

**MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, September 19, 2013**

**Samish Park
673 N. Lake Samish Drive
Bellingham, WA**

PRESENT: Commissioners: Gordon Rogers, Paul Woodcock, Janet Boyhan, Theresa Sygitowicz, Richard Sturgill

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Erik Axelson, Rodney Lamb,

ABSENT: Kenneth P. Kiesner, Jeffrey Margolis

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chair, Gordon Rogers at 6:30 PM.

I. AGENDA

A. September 19, 2013 Agenda Approval

MOTION: It was moved by Richard Sturgill and seconded by Theresa Sygitowicz to amend the agenda to add the discussion of the Vogt property in Birch Bay. The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: It was moved by Paul Woodcock and seconded by Theresa Sygitowicz to approve the agenda with revisions. The motion passed unanimously.

II. MINUTES

A. July 18, 2013 Minutes Approval

MOTION: It was moved by Janet Boyhan and seconded by Theresa Sygitowicz to approve the July 18, 2013 minutes and written. The motion passed with one abstention.

Richard Sturgill abstained because he was not present at July 18, 2013 Commission Meeting.

III. PUBLIC INPUT/COMMUNICATIONS – There were no items to address.

IV. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – MICHAEL MCFARLANE

A. Sierra Pacific – Access Road to Canyon Lake – Mike and Erik met with John Gold of Sierra Pacific to discuss access alternatives to the Canyon Lake trailhead. The route that is being considered is via the North Fork Road, through DNR property past Race Horse Creek. This route is currently used by WA State Department of Natural Resources and Sierra Pacific and would be a better access route in terms of shared maintenance and upkeep. The goal is to complete the arrangements and provide access by next season.

B. Lake Whatcom Reconveyance – The deed process is in the final stages in terms of finalizing the legal terminology and easements.

C. Maple Falls proposed Park – Mike recently attended a meeting between the Mt. Baker School District and a local community group to discuss the possibilities of establishing a park at the recently cleared Maple Falls grade school site.

The property has been declared surplus by the Mt. Baker School District and is an excellent site for a park. There are no wetland limitations on the property and there is an established parking lot, a ball diamond that only needs to be renovated and a basketball half-court.

The community group has asked the County to work with the Mt. Baker School district to acquire the site. If acquired the park would be operated in much the same way as the Van Zandt Memorial Park. The community would build the park and the County could provide the required playground inspections, if one was installed and management would be community driven.

The County Executive is supportive of this project depending on the purchase price.

D. Proposed community trail – EWRRC to North Fork Library – Because this trail is along a State Route, it is the County’s position that this should be a Washington State Department of Transportation project. The County Executive has an upcoming meeting with the Department of Transportation that will include a discussion about this proposal.

V. PARK OPERATIONS REPORT – ERIK AXELSON

A. Samish Park – Summer 2012 saw some gang related activity at Samish Park. This year that activity has been curtailed due to regular patrols by the Whatcom County Sheriff’s Department. The atmosphere at the park has returned to a more family oriented venue.

B. Seasonal Staff – This year’s seasonal staff in all three regions has been among the best ever hired. The Park rangers reported that even with the increased activity and attendance at our parks and in addition to performing their regular duties, the seasonal crews provided excellent and enthusiastic customer service.

C. Increased Park Use in 2013 – The summer months of June, July and August have seen mostly an increase in attendance compared to 2012, at all parks and trails and at some selected parks.

	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>Change</u>
• All Parks	229,995	263,379	+15%
• All Trails	313,012	387,224	+24%
• Silver Lake	33,223	63,454	+91%
• Samish	20,266	33,902	+67%
• Hovander	72,503	69,502	- 4%

D. Council Funded Capital Projects – Following is an update of the current 2013 projects that are funded through the Council approved capital budget.

1. Plantation Rifle Range Repaving – The project will include repaving the driveway and two parking lots. This project was awarded to Granite Construction for a low bid of

\$53,599. The budget for this project is \$69,000 which may allow funds for some other related improvements. The project is scheduled to begin early next week.

Gordon asked for an update on the HVAC System at the Range. Erik explained that the system is currently working well but is planned to be upgraded. The State RCO FARR grant program opens for application in 2014 and is a possible source of partial funding for replacement.

2. Lighthouse Marine Park Parking Lot Improvements – The project consists of minor improvements to specific asphalt problems in the day use area. The project was awarded to Western Refinery Services (WRS) for a low bid of \$31,179. The budget for this project is \$38,000.

3. Bellingham and Ferndale Senior Center Fire Alarms – An RFP last month produced only one bid, which was over the \$50,000 budget. The project will be re-bid.

E. Small Maintenance and Operations Projects.

1. Hovander Homestead Park – Concrete aprons were added at the Group Picnic Shelter in early August. This was finished prior to Senior Day in the Park and was well received. We also plan to install some access improvements to the walkways around the main house next month

Plans are being reviewed to install a better and more usable irrigation system that will tap our Nooksack River water rights. This would be an alternate to using the increasingly costly Ferndale city water for Master Gardeners and other irrigation needs.

This summer staff made improvements to the existing irrigation infrastructure. A proposal for an improved siphon pump system has been solicited but will need additional evaluation prior to purchase.

Our goal is to have a functional and efficient irrigation system in place for next year.

3. Hertz Trail – The structurally unsound footbridges on the trail are being replaced with new covered footbridges. The covered foot bridges will help protect the bridge structure and provide a safer crossing.

4. Lookout Mountain Trailhead – Park maintenance staff will be doing some work on the connection from the trailhead to the existing trail after the contractor has completed its portion of the construction on the trailhead.

F. Unauthorized, free-ride, downhill mountain bike trail – Stewart Mountain to Hertz Trail – This mountain bike trail has recently come to the attention of the Parks department and is a concern as a portion of this trail is within in the Reconveyance property boundaries.

A major concern is the nature of the active unauthorized trail building within the watershed. In this instance there are significant safety, erosion and sustainability issues as well, especially in the last three-quarter of a mile which is extremely steep and exits directly onto the Hertz Trail.

Parks is working in conjunction with DNR to post notices that “This is Not a Trail”. We are also reaching out to mountain bike users to correct and discourage these unauthorized

activities and perhaps recruit volunteers to help mitigate immediate erosion damage and safety concerns.

G. Energy Efficiency – Puget Sound Energy is sponsoring a program to replace incandescent and CFL light bulbs with 8 W. LED bulbs. These have an equivalent of a 40 watt bulb and provide a 25% or more reduction in energy use. We have replaced over 600 bulbs in our senior centers and park facilities in the past 30 days.

H. Park Events – Recent and upcoming park events include:

1. Muds to Suds – Hovander, August 24-25. Attendance was over 2300 participants. Revenue for participation in this event is still being calculated. There was an increased focus on risk management for this and all events in all parks this season.

2. Pt. Roberts Arts & Music Festival – Lighthouse Marine Park, August 3-4. Under new event managers this year, the Festival was a considerable success.

3. Northwest Kids Fest – Hovander, August 10. Attendance was at approximately 3,000. This is a Christian sponsored, family oriented event that returned for its second year.

4. Whatcom Skill Share Fair – Hovander, September 21-22. This event will include skill sharing demonstrations, bartering and live music.

5. Deming Library Fundraiser – Silver Lake Park, October 12-13. This will include a cycle-cross bike race and trail running event to raise funds for the Deming Public Library.

There was brief discussion regarding a National Forest Service notice for public input through a survey provided on their website, regarding their intent to close some roads and trails throughout the nation. It was suggested that it may be beneficial to complete the survey online. Janet Boyhan stated that she had the web page address and would be willing to share that information.

VI. DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT REPORT – RODNEY LAMB

A. Lighthouse Marine Park Dock Renovation – After re-bidding this project, two acceptable bids were received. HB Hansen was awarded the project with a low bid of \$241,058.79. Council approved the completed contract September 10, 2013. Piles will be installed prior to the in-water work window closing on October 14, 2013. The boarding float will be manufactured over the winter and be ready for installation in the spring of 2014.

Rod discussed the dock's construction, installation prep work and mandated efforts to protect marine wildlife.

B. Hovander River Trail – Work on this 1.5 mile trail has begun. Whatcom Builder's sub-contractor, Stremmer Gravel began clearing and grading on August 22, 2013 and are making good progress. The northern section of trail has been graded and base rock put down and crews are beginning work on the Southern portion of the trail in the picnic area. It is anticipated that the project will be completed by mid-October.

Rod discussed the materials used to surface the trail, material costs and trail maintenance expectations.

C. Samish Dock – Parks crew has made significant progress on the upland improvements for the project. The new concrete bulkheads and sidewalk have been installed. The existing docks will be removed and the new dock installed next week. The project completion date is October 15th.

D. Silver Lake Park Playground – Rod provided recent pictures of the new playground. He stated that the area has healed nicely from the construction activities. The Ranger reported that it has been well used and well received by the public.

The final step in the completion of this project will be the installation of a drinking fountain. The fountain has arrived but it will not be installed until 2014.

E. Lookout Mountain Trailhead – Construction for this project is nearly complete. The new restroom was installed September 16, 2013. Final improvements include a crushed surfacing top course, wheel stops and an asphalt driveway and will be completed in the next week or the week following.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan (CPROSP) – Mike provided an updated report on the Plan's goals and objectives. He explained that he reformatted this information from the previous narrative version to a clearer and more organized format.

He stated that the Report encapsulates past Commission Meeting topics that were identified as priorities in respect to the CPROSP and input from all the visioning session that were held this year. He pointed out that the yellow highlighted areas in the report are additions to the previous Plan's information.

Mike asked that the Commission members read through the report, compare the changes to the original CPROSP and if there are any additional items that need to be added, addressed or expanded on to let him know as soon as possible. It is anticipated that this will be completed in draft form and ready for review by October 2013.

Mike updated the Commission members on the online survey results for the CPROSP. He passed around a copy of the completed report but did not print one for each member as it is a rather lengthy document however it is available at the Park's Headquarters office for review.

He discussed that the report shows that the survey results parallel previous CPROSP efforts to identify public trends. Water access remains the number one priority in Whatcom County. Trails run a close second. Unlike the previous survey this survey included information on the public impression of Whatcom County parks with individual comments included at the end of the survey.

Beckwith Consulting stated that the responder demographics consisted mostly of an older age group which resulted in conservative responses in terms of funding. It was felt that if a levy went out to referendum that there would be much more support in that respect.

There was discussion regarding the number of results received and the possibility of re-releasing the survey. Mike explained that an additional component to public input

continues to be received in the Customer Satisfaction Survey that is being handed out in the parks by Park staff.

As a result of the input received from all surveys, it is felt that there is a good picture of public opinion regarding existing parks and what the priorities for the future include.

These results have not been compared with the State survey trends for Whatcom County but a comparison will be done in the near future to validate the State survey.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. August Financial / Attendance Report – Mike passed out a copy of the 2013 year-to-date financial and attendance reports.

The year-to-date attendance reports indicate a solid year overall. Camping numbers are down for 2013 however fall camping could balance these numbers to the past.

Mike explained that the attendance numbers on some trails have become more accurate due to the increased installation of trail counters.

The 2013 financial report is also year-to-date and does not provide a good comparison for previous years but does provide an accurate current picture.

There are some areas of concern in terms of revenue. The revenues for the Plantation Rifle Range are down as a result of the loss of some contracts due to cutbacks in federal funds.

There was some discussion regarding avenues for increasing attendance and revenues.

Mike stated that if there are questions regarding the reports either he or Darla Smith would be available to answer them.

B. County Council & Executive Expectations for Boards & Commissions – There was a suggestion that this issue should be an annual agenda item for discussion in order to reiterate the responsibility that public representative have as an appointee and member on Whatcom County's Boards and Commissions.

C. Discussion of organized groups using parks. – The parks are experiencing an increased and ongoing use by organized groups, in particular commercial entities that charge a fee to the public without going through a permitting process, paying a rental fee or otherwise informing the Department.

The major concern is not being aware of what transpires in the parks in order to provide effective management, be aware of changing patterns in recreation and crowding out or possibly putting other park users in jeopardy.

The Department does not have a particular policy or rule that prohibits the use of parks for commercial activities and would like to request that the Commission begin to consider discussions to explore possible recommendations to address this issue.

It was suggested that information could be provided regarding how other park agencies have addressed this issue. This will be provided to the Commission members prior to next Commission meeting.

ACTION: Park staff will provide for Commission consideration information regarding how other park agencies address and manage the issue of public parks use by organized groups that charge a fee to the public without going through a permitting process, paying a rental fee or otherwise informing the park department.

It was discussed that one of the aspects that needs to be considered is the equity and fairness of the activity and what the activity attendance cutoff would need to be to avoid problems to operations, impacts on the general public, safety and liability concerns and possible loss of revenue.

It was discussed that once a guideline is established there is a long period of public education.

It was the consensus of the Commission that this topic should be added as an agenda item during the winter months in order to allow some time to consider possible solutions for discussion.

D. Discussion of the Vogt Property at Birch Bay – Richard Sturgill discussed property in Birch Bay that the Voigt family heirs have indicated an interested in selling or partnering with the County to provide public use in terms of beach access, parking and restrooms.

Mike stated that a meeting was conducted with the community group and the County Executive. The property is located on Birch Bay Drive and the market price is around \$3.5 million which includes the tidelands and beach.

The immediate concern is the purchase price and that more information is needed regarding the partners and what their financial involvement will be in terms of development and the logistics of maintenance and upkeep if an agreement is formulated.

There has been no decision from the Executive Office except that there will need to be more research prior to any final decision being reached.

IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. NEXT MEETING: Thursday, October 17, 2013, 6:00 PM. The meeting will be held at the Bellingham Senior Activity Center, 315 Halleck Street, Bellingham.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Since there was no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Transcribed by: Pat Fisher, Clerk III

Approved by: Michael McFarlane, Parks Department Director