

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, June 17, 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: Joe Hashmall, Terry Terry, Sonja Max, Brad VanderWerff, Pete Coy, Brian Estes, Kristen Fagan
Staff: Michael McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

EXCUSED

None

GUESTS

None

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

None

IV. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None

V. AGENDA

A. June 17, 2021

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the June 17, 2021 agenda as written. Joe Hashmall seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VI. MINUTES

A. May 20, 2021

MOTION: Pete Coy moved to approve the May 20, 2021 Minutes as written. Brian Estes seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

A. Director's Report – Michael McFarlane

i. Whatcom Land Trust Skookum II Property Acquisition Proposal –

Staff has been working on the conservation easement for the Skookum II property. The County is contributing \$1.25 million of Conservation Futures

Funds to the purchase of the property and will have a conservation and public access easement. The property will be managed by Whatcom Land Trust and is set to close next week

- ii. **Squires Lake Park** – Squires Lake Park is a popular park located off I-5 at the South Lake Samish exit. The park is managed through a cooperative agreement between Whatcom and Skagit Counties because it is located in both counties. The water level of the lake is maintained by a dam located on a portion of Whatcom County property. The water from this dam flows out of the park onto private property and eventually into Friday Creek in Skagit County. The County has been trying to acquire this privately-owned property since the park was first acquired in the early 1990's. The property is 5.9 acres with very steep, heavily wooded terrain. A portion of the main trail was located on this property until about a year ago, when the property owner requested that it be relocated and it was moved to the property line. The property owner is now interested in selling and Mike has asked for \$90,000 (the appraised value of the property) to be transferred out of the Conservation Futures Fund to cover the purchase. The purchase of this property will protect the area from being logged or developed and provide a buffer from the noise and traffic on I-5. WC Parks is not proposing any development, except a short trail to view the waterfall. Mike sent a purchase and sale agreement to the County Executive and the property owner and will be making a presentation to the Natural Resources Committee. If everything goes as planned, the acquisition would close in August.
- iii. **Staffing** – WC Parks submitted a request to fill the staff positions previously frozen and hopes to have them open and funded by early July.
- iv. **COVID Reimbursement** – WC Parks administration is compiling a list of COVID impacts for reimbursement. The list will be submitted to county administration for refund monies received by the Whatcom County from the Federal Government. Items eligible for reimbursement include lost revenues from the closure of facilities and expenses from additional cleaning and employee protection and gear.
- v. **Senior Centers** – The Bellingham Senior Center is not starting the congregate meal until late July or early August. The Lynden Senior Center opened May 1st using a restaurant style serving model where seniors make reservations. The parks crew moved picnic tables to the Point Roberts Community Center last week so congregate meals can be served outside beginning in July. The Everson, Sumas, and Welcome Senior Centers are considering options that work for their specific centers.
- vi. **Indoor Facility Reservations** – Indoor facility reservations opened June 16th for events scheduled July 1st through the end of the year. Group sizes are subject to facility capacity.

- vii. **Open Meetings** – The Governor’s Office reported last week that open meeting restrictions will be lifted June 30th. In order for open meetings to occur, commissioners and committee members will need to be comfortable meeting in person; they will need to be comfortable with the public attending the meetings (vaccinated or not); and the number of attendees will need to remain below the maximum occupancy for the facility or fewer if 6-foot social distancing is still required. The County Council is looking to meet in person, while also continuing virtual participation. Mike asked the commission members to give thought to whether or not they are comfortable meeting in person, and if so, where they would like to hold the July meeting.
- viii. **Little Squalicum Park** – The City of Bellingham had asked WC Parks to transfer the County portion of Little Squalicum Park to the City. City and county legal staff were discussing liability associated with the property and the county has decided not to proceed with the transfer. Mike will let the commission know if anything changes, but he does not expect the transfer to move forward.

B. Operations Report – Christ Thomsen

- i. **Staffing** – Seasonal recruitment is ongoing. There have been a number of positions that have been filled and then become vacant, but more positions are filled than there were at the time of last month’s meeting. The Accountant position was filled with the promotion of the Maintenance Worker II at the Bellingham Senior Activity Center. Recruitment for the Maintenance Worker II position closed Tuesday. Fourteen applications were received and staff is confident that the interview process will be successful. At this point in time, the position is on track to be filled at about the same time that it becomes vacant.
- ii. **Operations** – Staff have been working very hard at preparing the parks for peak season and a full opening at the end of June. They have been doing a spectacular job on grounds, road, and trail maintenance. Lighthouse Marine Park was closed all of last year and staff have been preparing that campground for reopening as well. The hike/bike/paddle site is complete and ready for use when the campground opens.
- iii. **Hovander Homestead Park** – Today Christ was able to approve the return of large farm animals to Hovander Homestead Park. Jill Jacoby, the Regional Park Supervisor, will reach out to the volunteers who provide the cows, goats, and sheep to get them back in the park.
- iv. **Silver Lake Park Lagoon Bridge** – The lagoon bridge at Silver Lake Park needs to be replaced, but replacement is a number of years out. The crew has been doing interim maintenance to keep it in good repair until it can be replaced.

- v. **Plantation Rifle Range HVAC/Roof Project** – The Plantation Rifle Range HVAC/Roof replacement project opened May 5th. Four bids were received and Tiger Construction, the lowest responsible bidder, was selected June 15th. The council authorized awarding the bid and the contract will be delivered to the Executive for signature June 18th.
- vi. **Lake Whatcom Trail Development** – The Lake Whatcom Trail Development project went out to bid. Interested contractors attended a pre-bid walkthrough. At the walkthrough, a number of questions, recommendations, and comments came up. WC Parks decided to issue an addendum to address those concerns and the bid opening date was extended to June 22nd.
- vii. **Whatcom Council on Aging** – The Whatcom Council on Aging received funds to put toward the Bellingham Senior Activity Center. They chose to use the funds to refinish the auditorium hardwood floors and paint the entire interior of the center, except the classrooms.

C. Planning & Development Report – Rod Lamb

- i. **Red Mountain Shower and Restroom Facility** – Tiger Construction met the conditions for substantial completion and the Red Mountain Restroom and Shower Facility opened to the public June 16th. The restroom portion is open, but the showers remain closed due to COVID-19. There are a few remaining issues the contractor is dealing with, the biggest of which is the coin operated units in the showers. The wrong dispenser units were shipped and are missing electrical components necessary to hook up a coin counter. The coin counter is a feature that provides an auditing mechanism to verify that the coins put in the machine match up with the coins collected by staff. There's a manufacturing shipping delay in the baby changing stations, which are scheduled to ship in July. The contractor will install those when they arrive, as well as the paper towel dispensers.
- ii. **Maple Creek Campground Shower and Restroom Facility** – The Maple Creek Campground Shower and Restroom Facility bid opening was on June 9th. Tiger Construction was the only bidder and the bid was higher than available funding largely due to escalating costs from the pandemic and material shortages. Rod submitted a budget supplemental to the council for consideration. The budget for this project was passed by ordinance, so the ordinance has to be changed to add funding. The council will introduce the budget supplemental June 29th and then act on it July 13th. If the budget supplemental is approved, Tiger Construction will mobilize onsite by the end of July. Construction will continue through winter 2022 and the facility will open to the public when the campground opens April 2022.

- iii. **Birch Bay Beach Park** – Permit applications are still under review at county and state levels. Rod expects to have permit approval in September and the contractor onsite mid-September. The project is set to be completed by the end of the year.
- iv. **Lake Whatcom Park** – Funding was approved for preliminary design and engineering services for trailhead improvements at Lake Whatcom Park. The improvements include expanded parking capacity, new flush restroom facilities (septic and well), a picnic shelter, security lighting, signage, pedestrian and circulation improvements, and site furnishings. A Request for Qualifications was solicited for architecture and engineering services and four submissions were received. Those were reviewed by Mike McFarlane, Christ Thomsen, and Rod Lamb, and MacLeod Reckord LLC, a firm with a long resume of similar projects in sensitive watersheds, was selected. Contract negotiations are underway.
- v. **ArcGIS Story Maps** – Mike, Shannon, and Rod met virtually with the Whatcom County Information Technology department to present ArcGIS Story Maps. ArcGIS Story Maps are a web-based application developed by a company called Esri that are compatible with mobile devices and desktops. Story maps allow users to view narratives about parks with hotlinks to pictures, maps, directions, etc. WC story maps were created by Emily Bastow, a former staff member, and IT was able to take Emily's original drafts and convert them to the latest version. Mike and Rod will make the ArcGIS Story Maps available to the Parks Commission for review and comments prior to it being available to the public.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. **2022 Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan – Capital**

Projects List – The Master Capital Improvements list was sent out to field staff. Rod and Christ will be going through a budgetary process and refining the scope of the projects listed in the 6-year time frame. Many of the projects will remain in the unscheduled category, but having them on the list will allow them to be eligible for funding should funding become available. Brian was concerned that District 4 only has the Northwest Soccer Park and would like to see land acquisitions for non-motorized recreation trail development in District 4. Mike advised that land acquisition is in a different chapter of the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan. Brian would like to see reservation statistics (reserved days versus unreserved days) for Hovander picnic areas and more information on why the new shelters are necessary. Brian would also like visitation data for Hovander Homestead Park and the Plantation Rifle Range. Mike said this information would be provided.

B. **Park Facility Openings – Phase III Reopening Plan Healthy WA –**

Reservations for indoor facilities opened June 16th for events and activities

starting July 1st. Group sizes are subject to facility capacity. Shower facilities remain closed and will be reevaluated June 30th after consulting with the State Department of Health and the local Health Department. Mike asked if the commissioners were comfortable meeting in person in July. All commissioners wanted to meet in person except for Brian Estes. Terry Terry suggested meeting at the Birch Bay Library site and the commission members agreed to that location.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. Budget Supplemental Request for Maple Creek Restroom Project Budget –

The bid from Tiger Construction was above the available funding, so Rod submitted a budget supplemental. The budget supplemental will be introduced June 29th and acted on July 13th. If council approves the additional funding, Tiger construction will be mobilized on site before the end of July.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

XI. NEXT MEETING DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held July 15, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. Location will be determined June 30th per State/County guidelines regarding open meetings. If restrictions are lifted, the meeting will be held at the Birch Bay Library site (7968 Birch Bay Drive, Blaine, WA) with a tour/walk to the berm and Birch Bay Beach Park. If restrictions are not lifted, the meeting will be held virtually.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:22 p.m.

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