

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, March 21, 2024
East Whatcom Regional Resource Center
8251 Kendall Road, Maple Falls, 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: Carl Weimer, Frank Boteler, Geoff Klise, Joe Hashmall, Sheli Moore, Sonja Max

Commissioners Absent: Kristen Fagan

Staff Present: Bennett Knox, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

Guests/Public Present: Chris Orr (Whatcom Council on Aging), Jennifer Lautenbach (Lynden Community Senior Center), Daniel Probst

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Carl Weimer moved to approve the March 21, 2024 agenda as written. Geoff Klise seconded. The motion carried with unanimous vote.

Sheli Moore moved to approve February 15th, 2024 meeting minutes as written. Frank Boteler seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication

- a. **Greater Bellingham Running Club Letter** – Sonja Max confirmed that all commissioners received and read the letter from the Greater Bellingham Running Club.
- b. **Whatcom Chapter of Backcountry Horsemen of Washington Letter** – Sonja Max confirmed that all commissioners received and read the letter from the Whatcom Chapter of Backcountry Horsemen of Washington.

4. Director Update

- a. **Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan** – Bennett reported that once the budget is approved, the department will move forward with negotiations to get a contract in place for the Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan. Bennett anticipates having a consultant on board for the Lake Whatcom Policy Group meeting in June.
- b. **Comp Plan Update** – Bennett did not have anything new to report on the Comp Plan update.
- c. **Biennium Budget Process** – Bennett shared that staff have been busy with the Biennium Budget process, as the deadline is next week. Bennett shared that

balancing requests with departmental needs will be critical as the process moves forward.

5. **Operations Manager Update**

- a. **Operations Update** – Christ shared that the domestic well sampling at the Plantation Rifle Range is complete and the consultant is now analyzing the data. The next phase of site characterization is awaiting approval from the Department of Ecology. The department completed an application for a 50% match grant through the Washington State Department of Ecology for clean-up efforts. Christ is unsure of when results will be announced. The Samish Park Bridge project is moving forward and the park will be closed mid-May 2024 through September 2025.
- b. **Operations Staffing Update** – Seasonal recruitment is going well with very good applicants and six returning employees. Interviews were held for the new Park Attendant position and staff are waiting on the background check to move forward. Christ shared that the department is working on finalizing job descriptions for the two remaining operations positions: Land Manager and Land Management Technician. HR will finalize the job descriptions in April.

6. **Parks Design & Development Manager Update**

- a. **Capital Projects Update** – Rod shared that the Lighthouse Marine Park Roof and Siding Replacement and Silver Lake Park Lodge Roof Replacement projects are under construction and nearing completion. Both projects experienced weather and material supply delays which forced completion dates to be extended beyond the original contract period, and are now estimated to be completed mid-April. The Stimpson Family Nature Reserve paving project was submitted to Planning & Development Services for permit approval in March. The Lookout Mountain Road (LM-2000) geotechnical investigations have been completed and the project engineer is evaluating a range of solutions to repair damage caused by winter storms in years 2021 and 2022. The Plantation HVAC contractor has begun final work to connect the HVAC system to the building. However, there have been delays due to complications associated with lead remediation efforts at the high-power and small-bore range facilities. Rod received the Schematic Design submittal for the Silver Lake shower and restroom building at Cedar campground. The project is on target to be submitted for permit approval later this spring. Rod expects approval in the summer, bidding and construction in the fall, and an opening the facility to the public as soon as possible in the 2025 camping season. Rod met with a subcommittee of the South Fork Valley Community Association that is working on the Van Zandt Community Hall restoration. Parks has submitted the necessary pre-award documentation required to receive grant money awarded by the Department of Commerce for the Community Hall restoration. Finally, the department will be

publishing a Request for Qualifications for architectural design and engineering services for the proposed Maintenance Facility at Hovander Homestead Park in late March and hope to make a selection by mid-April.

7. Old Business

- a. **DNR/NRCA Areas Discussion** – The commission asked staff if they had any updates on the DNR/NRCA Areas. Bennett responded that he had nothing new to report. Bennett stated that there is still an opportunity for this process to look at recreation. The commission asked staff to be proactive and to continue to check in with DNR. Bennett agreed to continue to communicate with DNR and to keep the subject on the commission’s agenda periodically. Christ added that WC Parks has a proactive relationship with DNR and communicates with them often.

8. New Business

- a. **Council on Aging – Aging Well Whatcom Presentation** – Chris Orr, the Executive Director of the Whatcom Council on Aging and Jennifer Lautenbach, the Executive Director and Manager of the Lynden Community/Senior Center gave a presentation on Aging Well Whatcom.
- b. **State of the Parks Report** – Bennett stated that he is a year and half into his position and the department is making slow and steady progress. Bennett has a general philosophy of the have to do, the need to do, and the want to do. Bennett sees the department as necessarily primarily focused on those things we must do in terms of core duties and maintenance of existing facilities. He referenced that at the same time, the department needs to take steps to create conditions that will lead to progress toward the things we want to do. He referenced the upcoming focus on park master planning where the department needs to focus so we can advance projects that the community has wanted for a while. He cited forest management and regional trail development as examples. Bennett shared that the department has filled some critical positions, and made some really good hires. Bennett acknowledged that it’s not just about bringing on staff, but also retraining staff. Bennett shared that department morale while better can still be improved and he feels the department is moving in the right direction as works through the current phase of adjustment with new staff and positions. Bennett acknowledged that work load is high and the department is at capacity for the number of projects it can take on. Bennett discussed that the budget is tightening and the department is necessarily needing to prioritize projects. Bennett would like to continue engaging and empowering the community. Bennett would like to look for opportunities to engage with outside groups who may be able to leverage additional resources and funding.

9. Open Discussion

Rod shared that he visited with Jeff Margolis from the Van Zandt Steering Committee. The committee would like to give the parks commission a presentation about the Van Zandt Community Hall renovation project. The commissioners agreed to put the presentation on the next agenda with a 30-minute time allotment.

A commissioner shared that the South Whatcom Fire building located across from Gate 3 in Sudden Valley is closed due to significant water damage.

10. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

- a. **39th Annual Woods Tour, June 7, 2024, 9:00am – 3:00pm, Deming Log Show Museum, 3295 Cedarville Road, Bellingham, WA** – Bennett will email the commissioners a flyer for this event.

11. Meeting Input/Evaluation

None.

12. Next Meeting: April 18, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

The next Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. on April 18, 2024 at the Van Zandt Community Hall, 4106 Valley Highway, Deming, WA.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

Transcribed by: Erica Kulm, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director