

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, March 18, 2021

Virtual Meeting

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Commissioners: Terry Terry, Pete Coy, Joe Hashmall, Sonja Max,
Brian Estes, Kristen Fagan

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

EXCUSED

Commissioners: Brad VanderWerff

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

None

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Pete Coy asked if it was too late to make any changes to the survey. Brian Estes inquired about the survey being translated into Spanish and Punjabi. Mike advised he would send the press release and survey link to all commission members.

V. AGENDA

A. March 18, 2021

MOTION: Joe Hashmall moved to approve the March 18, 2021 agenda as written. Brian Estes seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VI. MINUTES

A. February 18, 2021

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the February 18, 2021 Minutes as written. Brian Estes seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. Director's Report – Michael McFarlane

- i. **Blue Canyon Road** – Whatcom County legal staff sent notices to two property owners on Blue Canyon Road that are encroaching on park

property. The encroachment has happened over a period of time and includes small cabins and storage sheds.

- ii. **Little Squalicum Park** – The City of Bellingham has asked if WC Parks would transfer their portion of Little Squalicum Park to the City. This was first proposed about 15 years ago and then again about 4 years ago. Historically, WC Parks has leased their portion to the City and the City has managed it. Both the City Park Director, Nicole Oliver, and the WC Parks Director, Michael McFarlane, are in support of the transfer. City and County legal staff are working on the transfer and ultimately, the City Council and County Council will need to approve the transfer. The public won't see any changes as a result of this transfer.
- iii. **ShakeAlert Earthquake Early Warning System** – The Pacific Northwest Seismic Network will be installing an earthquake sensor at Nessel Farm near the caretaker's residence mid to late April. This sensor will be a part of the ShakeAlert System that alerts the public to potentially damaging earthquakes before the shaking arrives to help prevent damage and casualties. The hope is to have the system online by late May/early June.
- iv. **City of Lynden** – The City of Lynden requested the county's participation in the acquisition of a park located within the city limits. It is a four-acre parcel with basketball courts and ball diamonds that was owned by the school district. The city and neighborhoods would like to protect it and keep it for park and open space purposes. The county council approved \$250,000 of conservation futures fund for that acquisition and an open space easement has been sent to the City of Lynden for review. That easement will be presented to the city council and county council for approval sometime in May.
- v. **East Whatcom Regional Resource Center** – WC Parks received notification that a roundabout is going to be constructed at the entrance to the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center. This will help facilitate the safe flow of traffic to the EWRRC, the adjoining commercial district, and residential area across the street.
- vi. **COVID Update** – The Governor's Office announced that all counties in the state will move to Phase 3 beginning March 22nd. This announcement came before any guidance documents were completed or released. A couple of documents came out this week explaining what will be allowed in Phase 3, but there are still a number of unknowns and conflicting language. City parks will begin accepting reservations for some outdoor events and park uses on April 1st. Those reservations will be scheduled for June 1st and beyond. State parks opened their shelters and group camps March 22nd. WC Parks opened reservations for Silver Lake Park Group Camp on March 18th (the campground opens April 9th). WC Parks plans to open reservations for outdoor picnic shelters March 29th.

Lighthouse Marine Park camping and group camp will remain closed until the border restrictions are lifted. Park staff is working on the feasibility for indoor rentals as further guidance is released. The Governor's Office has indicated that the move to Phase 4 will be much quicker than the move from Phase 2 to Phase 3.

- vii. **Staffing Update** – WC Parks is interviewing for an Accountant at the administrative office because Emily is taking a position in her family's business. The Regional Park Supervisor position was filled by one of the Park Attendants. The vacant Park Attendant position is being posted internally. Applications are also being accepted for seasonal extra help positions that last 4-6 months, primarily over the summer months.

B. Operations Report – Christ Thomsen

- i. **Staffing** – The vacant Regional Park Supervisor position for the South Region was filled by Mike McKenzie, a Park Attendant from the East Region. The Park Attendant position was posted internally and closes on March 24th. If that position is not filled internally, staff will look at options for external recruitment. Seasonal extra help applications are being accepted and recruitment is ongoing.
- ii. **Operations** – The maintenance crew has been grading parking lots and roads throughout the parks. The crew has also been prepping the vacant rental house at Point Roberts for occupants. The house is located above the park office in Lighthouse Marine Park and has been advertised, but hasn't received a lot of interest because of the pandemic and the border closure. Staff has been doing vegetation management and cleaning up at Red Mountain Campground. Each campsite driveway will be graded and receive a rock lift. A new self-registration kiosk and pull-out will be constructed in the campground and a new sign will be placed at the entrance. The goal is to have all of this completed before the campground opens on April 9th. Staff is working on the development of a new campsite at Lighthouse Marine Park that would be a non-motorized, hike/bike/water trail only site. The hope is to have that ready before the campground opens or shortly thereafter.
- iii. **Budget Supplementals (Lookout Mountain Road Design & Engineering and Point Whitehorn Stairway Design & Engineering)** – The budget supplementals for the Lookout Mountain Road Design & Engineering and the Point Whitehorn Stairway Design & Engineering were approved by the council and the funding was received. Christ hopes to get the request for quotes out in the next week or two for both of these projects.

C. Planning & Development Report – Rod Lamb

- i. **Red Mountain Shower and Restroom Facility** – Rod shared a presentation of the construction of the Red Mountain Shower and Restroom Facility.
- ii. **Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility** – Rod submitted the building permit for the Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility to Planning and Development Services last week and hopes to get approval by the end of April. Rod is still working on the two State Department of Health permits; one is for the septic system and the other is for the water system. The engineer received approval to start the design, which means the State approved the location for the septic system. Rod hopes to have the project out to bid in May, the contract awarded in June, the contractor mobilized onsite in July, and construction completed in December.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

IX. NEW BUSINESS

- A. City/County Trail Connections – Cordata Park** – Cordata Park is a City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation park project. Whatcom County helped to facilitate the project by transferring some public works properties to the city, but there are no plans to link the trails from Cordata Park to Hovander Park or Tennant Lake. If the commission is interested in linking the trails, they should add it to the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan. Discussion ensued. Mike advised the city has a plan for trails north of the Cordata area; he will find it and send it to the commission members.
- B. 2021 Trail – Levels of Service (LOS)** – Rod presented a graphic of the population of Whatcom County and the miles of trail necessary to meet the levels of service.
- C. Goals & Objectives 2022 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan** – The commission chose to defer action on the Goals & Objectives to the April 15th meeting.
- D. Birch Bay Beach Park** – Rod shared a presentation on Birch Bay Beach Park Development. The total cost of the Birch Bay Community Park Master Plan is more than four million dollars; funding is not currently available. WC Parks plans to make improvements so the park is usable for day use. The existing fence will be removed and replaced with a log railing that will act as a vehicular barrier and delineate the park’s frontage. The tsunami pole will be relocated to one end of the park as close to the property line as possible. The two asphalt road loops will be removed and topsoil will be brought in to fill the holes. The turf will be renovated and perimeter landscaping will be installed to screen neighboring properties. A small concrete pad will be poured at the center of the park where an entrance sign, a park rules sign, and bollards will be placed. This project is

challenging because it's in the shoreline zone and because it's sensitive in terms of cultural resources. The work will be done in two phases. The exemption permit will hopefully be done by August 1st and then the shoreline substantial will be completed after permit approval, which will most likely be after Labor Day.

E. Review SFVCA Custodial Agreement – The Van Zandt Community Hall is located in the South Fork Valley on Highway 9. The hall is owned by the county and operated by the South Fork Valley Community Association as a community center. The SFVCA uses the hall for the radio station, association sponsored events, and also makes it available for rentals. Historically, the county has given the association \$1,000 annually for scheduling of the hall. The association uses that money for utilities, insurance, maintenance, and upgrades. COVID has eliminated all revenue sources for the association and as a result, the association is requesting that their contract only be extended for one year. The association plans to operate the hall through the end of the year and then reassess. There is a clause in the contract that allows them an additional year without getting a new agreement. The SFVCA also rents, maintains, and keeps the Josh VanderYacht Memorial park clean. This contract is out for signature and approval by the Van Zandt Community Association.

F. Review Rifle Range HVAC/Roof Project – The indoor range at the Plantation Rifle Range currently has a roof mounted air handling unit that filters airborne lead and other contaminants. The air handling unit is over thirty-six years old and the roof was last replaced in 1995. The HVAC/Roof project entails removing the roof mounted system and associated duct work and replacing it with a ground-based unit, new duct work, and new control system. The existing membrane roof will also be removed and a new roof will be installed. This project went out to bid last October and the lowest responsible bid was \$976,000. That bid exceeded the available budget of \$796,000. Additionally, the funding package for the project was a combination of county and state funds and those funds were set to expire. In November 2020, WC Parks requested that the Recreation and Conservation Office extend the grant funds through December 31st, 2021. That extension was granted. The county funds expired at the end of the fiscal year, so WC Parks is requesting a budget supplemental and some additional funding at this month's council meeting to help move the project forward.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held virtually on April 15, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director