

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, February 15, 2024
Semiahmoo Cannery Lodge
9261 Semiahmoo Parkway, Blaine, Washington

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

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

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

Staff Present: Bennett Knox, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

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

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Old Business Item A (Comp Plan Review) was moved ahead of staff updates. Kristen Fagan moved to approve the February 15, 2024 agenda as amended. Sheli Moore seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Joe Hashmall moved to approve the January 18, 2024 minutes as written. Kristen Fagan seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

Daniel Probst thanked the commission for the letter of support to council on Brokedown Palace and Anderson Creek sites. According to Mr. Probst, council concurred with the state, but did include language in their letter to the state requesting that the state look into creating a natural area reserve similar to Blanchard. He stated that in a follow-up meeting with DNR through Zoom on February 7th, DNR staff brought up the fact that the proviso actually says word for word that “forested state trust lands exchanged with lands purchased under this subsection may be designated by the department as natural resource preserves or natural resource conservation areas without being subject to the requirements of Chapter 79.7”. This means the state law that was passed gives only gives them two options and it is unknown if a third suggestion can be an option. Mr. Probst would like the parks commission to consider recommending the reconveyance of these properties for county parks for public use. As long as the purchased lands are trust lands, they can be requested back from the state. Once the state transfers the trusts, the lands can no longer be reconveyed back. DNR is trying to do this within one year. Daniel will provide more information at the next meeting. Sonja Max shared that she was at the February 7th meeting and Kaylee and John from county council have asked for a follow-up meeting discuss this. The commissioners will address this topic at the next meeting.

4. Old Business

- a. **Comp Plan Review** – Cliff Strong and the commissioners discussed recommendations for the 2025 CompPlan Review.

MOTION: Sheli Moore moved to acknowledge that the comments presented in Cliff's 2025 CompPlan Update document will be taken into consideration while recognizing that recreation is now central to people's lives. Frank Boteler seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

5. Director Items

- a. **Capital Improvement Program Update** – Bennett provided a draft list of the Capital Improvement Plan.
- b. **Canyon Lake Update** – The signed agreement for Canyon Lake is on the council agenda for February 20th. The department is working to put into place the mechanisms to get the signage and gates installed so the park can be opened mid to late summer.
- c. **Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan** – The department started conducting interviews of the respondents for the Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan. The interviewing committee included a staff member from the City of Bellingham, as they manage a lot of watershed properties. Bennett hopes to negotiate a scope and fee with the chosen consultant in March.
- d. **Grant Opportunities** – Bennett wanted to recognize that with the issues facing the county as a whole, there is a real tightness around the budget. Bennett advised the department will need external funding and will apply for grants as it has in the past. In order to be successful in these grant applications, Bennett would like to continue lay the groundwork for community support and engagement. Bennett would like to create connections and partnerships with community members, non-profits, and other stakeholders so that strategies can be developed to develop support for these grant applications.

6. Operations Manager Update

- a. **Operations Update** – The pedestrian foot bridge in Lake Samish Park has been closed because the footing of the bridge was undermined with the heavy rains. The replacement of this bridge was added as an amendment in the CIP and the department hopes to replace the bridge while the park is closed for the Samish Bridge Replacement Project. Samish Park will be closed mid-April until at least August 2025 while Public Works replaces the Samish Bridge. WC Parks will be working on communication plans to share this closure with the public. Public Works will close the road to everything but local traffic, but the department will need to plan for managing shoreline access. The Department of Ecology approved the Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP) for the sampling of the domestic wells near the Plantation Rifle Range and the consultant will begin sampling Tuesday. The consultant also submitted a modified SAP for the rest of the site

characterization work and plan to start in early March to get that work done. Once that is complete, cost estimates for cleanup can be refined with cleanup to begin this spring. There was a sewer line failure at the Bellingham Senior Activity Center which required the whole facility to be shut down. While the contractor repaired the failure, maintenance staff installed valves so that in the future portions of the building can still function when failures like this occur.

- b. Operations Staffing Update** – Three vacancies were filled internally and external recruitment opened for the remaining vacant Park Attendant position. Many highly qualified candidates applied and interviews will begin in the next two weeks. Staff finished the job description for the Land Management and Trails Supervisory position. Once finalized by HR, recruitment for that position will open. Staff is now working on the job description for the Land Management Technician. Seasonal staff recruitment will open within the next week.

7. Parks Design & Development Manager Update

- a. Capital Projects Update** – The contractor for the Plantation Rifle Range indoor HVAC replacement is beginning the exterior civil work in preparation for final connection from the air handling unit to the building. The contract with the design consultant for the Lake Whatcom Park Trailhead project was recently renewed. Public outreach for this project will begin in the spring. Rod will be submitting for a land disturbance permit and SEPA review for the parking lot improvements at Stimpson Family Nature Reserve. The WC Parks maintenance crew will be removing rot and missing siding from the Hovander Barn in preparation for it being painted this spring. CIMA Construction has completed all of the roof work for the ranger's residence, the restroom, and the chow hut at Lighthouse Marine Park and is now waiting on siding materials. They still plan to be finished by the end of March. GeoEngineers began work on the Lookout Mountain Road repair, but were delayed because an auger dug up an electrical line. A locate had been done prior to excavation, but evidently didn't precisely locate the electrical line. Fortunately, no one was hurt and PSE has repaired the line and was able to restore power to the communication towers. GeoEngineers will resume their operations next week. The HVAC upgrade at the administrative office has been paused so that additional funding can be secured to complete similar upgrades to the annex building which will soon be occupied by WC Parks staff. 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. The first option is a complete facility conditioning of all spaces that are within the existing facility and the second option is conditioning of only the most critical spaces. Staff are in the process of reviewing the options internally and with the Council on Aging. No decisions have been made. Masterworks Roofing will replace the Silver Lake Lodge roof in March. They will be opening up some skylights that have been covered which will improve the

natural indoor lighting. The CPROS was approved and adopted by county council on January 23rd. The department submitted it to RCO on January 29th and it was certified almost immediately. The department is now back in compliance and grant eligible.

b. Regional Trails Update – Not discussed.

8. Old Business (continued from above)

a. Draft Work Plan – The commissioners reviewed their draft work plan for the year.

9. New Business

None.

10. Open Discussion

None.

11. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

a. All-Staff Meeting – Thursday, March 7

12. Meeting Input/Evaluation

None.

13. Next Meeting: March 21, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on March 21, 2024 at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center, 8251 Kendall Road, Maple Falls, WA.

14. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Transcribed by: Kristin Lunderville, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director