

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, July 17, 2014

Lighthouse Marine Park Boardwalk
811 Marine Drive
Point Roberts, Washington

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chair, Paul Woodcock at 6:49 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Commissioners: Paul Woodcock, Jeff Margolis, Janet Boyhan and Theresa Sygitowicz

Staff: Mike McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rodney Lamb, Ben VanBuskirk

EXCUSED:

Gordon Rogers, Kenneth Kiesner and Richard Sturgill

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS / COMMUNICATIONS

A. COMMENTS:

1. Point Robert Lighthouse Society Presentation

Mark Robins with the Point Roberts Taxpayers Association was recognized. He commented that the Taxpayers Association endorses the Point Roberts Lighthouse Society project.

He commented that Lighthouse Marine Park pier and boardwalk has also been a top priority of the Taxpayers Association and would like to request that communication with the public at Point Roberts regarding the progress of these projects be increased over past practices.

He commented that the Point Roberts Lighthouse Society has completed architectural designs and that funding is in place to see the lighthouse project to completion. He requested a re-confirmation of the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation commitment to work with the Society and to revisit the drafting of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Mark spoke to the specifications of the project, the involvement of the Coast Guard and the impact that the addition of the lighthouse would have on the economic development of Point Roberts in terms of increased tourism.

Mark introduced Darrel and Dorothy Sutton, spokespersons for the Point Roberts Lighthouse Society.

The Chair recognized Darrel Sutton. Darrel commented on the history of the project, the involvement and interest of the local citizens, and the goal to have the project completed by 2015.

He stated that it is the intent of the Society to raise the funds required to construct a facility that would house a public meeting venue, an ADA restroom and a U.S. Coast Guard approved navigational light and that when the structure is complete gift it to Whatcom County.

The Society provided a power point presentation regarding the construction timeline, the structural specifications and proposed use of the facility. They also provided a portable model of the proposed facility for Commission members to view.

The Society opened the floor for questions. There was further discussion on the use of the facility, project funding plans and Whatcom County's role in the project.

Mike McFarlane discussed that ultimately the County Council will have final project approval but that he is open to discuss the MOU conditions.

The Society thanked the Commission for the time to make their presentation.

B. COMMUNICATIONS:

1. Special Event Email Request: Bruce Burpee, Event Director, Silver Lake Outdoor Festival

Mike McFarlane shared an email communication from Mr. Burpee regarding their request to hold a special event in early October, 2014. The event is titled, Silver Lake Outdoor Festival and will consist of a foot and bicycle race followed by a social gathering after the races to include a beer garden.

Mr. Burpee has requesting consideration for the use of Silver Lake Park at a reduced fee and to amend the bicycle course to run through the campgrounds.

Mike discussed that in his email, Mr. Burpee refers to a pricing policy from the 2008 Comprehensive Plan as support for the reduced fees. Mike explained that this policy was presented as a potential alternative pricing strategy in the 2008 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan but that it was never adopted. He explained that rates and fees are set by Whatcom County Council and that the Parks and Recreation Department does not have the ability to waive or reduce fees

Mike commented that last year's event was run on a trial basis and negative comments were received from regular campers about the noise and disruption to their camping experience. Mike discussed that this raises questions regarding special events in our parks, such as how many events are appropriate in the park and whether or not the event activities are compatible with the park.

Commissioners discussed that a request from campers for a refund because of noise would be understandable, that one of the main reason to stay in the park is for the peace and quiet that it provides.

Mike informed the Commission that this year's event date was approved earlier by the previous Operations Manager. He stated that proposed changes to the course proposed by Mr. Burpee using existing trails and campground roads were required as this would provide a safer course, void of fire rings, electrical boxes and water spigots and would be less disruptive to campers. Some of the course changes were rejected by Mr. Burpee.

Other suggested changes were to move the event date from early October to late October or early November when the camping population is down but due to date commitments made by the previous employee, this could not be accomplished.

The question was asked if there is another venue that could be better suitable for the event. Christ stated that Mr. Burbee did explore alternative venues and decided that Silver Lake Park was the most appropriate venue for the event.

Christ stated that concerns have been expressed to Mr. Burbee that that the event may not be a compatible use of the park but it is felt that under the circumstances the best possible arrangements have been made for this year's race. He discussed that one of the requirements for the event was to require Mr. Burbee to rent the campgrounds along the portion of the park road system that is being used for the race route. This equates to renting Loops 2 and 3. This will offset the loss of revenue from campers that will not rent during the event.

The deadline for Mr. Burpee to accept the conditions of and pay for the event is the end of month. If he accepts the conditions and pays no further action will be required for this year's event. If he does not and requests input from the Commission it will be placed on the Agenda for the month following his request.

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There were no general comments.

V. AGENDA

A. AGENDA APPROVAL

MOTION: It was moved by Theresa Sygitowicz, seconded by Janet Boyhan and passed unanimously to approve the July 17, 2014 Agenda as written.

VI. MINUTES

A. MAY 16, 2014 MINUTES APPROVAL

MOTION: It was moved by Theresa Sygitowicz, seconded by Jeff Margolis and passed unanimously to approve the second draft of the May 15, 2014 Minutes as written.

B. JUNE 19, 2014 MINUTES APPROVAL

MOTION: It was moved by Theresa Sygitowicz, seconded by Janet Boyhan and passed unanimously to approve the June 19, 2014 Minutes as written

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MIKE MCFARLANE

1. 2015 – 2016 Budget – The executive has shared that the County's revenues remain relatively flat. For the next three years the expectation is that there won't be approval for any substantial budget increases and that any increase in department budget will need to be accompanied by new or outside revenues sources. For the Park's Department outside revenue sources could include the Conservation Futures Fund, donations, fees and the Park's Special Revenue fund.

Mike stated that the financial horizon is showing modest growth but that it is currently very stagnant for the next budget cycle and that expectations for use of the General Fund should be kept low.

Budget will be submitted for input within the next two weeks.

B. OPERATIONS REPORT – CHRIST THOMSEN

1. Staffing:

a. Silver Lake Park Ranger Position – The new Ranger’s first day on the job was July 7th. Christ stated that all indications show that this will be a good fit.

The renovations to the Silver Lake Park apartment have been completed and it has been rented to the Silver Lake Park Ranger and his family.

Christ will email before and after pictures of the renovation for Commission’s interest.

ACTION: Christ to email before and after pictures of the silver lake park apartment renovation to commission members.

2. Projects

a. Hertz Trail – Two bridges are being replaced on the Hertz trail this year. One bridge has been completed and the second bridge has been removed, the super structure set in place and should be completed in the next three weeks.

As a result of the work that has been done on this trail the Park’s Department has received a \$7,000.00 donation to be applied to continued park improvement efforts. This donation has been deposited in the Parks Special Revenue Fund.

b. Wilkinson Rental – The maintenance crew is on schedule with the demolition of this structure.

The estimates for asbestos removal have been received, an agency has been selected and the work completed in August.

It is the plan to complete the project prior to the watershed window closing.

c. Bay to Baker Culvert Repair Update – Christ recently called to check the status of the permit for this project and is waiting for a reply. He will provide updates for Commission members as received.

3. Incidents

a. Employee Injury – An employee sustained a minor injury to their finger. The incident has been reported and resolved.

b. One minor motor vehicle accident and one minor visitor injury – Both incident were reported and required no further action from the Department.

C. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT REPORT – ROD LAMB

1. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock Renovation – The engineer’s calculations and shop drawings have been reviewed and there were a few comments and questions for the manufacturer. A new set of calculations and shop drawing are expected to be received for review later this month.

Pile driving is scheduled for September, 2014.

2. Hovander Picnic Shelter Driveway Relocation – The project was approved by Planning and Development Services (PDS) and the permit has been issued.

Three bids have been received and the low bid was submitted by Whatcom Builders for an amount of \$30,163.00. A budget supplemental has been submitted to Council for consideration.

Once the budget supplemental has been approved a contract will be drafted for Executive approval and once approved, work will begin. It is anticipated that the project will be completed in approximately two weeks.

Rod provided a map of the proposed route and specifications of the road for Commission review.

3. South Fork Park – The critical areas and geotechnical investigation field work has been completed and a final findings report is expected by end of month.

The topographical survey work will be completed this week with a report following.

Preliminary engineering on the trail head will commence once all reports have been received and reviewed.

4. Nessel Farm Building Restoration – Bid packages for the foundation repairs are being drafted. The package is pending the engineer’s technical specifications. Rod is drafting the scope of work and contract.

5. Silver Lake Park Road and Electrical Improvements – The Request for Qualification has been released to electrical and civil engineering firms. Five proposals were received and staff is in the process of reviewing and evaluating them.

6. Reconveyance Planning – Efforts continue on inventory and mapping. Additional field work was completed on the tower sites and information was received from Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on orphaned and abandoned roads. This information is being reviewed and will be used to identify possible trail connections within the trail system.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Parks & Recreation Commission General Business Rules – Mike provided a draft for final review of the General Business Rules/Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission.

He stated that he had not received any comments or requests for changes to date and asked if there were any this evening. There were none.

MOTION: It was moved by Theresa Sygitowicz, seconded by Janet Boyhan and passed unanimously to adopt the 06/19/14 draft of the Parks & Recreation Commission General Business Rules

B. Lake Whatcom Reconveyance Planning – Mike stated that the initial Planning Meeting included a briefing on the planning process and a request for public comments.

There were over 100 participants at the meeting. Public comments received at the meeting and subsequent emails were compiled into one document that Mike provided to the Commission members for their review. This information is also available on the Whatcom County Parks and Recreations web site.

Mike discussed the four categories for public comment; Natural Resources, Recreation, Management Issues and Other. He explained that as part of the process the public comments will be used to help draft the conceptual plans.

He pointed out that a major recurring concern is the water quality of Lake Whatcom. As a result, during the initial phase a part of the focus will be to look at high, medium and low levels of recreation and its impact on water quality.

Mike explained that because of staff involvement in the current budget planning process, the meetings have been tabled for this summer but will resume after August, and continue until the process is complete.

Theresa asked if it would be advisable to consider hunting season when scheduling the fall meetings.

Jeff asked if there was any action required from the Commission at this time.

Mike asked if the Commission could review the public comments and concerns to be familiar with them and to compile any other ideas, comments or suggestions for discussion at the next Commission Meeting. Any comments, etc., can also be emailed to him prior to the meeting.

At a later meeting staff will present various proposals based on the comments received at the first meeting, receive feedback on the proposals to both confirm that the vision is correct and be able to begin expanding or changing the proposals based on that feedback.

Janet asked Mike if he would comment on his general opinion of the comments on the whole.

Mike stated that the comments provided a lot of good information on the public wishes for the park. The comments were broad ranged, from keep everyone out, to open it free-for-all. The one surprise was the interest in winter sports on Stewart Mountain.

Mike discussed that the meetings will continue to address issues and concern and clear up what services are in place, such as fire protection and to determine what is still needs to be considered. These are issues and questions that will be raised and discussed during the process.

Jeff asked that because the recurring concern seems to be protecting the water quality, what responsibility does the Department have in protecting the water quality and how will that be achieved.

Christ explained that these are some of the considerations that were addressed when writing the job description for the new area park ranger position. This will allow staff to manage park activities that could negatively impact water quality. These management duties will include monitoring the trails systems, being informed on the regulations that apply to the water shed and best management practices in protecting water quality. The goal is to insure that the Department's staff is being good stewards of the water quality.

The Department will also partner with agencies that have a shared responsibility to make sure efforts are not being duplicated and to become familiar with their role in water quality protection. An example would be the City of Bellingham's efforts to form a forest management plan for the area and the work that they have done to contract for a plan.

Mike explained that the Department will act as a land manager of the areas that fall under our jurisdiction and authority. In addition, County Council has made water a priority and can task other County departments that have an enforcement responsibility.

There was some discussion on allocation of funds between local government entities in terms of procuring additional funds to accomplish shared interests. Mike said that this has not been discussed to date but that it may be something that could be considered in the future.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. TRAILS – Jeff stated that his interest is the connection of the last portion of Lake Whatcom Trail to Canyon Lake. He asked if Mike could provide an update the Commission on the Department's efforts to make the connection.

Mike discussed that the last stretch is privately owned. He has been in touch with the owners in December, 2013 and each previous year to discuss the Department's continued interest. They have indicated that if they do decide to sell they would contact the Department. Relations remain cordial.

Mike pointed out that the area up above this property is an extremely fractured stratum and provides nothing to anchor to in order to construct a trail.

Various solutions have and are continuing to be explored as this is one of the Department's higher priorities.

The agenda topic of "Trails" was at the request of Richard Sturgill, Jeff Margolis and Gordon Rogers. Because Richard and Gordon could not make this meeting and they have areas that they would like to discuss, the topic can be placed on future agendas at their request.

B. "PRESERVING A WAY OF LIFE" A NATURAL HERITAGE PLAN FOR WHATCOM COUNTY – At the June meeting Mike was asked by Planning and Development Services to present "Preserving A Way of Life": A Natural Heritage Plan for Whatcom County for Commission review and provide a recommendation on whether or not to recommend removal of this document as a reference in the County Comprehensive Plan.

It was discussed that because this document was approved by Whatcom County Council, and it contains many good goals and policies and that it is a citizen driven document it should be retained as part of the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Theresa stated that even though the document needs to be updated, this is a County Council approved document and that the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission should not be offering a recommendation on whether to retain or remove it from the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Paul Woodcock called for a motion.

MOTION: It was moved by Janet Boyhan, seconded by Jeff Margolis 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. The motion passed with the following vote: 3 Yeas, 0 Nays and 1 abstention. Theresa Sygitowicz abstained for the above noted reasons.

C. 2015 – 2016 BUDGET – Mike stated that because there was a delay in getting the budget documents to the Departments staff are about 2 days behind the expected progress. As a result he does not have many comments at the time.

He provided a copy of the Department's rates and fees sheet and the County's Unified Fee Schedule (UFS). He asked if the Commission would review the documents and if there are any comments or questions to please relay them to him as soon as possible.

Department staff has reviewed fees and charges from a departmental stand point. Mike discussed the changes that are being proposed and the justification for the changes.

He discussed the Department's revenues are remaining relatively stable, with anticipated slight increase of approximately \$20-30,000 annually.

There is currently a request for additional funding for the Senior Centers to cover increased costs in the parking lot and phone system.

New expenses included costs for Lake Whatcom Lands with funding provided from the Park's Special Revenue.

There is also an increase in seasonal hours being requested for South Fork Park.

The Whatcom Volunteer Center recently informed the County that as of the end of the year they will no longer cover liability insurance expenses. This will create a burden for the Department because these costs will now come out of the Department budget. The Department will request a budget increase to recover these costs.

Capital projects have been submitted and will be reviewed as part of the budget process with the County Executive and County Council during the regular budget process.

It was discussed that the overall approach to the budget was to not increase our rates on public fees but to recover the increase in Department expenses for commercial and special events. This is because these events mostly benefit the event coordinators and private promoters as opposed to the general public and require greater efforts and cost from the department.

In general, the budget will remain relatively the same as it has for the past two budget cycles.

It is the Department's goal to have the Executive's budget available for review by the Commission in October.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. AUGUST MEETING DATE, TIME AND LOCATION

The meeting date is August 21, 2014. There will be a tour of Lookout Mountain prior to the meeting. The tour rendezvous location and times and meeting location and times will be determined and shared at a later date.

B. PRELIMINARY DRAFT – LEVELS OF SERVICE (LOS) – Mike provided the preliminary draft chapter of the Six-Year CIP-LOS that is being proposed by Planning and Development

Services in an upcoming meeting that he will attend. Mike will provide an update after the meeting.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: It was moved by Theresa Sygitowicz, seconded by Janet Boyhan and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director