

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

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

Staff: Michael McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

EXCUSED

Commissioners: None

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

None

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None

V. AGENDA

A. February 18, 2021

MOTION: Joe Hashmall moved to approve the February 18, 2021 agenda as written. Brad VanderWerff seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VI. MINUTES

A. January 21, 2021

MOTION: Brad VanderWerff moved to approve the January 21, 2021 Minutes as written with the date amended from January 15, 2021 to January 21, 2021. Sonja Max seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. Director's Report – Michael McFarlane

- i. **COVID Update** – Whatcom County has moved to Phase 2 of the State's reopening plan and the State is currently working on a Phase 3. WC Parks staff have been communicating with both state and local health

officials regarding interpretation of the guidelines. The local recommendation is to be conservative and hold off on facility and shelter rentals. WC Parks staff is assessing the feasibility of a limited reopening (possibly in April) and trying to simplify the language of the guidelines so that they are clear to the public. Staff is also creating a COVID-19 compliance agreement to be sent to each person making a facility or shelter reservation. The agreement requires the person in charge of the reservation to enforce all of the guidelines and restrictions. WC Parks plans to coordinate moving forward with facility and shelter rentals with the City of Bellingham Parks. WC Parks is also evaluating the feasibility of events. The organizers for the Ski to Sea Race have cancelled the 2021 Ski to Sea Race because half of the teams said they wouldn't participate this year. The US/Canadian Border remains closed and opening will be reassessed in March. If it opens, the campground at Lighthouse Marine Park will be opened in April.

- ii. **Staffing and Budget Cuts** – Staff is looking at seasonal staffing and trying to balance it with budget cuts and revenue shortfalls due to closures. WC Parks plans to do a slow roll out of seasonal staff and will keep the commission posted each month. There is a \$376,000 reduction in the budget and if the campground at Lighthouse Marine Park doesn't open and the Plantation Rifle Range doesn't return to full capacity, there will be an additional \$160,000-\$200,000 shortfall. Utility and service costs have increased with no budget increase. There are two full-time Regional Park Supervisor vacancies. One position is frozen and is helping to meet some of the budget reductions; the other position is being advertised internally and hopefully can be advertised externally if not filled internally.
- iii. **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife** – The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is working on upgrading the boat launch at the south end of Lake Whatcom by the end of 2022. The property is Public Works' property, but has a huge recreational component because it provides public access at the south end of the lake.
- iv. **Camp Horizon Foundation** – The Camp Horizon Foundation requested to begin negotiations to extend their lease with WC Parks, as the current lease expires the end of 2022. The Camp Horizon Foundation operates a camp for young adults with disabilities at Bay Horizon Park in the Birch Bay area. The Foundation maintains all of the buildings and would like some assurance that they're going to be there for the next 10-20 years. The current agreement is about 20-25 years old.
- v. **County Council Action** – The County Council approved to move forward with a proposal from the Finance and Administrative Services Committee for the Northwest Annex Feasibility Study. The study is to look at a new county office complex at Smith and Northwest, located next to the Phillips

66 Soccer Fields and the baseball diamonds. Mike advised this project will not negatively impact the use of or encroach on those fields and may actually benefit the fields with enhanced parking.

- vi. **Open Government Training** – All new commission members need to complete the Open Government Training.

B. Operations Report – Christ Thomsen

- i. **Staffing** – Reid Parker, the Regional Park Supervisor for the South Region, took a position with Washington State Parks and his last day was February 17th. Internal recruitment for the position closes February 23rd.
- ii. **Hertz Trail Slide** – A landslide was reported on January 20th at the 1.25-mile marker on the Hertz Trail. Staff assessed the slide and determined what needed to be done to get the trail opened as quickly as possible. Staff began clean-up on January 21st and had the rental equipment necessary to deal with the large boulders onsite on Monday, January 25th. The trail was reopened on Friday, January 29th. This was a substantial effort on the part of our equipment operators to get this slide cleaned up in such a safe and timely manner.
- iii. **Tomyhoi Cabin Remodel** – WC Parks staff began the remodel of the Tomyhoi cabin at Silver Lake Park on January 14th. The remodel included remodeling the kitchen, moving the main entrance door, installing a new window, sheetrock work, and painting. It also included upgrading the electrical system, installing a gas stove, replacing the flooring, upgrading the lighting, and other miscellaneous tasks. Christ shared a slideshow of the improvements.

C. Planning & Development Report – Rod Lamb

- i. **Red Mountain Shower and Restroom Facility** – Work continues on the shower and restroom facility at the Red Mountain Campground in Silver Lake Park. The foundation and masonry work were completed before the weather got too cold. Framing began on Monday, January 25th, but the contractor lost about three days because of the snow and cold weather. The windows will be three weeks late because of manufacturing difficulties related to COVID. Temporary measures will be taken to seal the building so that the interior work can be completed in a dry space. The tentative schedule is to have substantial completion of the building by the end of May and have it opened for public use mid-June.
- ii. **Maple Creek Shower and Restroom Facility** – The design process is underway for a second shower and restroom facility that will be located in the recently renovated Maple Creek Campground at Silver Lake Park. The configuration is very similar to that of the Red Mountain facility, but the Maple Creek facility will be a little larger. Rod has started the permitting process because the building is large enough to require State Department of Health review of the septic system. This process will take a

month or so longer than the usual process of dealing with the local Department of Health. A building permit should be submitted by early March and the tentative schedule is to be under construction in June and completed by the end of the year.

- iii. **Birch Bay Community Park** – The Birch Bay Community Park is currently being used as a construction staging area for the Birch Bay Berm Project that Public Works is working on. The project includes shoreline restoration and a separated pedestrian path that runs about a mile along Birch Bay Drive. The project is scheduled to be completed in March. Once the contractor leaves the site, Parks will remove a dilapidated chain link fence along the park's frontage and replace it with a log railing that is minimally disruptive to the site. The railing will act as a vehicular barrier and will delineate the park's frontage. A small concrete pad will be poured at the center of the park to allow pedestrians to enter and exit the park.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

IX. NEW BUSINESS

- A. **Introduction of New Members** – The new commissioner members introduced themselves and shared the reason(s) they wanted to be on the commission.
- B. **Election of Chair and Vice Chair** –
 - MOTION:** Brad VanderWerff moved to elect Sonja Max as the Chair. Sonja Max seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.
 - MOTION:** Brad VanderWerff moved to elect Pete Coy as the Vice Chair. Sonja Max seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.
- C. **Commission Functions, Meeting and Resources** – Mike explained that the Park Commission is an important advisory committee because it is citizen representation. The Park Commission and the Planning Commission are the only two bodies that are appointed by districts. The commission is codified and as a result, some of the ways business is handled is different because of the code and the responsibilities of the department. The commission is independent from the department and is advisory to the department and the Executive. The commission does not deal with personnel issues, but deals generally with policy, planning, and items that go to the Council for approval.
- D. **December Financials** – Mike handed out the department's 2020 financials. It is not the final, audited version; that will come out in March.
- E. **Quarterly Reports** – Mike handed out quarterly reports for the Hovander Maintenance Building & Demolition of Old Building, Lake Whatcom Trail Development, Nessel Farm, Silver Lake Road & Electrical Improvements, and South Fork Park. Mike advised quarterly reports for current and past projects are available on the Parks website under Planning & Development.

F. COVID-19 and Special Events – This topic was covered in Mike’s staff report.

G. 2022 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan and 2016

Community Survey – Rod gave an update on the Department’s Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan. This plan is updated every six years and is a guidance document used to meet the recreational demand of county residents. It is a requirement from the State Recreation & Conservation Office (RCO) in order to be grant eligible. Some of the plan elements include articulating goals and objectives, inventorying existing facilities, including/providing public involvement, analyzing demand and need, and developing a capital improvement program. The process for updating the Comp Plan begins with reviewing previous plans and gathering information about existing facilities from a variety of sources including GIS, spatial analysis, and public engagement. Rod and Mike will present to the County Council twice; once next week and then again in November to present the findings. An environmental checklist will be submitted to Planning and Development Services for SEPA review. Then there will be a public hearing with the County Council and adoption in December. Following adoption, the plan will be submitted to the Recreation and Conservation Office in January for certification. Once the plan is certified, the old plan will be replaced. Rod shared a slide show of projects from the 2016 Comp Plan that have been completed. The survey for the public engagement portion of the 2022 Comp Plan will be 100% online and will be ready to go in about 2 weeks.

H. Budget Supplementals (Rifle Range HVAC, Lookout Mountain Road Design and Engineering, Point Whitehorn Stairway Design and Engineering) –

There are three budget supplementals going before the Council next Tuesday. The first will be introduced to reallocate funds for the Plantation Indoor Range HVAC and roof replacement and also to provide supplemental funding for the project. The other two supplementals are related to FEMA funds. One was a road failure at Lookout Mountain Forest Preserve and the other was for damage to the stairway at Point Whitehorn. FEMA is funding the architectural and engineering costs to repair both the road and the stairway. The funds were received in 2020 and these supplementals move the funds to the 2021 budget. Once the architectural and engineering is done on both projects, FEMA will fund the repairs.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held virtually on March 18, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

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