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

EXCUSED

Commissioners: None

**III. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS**

None

**IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

None

**V. AGENDA**

**A. October 15, 2020**

**MOTION:** Pete Coy moved to approve the October 15, 2020 agenda as written. Richard Sturgill seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

**VI. MINUTES**

**A. February 20, 2020**

**MOTION:** Richard Sturgill moved to approve the February 20, 2020 Minutes as written. Brad VanderWerff seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

**VII. STAFF REPORTS**

**A. Director's Report – Michael McFarlane**

- i. **Grant Applications** – Three grant applications were submitted. One was in collaboration with the Opportunity Council for a covered sport court at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center. That application scored very well and is expected to be approved. The other two were for local

parks and trail development, but they scored very low. They were competitive grants with lots of applicants, so it's unlikely they will be approved. The official results will be announced in the springtime.

- ii. **Park Reservations** – 2021 Silver Lake Park campground and cabin reservations open December 1<sup>st</sup> at 9:00 a.m. Group camps and picnic shelters will remain closed until Whatcom County moves into Phase 3 or 4. Special Event Applications will not be accepted until that time as well. Lighthouse Marine Park reservations will remain closed until the border crossing restrictions are eased, as WC Parks staff spent an enormous amount of time processing refunds and mailing checks for 2020.
- iii. **Miscellaneous** – WC Parks has a vacancy in the South Region that probably won't be filled until sometime in 2022 or later because of the county's hiring freeze. 2020 Race Week at Point Roberts was cancelled because of COVID and will be moved to a different venue for 2021. The Foothills Food Bank opened in Building 2 at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center in March. The Daughters of the American Revolution had requested to put a plaque in commemoration of the Galbraith Farm at South Fork Park; that project is moving forward. The Black Mountain Forestry Center will be moving out of Silver Lake Park and the organization will be dissolving. Their collection of equipment will be moved to the City of Darrington, where it will be placed on display. Most of the items will be removed by springtime. The Birch Bay Beach Park is still being used by the contractor for construction on the berm; the project is on schedule and should be completed in March 2021.

## **B. Operations Report – Christ Thomsen**

- i. **Miscellaneous** – The employee cabin demolition at Silver Lake is complete and the area has been restored to open space conditions. WC Parks staff remodeled the Kulshan cabin and it has been in use since the cabins reopened in the spring. The Gerdrum Home is having some repairs done and the Tennant Tower painting is finished. Staff worked on a backlog of sixty projects this season and has reduced that backlog to 30. Most of these projects were maintenance projects that took more effort than typical repairs.
- ii. **COVID Response** – COVID caused some dramatic changes in Parks operations. Lighthouse Marine Park did not open at all for camping and the Plantation Rifle Range was closed for a period of time. WC Parks staff went through the entire peak season with very few seasonal employees and did an exceptional job of keeping up on grounds maintenance while cleaning restrooms much more frequently than normal.
- iii. **Lake Whatcom Watershed** – WC Parks heavy equipment operators spent much of the summer in the Lake Whatcom Watershed performing road maintenance. They cleaned out the ditch on the Hertz Trail and

installed new culverts to improve water quality and control. They also added rock to most of the trail to increase accessibility and keep it in good condition for the winter.

- iv. **Plantation Rifle Range** –The HVAC system and roof replacement at the indoor range is out to bid.

**C. Planning & Development Report – Rod Lamb**

- i. **Silver Lake Park** – Rod has been working on the shower/restroom facility at Red Mountain Campground. Earlier this year WC Parks was informed by Planning and Development Services that a conditional use permit was necessary to construct the new facility because of the zoning associated with Silver Lake Park. The conditional use permit process was completed in July and the final design permit pack was submitted at the same time. Rod is working with the State Department of Health to get a green level water operating permit for Silver Lake. Currently, Silver Lake has a blue level water operating permit, which does not allow for expansion of the existing water system. The Department of Health and the Department of Ecology want to verify that WC Parks has a protected water right to add to the capacity of the existing system and that the pump and aquifer can sustain an additional connection. The pump test is being completed next week. If the test is successful, it is expected that a green water operating permit will be issued by the State Department of Health, which will allow Whatcom County Planning and Development Services to issue the building permit. The shower/restroom facility went out for bid and five bids have been received. Rod will have more information next month after the bid tabulation has been completed. Rod also submitted a contract amendment to the Executive for the next phase of the Silver Lake project, which is the shower/restroom facility for the Maple Creek Campground. Funding is being requested for the 2021-2022 budget and if it is approved, design, engineering, and permitting will be completed this year so the project can go out to bid early next year and completed around mid-June. If that funding is approved, Rod will also begin the design and engineering of the third shower/restroom facility to be constructed near the cabins and the Cedar Campground. That facility will be a twin of the facility at Red Mountain with the same number of stalls and same design. The dry hydrant was installed at Silver Lake Park by Williamson Construction and should be operational early next week.

**VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

None

**IX. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Introduction – Pete Coy, New Commission Member** – Pete Coy introduced himself.

**B. Election of Chair/Vice Chair**

**MOTION:** Pete Coy moved to defer election of a new chair/vice chair to early 2021. Brad WanderWerff seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

**C. Proposed Change to Business Rules – Quorum Voting** – It was proposed to change the language regarding a quorum from “A majority of the entire membership constitutes a quorum for the conducting of regular business” to “A majority of appointed confirmed positions constitutes a quorum for the conducting of regular business”. This change would allow the Park Commission to continue conducting business when there are vacant positions.

**MOTION:** Pete Coy moved to change the business rules pertaining to quorum as presented. Richard Sturgill seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

**D. 2020 Departmental Activity and COVID-19 Impacts** – COVID has had a huge impact on park use. There was an 11.4% increase in park use and a 38.8% increase in trail use compared to this time last year. This equates to 234,000 more visitors this year even with shelters, facilities, playgrounds, and group camping being closed. Lighthouse Marine Park campground remained closed because of border crossing restrictions. Silver Lake Park did not open for camping until June and opening fishing was delayed. The Park Administrative Office was closed to the public and for employee safety, remains closed. All WC Parks work groups have been isolated to their regions so there isn't a mixing of staff on a day to day basis. All senior centers were closed, but the contracts with the providers continued. The senior centers started meal distributions with drive-thru pick up. There is no estimate as to when the centers will reopen. The East Whatcom Regional Resource Center was closed, but the Food Bank remained open for food distribution. The Master Gardeners were able to continue their programming and gardening this summer at Hovander Park. Three Capital Projects were suspended. The trail completion at Lake Whatcom Park (connecting the Chanterelle Trail to the Hertz Trail) and the Lake Whatcom Trailhead plan (new parking area and restrooms) will be deferred to 2021. The Forestry Plan for the Lake Whatcom Watershed properties was put on hold and the Executive will set the agenda for moving forward on that plan. Park Staff assisted with traffic control the first weekend of the Bellingham drive through COVID testing. There was a negative cash flow for several months this year with cancellations and refunds, but once reservations reopened, reservations filled up and positive cash flow resumed. All full-time staff were required to take four furlough days before September 12<sup>th</sup> and seasonal extra help hiring was reduced to save money. WC Parks revenues are estimated to be about \$179,000 short on the park side and about \$60,000 short at the Rifle Range. 2021 reservations

open December 1<sup>st</sup>, so that activity will be down a bit with Silver Lake Park camping and cabin reservations opening. WC Parks staff, both full time and part time, have done an outstanding job of not only of keeping themselves safe while keeping the parks open and operating, but in keeping the public protected as well. There were a lot of frustrated customers venting about restrictions, overcrowding, and other park users at the beginning of COVID, but things settled down as the season progressed. Things will continue to change as restrictions are eased and Whatcom County moves into the next Phase. WC Park playgrounds reopened this week. Parks and trails have not been identified as major hot spots or areas where outbreaks begin.

**E. Review Major Contracts and Agreements** – The remaining two communication tower leases were completed. The first agreement was with PI Tower and runs through 2040. A new tower will be installed to provide emergency and public safety services for Skagit and Whatcom County. The second agreement is with Verizon, who has requested the lease not start until 2022. That lease will run through 2042. The interlocal agreement with the Blaine Birch Bay Park & Recreation District will go to the County Council for approval on October 27<sup>th</sup>. This agreement is for the District's use of the gymnasium for their recreation and park purposes. When it expires in December 2022, long term agreements will be negotiated with the Park District and Camp Horizon for the use of Bay Horizon Park. The City of Bellingham requested to put a new restroom facility in Boulevard Park by Wood's Coffee, as the restroom at the north end of the park is closed. The only viable location for a new restroom is the property immediately east of the Woods Coffee building, which is owned by Whatcom County. In September, City and County legal staff were able to figure out a lease agreement that allows the City to proceed with the restroom building. An interlocal agreement was made with the Point Roberts Park and Recreation District for the District to staff and run a kayak program at Lighthouse Marine Park. The agreement with the Boys & Girls Club for the baseball diamonds at Smith and Northwest was renewed. Rod worked on a permanent easement for the septic field, restroom, and trail at the Glacier Restroom with Gary Graham and his property; that easement was recorded last week. The County Council approved three resolutions for WC Parks to apply for grant agreements with the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office for South Fork Park trail development, development of Birch Bay Beach Park, and to develop an outdoor sports court at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center. The road maintenance agreement for Nessel Farm is almost complete; it will be a 3-year agreement with Bakke Farm Association. Shannon Batdorf, our Administrative Specialist, sent out all Senior Center contracts for approval. Those contracts are for the operation of the Senior Centers and did not change from the past 2 years. The agreement with the South Fork Valley Community Association for use of the Van Zandt Hall expires in December and will be sent out shortly.

- F. Review 2021-22 Proposed Capital Projects** – Mike shared the 2021-2026 Capital Projects Draft. It will be presented to the Council at which time the Council will decide which projects to fund.
- G. Review 2021-22 Proposed Operating Budget** – The Executive is scheduled to release his budget October 16<sup>th</sup> and the Council is scheduled to modify and approve it November 24<sup>th</sup>. The Executive asked all departments to submit budgets as status quo and present strategies to reduce expenditures by \$243,000 in 2021 and \$244,000 in 2022 because of COVID. WC Parks is seeing record numbers of users in the park system and costs are not going down, as most are in labor. As a result, WC Parks will ask to withdraw \$200,000 from the Park Special Revenue Fund in 2021 and \$200,000 in 2022. This is a different approach than what is typical, but would allow WC Parks to continue to provide the current levels of service to the public without having to close major park areas. Mike is optimistic that revenues will continue to turn around and will have the budget to share with the Commission next month.
- H. Agricultural Advisory Committee Trails, Trailhead Proposed Change** – The Agricultural Advisory Committee is recommending a change to the zoning code on agricultural lands which would require an Administrative Review and \$900 fee for approval of trails being built on agricultural land. This would add a lot of time and cost to a process that already requires much planning and permitting. Mike will express these concerns to WC Planning staff.

**X. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Sonja Max toured the Ridley Creek Trail with Daniel Probst and said it is a great trail with interesting history.

**XI. NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION**

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held virtually on November 19, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

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