

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, January 18, 2024
Virtual Meeting

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Sonja Max at 6:00 p.m.

Sonja Max welcomed Geoff Klise to the commission. Geoff Klise introduced himself.

Commissioners Present: Carl Weimer, Frank Boteler, Geoff Klise, Joe Hashmall, Kristen Fagan, Sheli Moore, Sonja Max

Staff Present: Bennett Knox, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

Guests/Public Present: Cliff Strong (PDS), Daniel Probst, Kate Chandler

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

The Forest Resiliency Task Force was added as Item A under Old Business. Joe Hashmall moved to approve the January 18, 2024 agenda as amended. Carl Weimer seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Carl Weimer moved to approve the December 19, 2023 minutes as written. Kristen Fagan seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

Daniel Probst tried playing a recording from Rud Browne, but it didn't work. Daniel will send it to Sonja Max so she can forward it to all of the commissioners.

4. Director Update

a. Capital Improvement Program Update – Bennett provided an update on the 6-year CIP. Additions include multi-modal trail projects in anticipation of the added staff members.

b. Canyon Lake Update – Bennett advised that Western Washington University and Sierra Pacific Industries reached an agreement for Canyon Lake. The agreement will be introduced at the next council meeting for approval. Bennett hopes to have Canyon Lake open to the public mid-summer.

c. Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan – Bennett, Christ, and Chris Elder (Public Works) are reviewing the four proposals that were submitted and will meet next week to discuss them.

d. Point Roberts Boat Ramp – Bennett shared that since the commission meeting at Point Roberts in June 2023, the department has been in discussions with the marina in Point Roberts as a potential location for a boat ramp. WC Parks has presented a proposal to negotiate a long-term agreement for a protected undeveloped parcel that would be suitable for a boat ramp. If the marina is

interested in an agreement, there may be some grant opportunities to apply for in the spring.

5. Operations Manager Update

- a. Operations Update** – WC Parks is waiting for the Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP) from the Department of Ecology so that sampling of the domestic wells near the Plantation Rifle Range can begin. Christ shared that staff did a great job of preparing for and dealing with the challenges that the cold snap caused.
- b. Staffing Update** – Through the mid-biennium review the department received four new positions. A vacancy was also created by a retirement. The department has been working through recruitment for the Ranger and Park Attendant positions. A decision on the Ranger position was made today, but Christ is not yet ready to publicly share that information. The Park Attendant position will move to external recruitment, as internal interest was not enough to fill the three vacant positions. The crafting of job descriptions for the conservation and trails work group continues and Christ hopes to begin recruitment by the end of the month. Extra help recruitment will begin in February for the seasonal positions that typically start in April and May.

6. Parks Design & Development Manager Update

- a. Capital Projects Update** – CIMA Construction was scheduled to begin the roofing and siding replacement for the ranger's residence, restroom facility, and old chow hut at Lighthouse Marine Park this week, but had to delay the start because of the weather. They plan to start in the next couple of weeks. Masterworks Roofing will replace the Silver Lake Lodge roof in March. Rod is working with Christ, Brandon (WC Parks Maintenance & Construction Supervisor), and Sean (Tiger Construction), on a schedule for the completion of the indoor range HVAC system replacement at the Plantation Rifle Range. Rod will report that schedule at next month's meeting. FSi Engineers completed their preliminary analysis of the HVAC system at the Bellingham Senior Activity Center and outlined two potential strategies to address indoor air quality. Staff are in the process of reviewing the options as well as sharing the information with the Council on Aging in terms of their ongoing operations at that facility.
- b. CPROS Update** – The CPROS was introduced to the county council on January 9th and was generally well received by all council members. Council members did have some questions and comments around sustainable funding. Bennett and Rod met with councilmember Galloway individually. Next Tuesday there is a public hearing CPROS update if any commissioners would like to speak on behalf of the plan. If approved, the update will be submitted to Recreation Conservation Office mid-February for certification by March 1st.

7. Old Business

a. Forestry Resilience Task Force

MOTION: Sheli Moore moved to designate Carl Weimer as the main representative and Joe Hashmall as the alternate to the Forestry Resilience Task Force. Frank Boteler seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

8. New Business

a. Comp Plan Review – Cliff Strong (PDS) – Cliff Strong, a Senior Planner with PDS, presented a letter from County Executive Sidhu, County Council Resolution 2022-036, the Advisory Committee Review Guidelines, and CompPlan Chapter 9. Cliff asked the commission to review the documents and email him their thoughts a week ahead of the February commission meeting so that he and Bennett can compile a list for discussion.

b. DNR – Anderson Creek/NRCA – Sonja prefaced this discussion by pointing out that the lands being discussed are DNR managed and not county owned. Sonja advised that DNR has been charged with putting property (roughly 650 acres in Whatcom County) into a natural resource conservation area that would prevent the harvesting of any trees in these areas to increase the carbon stores and natural habitats. Sonja’s understanding of the NRCA lands is that there would be minimal recreation allowed on these properties. Several of the properties identified are in direct conflict with trails in the comprehensive plan and the Lake Whatcom circumnavigation trail and Bellingham to Baker trails that Daniel Probst are working on. Discussion ensued amongst the commission members and staff.

MOTION: Joe Hashmall motioned to recommend support of the concept of sequestering carbon dense land through the NRCA mandate, but to maintain recreational access on those lands for hiking, biking, and equestrian use. Kristen Fagan seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote. Sonja will draft a letter for the commissioners to review before being sent to the county council.

c. Election of Commission Chair and Vice Chair –

MOTION: Carl Weimer motioned to keep Sonja Max as the Chair and Frank Boteler as the Vice-Chair. Kristen Fagan seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

d. Commission Work Plan for 2024 – The commission discussed developing a work plan for 2024. Geoff Klise would like to discuss the appropriateness of the range being operated by the county. Bennett asked that the commission provide input on the forest management plan, multi-modal trail work, and the Hovander master plan. Frank asked Bennett for a State of the State address; significant things he has learned in the last year, his priorities for the future, and how the commission can help.

9. Open Discussion

Bennett shared that the sign at Semiahmoo Park that was a source of community comment related derogatory language toward the Asian-American community related to a piece of equipment at the Semiahmoo Museum will be replaced with a new sign renaming the piece of equipment a salmon butchering machine.

10. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

a. All-Staff Meeting – Thursday, March 7

11. Meeting Input/Evaluation

None.

12. Next Meeting: February 15, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on February 15, 2024 at the Semiahmoo Cannery Lodge, 9261 Semiahmoo Parkway, Blaine, WA.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director