

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, January 20, 2022

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

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Christ Thomsen

EXCUSED

Brad VanderWerff

GUESTS

None

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

None

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

- A.** Brian Estes shared a Cascade Bicycle Article about the Willapa Hills State Park Trail. He thinks it's a great example of the opportunities that tourism presents to various parts of the state and would like to start a dialogue about creating a similar trail in Whatcom County (maybe along the Highway 99 right-of-way). The topic will be added to the next meeting agenda.
- B.** Terry Terry wanted to thank Christ Thomsen for the information and photos of the flood damage to Hovander Homestead Park and Tennant Lake. She was able to share the information with members of the Ferndale community.
- C.** Sonja Max is on the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and said that they have been working to get bicycle routes in Whatcom County connecting all of the population centers. She shared a map of what the committee has identified so far as potential routes. Jon Hutchings, the Director of Public Works, joined the committee in their January meeting and has allotted \$20,000 for a consultant to help prioritize the routes. Sonja said the committee would love the support of other commissions on the project. Pete Coy suggested looking at Highway 99. Mike McFarlane advised the Executive's Office is currently working on a trail in the Columbia Valley along SR 547. Brian asked about legislation in the current session that the committee might want to advocate for. Mike advised he gets a weekly email from the lobbyist for the Washington Recreation and Park

Association that he can share with the commissioners. Brian would like to add 2022 legislative session items of interest to the February agenda.

V. **AGENDA**

A. **January 20, 2022**

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the January 20, 2022 agenda as written. Brian Estes seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VI. **MINUTES**

A. **December 16, 2021**

MOTION: Joe Hashmall moved to approve the December 16, 2021 minutes as written. Brian Estes seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VII. **STAFF REPORTS**

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

- i. **COVID Update** – Commission meetings will continue to be virtual. Work groups within the department have been separated to help minimize any impact from illness.
- ii. **Blue Canyon Septic Easements** – Mike is still working on the septic easements at Blue Canyon. One easement was resolved and will need a recommendation from the county's property management committee and the park commission before it goes to the county council. The second request was denied because it was too close to the existing easement and the reserve field.
- iii. **Flood Recovery** – The department is continuing to work on flood recovery, but does not have current funding to do the major improvements necessary to get Hovander back open. A funding request is being put together for trail restoration, fencing, and other improvements. That request will be submitted to the Executive's Office and then to the county council. It will be introduced at one council meeting and then hopefully approved at a second meeting. The earliest the department can expect to see funding would be late February. If it doesn't make that deadline, it wouldn't be until the end of March. Once the funding is approved, it will take additional time to get contracts in place before things can move forward.
- iv. **Miscellaneous Updates** – The final batch of 2021 invoices was signed and submitted today. Staff is working on getting 2022 purchase orders in place. The department is waiting for the Executive Order approving the change in the Unified Fee Schedule to adjust camping and cabin fees in

lieu of eliminating shower fees. A \$2.00 per hour increase for seasonal extra help was approved and goes into effect this next pay period.

- v. **Staffing** – Interviews are being scheduled for the vacant Clerk IV and Construction & Maintenance Supervisor positions. Recruitment is ongoing for the Design & Development Supervisor position. WC Parks is now in competition with the City of Bellingham to fill this position, as their Parks and Recreation Department is recruiting for the same position.
- vi. **Lake Whatcom Trailhead Improvements** – Mike doesn't have an update on the Lake Whatcom trailhead improvements, but expects to have it on the agenda for February.
- vii. **Whatcom Million Trees Project** – Mike Feerer from the Whatcom Million Trees Project advised that Phillips 66 made a substantial donation to the Whatcom Million Trees Project for tree planting at Hovander Park. A timeframe will be established in the next couple of weeks to move forward with that project. The areas being considered for the trees are the north end of the park to screen out Ferndale and the area along the road to buffer the industrial park across the street. There is also interest in a demonstration plot in one of the fields.

B. Operations Report & Design and Development Report – Christ Thomsen

- i. **Staffing** – Seasonal extra help recruitment begins in February. Recruitment for the Maintenance & Construction Supervisor is ongoing and interviews are scheduled for next week. Since the December meeting, the department has struggled with the staffing of regular employees because of the effects of the pandemic, illness, and weather. Christ shared that the staff has really stepped up and done a great job of meeting all of the service needs for the department. One operator did a bang-up job of taking care of all county parks in a single plow truck during the snow and cold weather event.
- ii. **Operations Update** – Staff had been working on clean-up and repairs from the November storm event, but that work was slowed by staff shortages and vehicles being in the shop. The December snow and freezing weather then redirected staff to dealing with frozen and broken pipes throughout park properties, including the Silver Lake Lodge, Glacier Restroom, Ferndale and Bellingham Senior Activity Centers, and some of the residential rental properties.
- iii. **Hovander Homestead Park** – The goal is to reopen Hovander to the public by Friday, May 6th. This would be in time for the Master Gardener plant sale on Mother's Day weekend. Staff continues to work primarily on cleanup activities and infrastructure repairs because additional funding is needed to accomplish the majority of repairs. Necessary repairs include the removal and installation of fall protection at the playground, the installation of new fencing, the replacement of the drip irrigation system

and mulch at the Fragrance Garden, the resurfacing of trails, roads, and parking lots, turf repair, regrading, and sediment removal. Christ is preparing a budget supplemental to fund these repairs and will then begin working on agreements so that work can move forward as soon as funding is available. Terry Terry asked if volunteers could help with clean up. Christ advised that once things dry up a little bit staff will be looking for volunteers to help with debris removal. He recommended sharing volunteer contact information with Jill Jacoby, the Regional Park Supervisor for the West Region. The boardwalk at Tennant Lake Boardwalk received substantial damage and WDFW is working on a timeline for effecting repairs.

- iv. **Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility** – The Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility is coming along beautifully. The contractor has requested a two-week extension due to adverse weather in December and effects of the pandemic.
- v. **Plantation HVAC and Roof Replacement** – The Plantation HVAC and Roof Replacement is moving along. There were some minor delays due to weather and the coordination of lead sampling, but it has not affected the schedule.
- vi. **EH1 Trail Construction** – There was a pre-construction meeting with the contractor for the EH1 Trail Construction project. The contractor plans to tag the trail in mid-February so that staff can review it and make any necessary changes. That project will start and finish this year.
- vii. **Nugent’s Corner** – The Nugent’s Corner contract is in place and the contractor plans to demolish the building towards the latter part of February.
- viii. **Plantation Rifle Range Dust Collecting** – There is a contract in place for some renovations on the dust collecting unit at the indoor range. That work will begin February 1st through February 3rd.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. Election of Commission Chair and Vice Chair –

MOTION: Brian Estes moved to elect Sonja Max as the Commission Chair. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

MOTION: Brian Estes moved to elect Pete Coy as the Commission Vice Chair. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

- B. 2023 – 2024 Capital Projects** – Mike presented the Parks and Recreation Department Capital Projects List and asked the commissioners to look at the list to see if there were projects that they would like more information on or if there were projects they would like to see added to the list. The list will be reviewed in February and finalized in March, at which point the commission will vote to recommend the list for submission to the County Executive for review. The County Executive will respond with the projects he would like to move forward with. Ultimately, the list will be presented to the County Council for approval.
- C. 2021 Visitor Use** <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/3733/Visitation> – Mike advised 2021 Visitor Use was posted to the website. Visitation numbers will be updated monthly.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held virtually on February 17, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director