

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION**  
**Thursday, April 18, 2024**  
**Van Zandt Community Hall**  
**4106 Valley Highway, Deming, WA**

**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, Franklin Boteler, Geoff Klise, Sheli Moore, Sonja Max, Kristen Fagan

Commissioners Absent: Joe Hashmall

Staff Present: Bennett Knox and Rod Lamb

Guests/Public Present: Will Redecki, Jeff Margolis, Roger Brock, Ryan McCall, John Stephens, Dan Probst

**2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes**

Carl Weimer moved to approve the April 18, 2024 agenda as written. Franklin Boteler seconded. The motion carried with unanimous vote.

Sheli Moore moved to approve March 21, 2024 meeting minutes as written. Frank Boteler seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

**3. South Fork Valley Community Association – Review of Van Zandt Community Hall**

**Reconstruction Project.** – Presentation by Will Redecki from South Fork Valley Community Association. Mr. Redecki provide an overview of the Association, the history of the Community Hall and the current scope and need for the renovation project. He explained that the Association has responsibility for maintenance and capital improvements to the Hall and the importance of the project to generate additional revenues that will support facility upkeep and improve the services provided in the broader Acme Valley.

**4. Public Comments/Communication (comments should be kept to 5 minutes or less)**

- a. Letter from Sean Howard – A letter from Sean Howard was shared with the commission.

**5. Director Items**

**a. Canyon Lake Community Forest –**

Bennett shared that the department has a access easement and road maintenance agreement in place with Sierra Pacific Industries and WWU to provide access across SPI property for access to Canyon Lake. The department has started on some of the items that need to be done to implement that agreement. Main items include for signage and gates that need to be installed. However, recently the County was informed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources that an agreement will be required for access across DNR road segments prior to SPI property. Meetings are scheduled

between the County, DNR and other stakeholders in the coming weeks to initiate negotiations related to securing that access.

**b. Carrasco/Nesset Farm –**

WC Parks purchased the Carrasco property at the end of Saxon Road. This property was purchased to provide pedestrian access to Nesset Farm and for development of a trailhead to support future hiking and equestrian trail connectivity in the area. Later this year the department will submit a supplemental budget request to remove unnecessary structures located on the property in keeping with the Department's justification for acquisition. The department has been meeting with WC Parks has an existing easement with DNR that allows trail development for access to Nesset Farm. The Department is working with the Nesset Farm Foundation which is the primary partner for development of the trail and Nesset Farm and with whom the Department is working for development of necessary planning for future activation of Nesset Farm. Bennett said the department is working toward further community engagement around how this property acquisition fits with other park development associated with South Fork Park.

**c. Pt. Roberts Marina –** Bennett shared that the department is moving forward with discussions regarding a potential boat ramp at Pt. Roberts Marina. Bennett stated that the WC Parks shared with the Point Roberts community that County will not be replacing the boat ramp at Lighthouse Marine Park given that the facility has failed twice, and that the department is looking for an alternative. Bennett shared that WCParks staff member Rod Lamb put together a concept diagram for a potential acquisition and construction of a ramp at the Point Roberts Marina and that this proposal has been presented to the the Marina. Discussions with the Marina regarding potential acquisition and development are ongoing.

**d. Comp Plan Update –** Bennett shared a letter from Phil Thomson, the chair of the Climate Impact Advisory Committee (CIAC). The CIAC is looking to cooperate with WC Parks commission. The CIAC shared detailed comments that they had provided to PDS.

Following up on previous discussions involving the Parks Advisory Commission, the department has taken the prior commission, met internally to discuss, and is working on providing Department comments back to PDS. Bennett said that the department will send a draft to PDS for their feedback and comments. Bennett shared that PDS is gearing up for the public process formally. PDS will be going before the planning commission next month and then to council with their public outreach plan. Bennett said the department would like to have their comments in to be able to feed into that process.

**6. Operations Manager Updates – Christ on Vacation**

Bennett gave update on the Plantation Range due to Christ being on vacation. Bennett shared that the consultant has approval from ecology to move into the last phase of site characterization.

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

**a. Capital Improvement Program Update –**

Rod shared that design work for the Silver lake shower and restroom facility near Cedar camp is underway. Rod shared that the department is reviewing the design development package that was submitted by King Architecture. Rod explained that one of the things

that came up during the schematic design was the need for backup electrical power at Silver Lake generally. Rod shared that Silver Lake frequently experiences power outages that take the water system off-line. Rod went on to explain that when the water system goes down it loses pressure and triggers a mandated protocol that Parks has to follow to sanitizing the water system each time a power outage occurs. Rod shared that campers then are required to boil water for their safety. Rod said that the backup electrical generator will be an additional expense but the department feels that it's justified. Rod shared that power outages happen at least a half dozen times a year and corrective actions are very labor intensive and are serious inconvenience to the visiting public.

Stimpson trailhead parking improvements: Rod shared that the project is currently in permit review. Rod is expecting the permit to be approved later this month allowing the department to get a bid package together and put out for advertising for construction this summer. Rod said that the department is still hopeful to get the project completed before the watershed window closes at the end of September.

Plantation indoor range: Rod shared that Tiger Construction is back on the project. Rod shared there was an earlier complication due to the site characterization work that concluded the contractor needed to work under the assumption that the soil was contaminated with lead. That information changed how the contractor does excavation because the soil has to be treated differently. This will require additional worker training of the contractor's staff before final work can commence. Parks submitted a supplemental budget request for a few remaining project items that are in addition to connecting air handling unit to the building. Rod shared that the PA system needs some attention, as well as some interior lighting that needs to be repaired before opening the facility to the public. Rod stated that it still unclear how long the repairs will take and therefore the opening date is still pending.

Lighthouse Marine Park: Rod shared that the siding and roofing project is nearing completion, and should be wrapped up by the end of next week. Rod stated that it was a much-needed repair.

Silver Lake Lodge: Rod shared that the reroofing project concluded today. The contractor finished the last elements and will demobilize off the site. Rod gave a shout out to WC Parks employee Dave Bramer. Rod stated that Dave had done a great job with his assignments, in particularly the Silver Lake Lodge reroofing project and the Lighthouse Marine Park siding and roofing project that were both under his charge. Rod said that Dave had done a great job monitoring progress and keeping the contractor on schedule.

Discussion ensued about the parking lot of the Hertz trail after a commissioner asked status. Rod said the trailhead improvement project is progressing. The department submitted another supplemental budget request for additional dollars to facilitate some public outreach. The department has completed the preliminary design for an improved trailhead facility.

Rod shared the Hovander Homestead Park Master Plan effort that is getting underway. Rod said that after the funding is approved the project will be starting up early summer. Bennett shared that on the list for future projects is the Birch Bay Beach Park. Bennett shared that there is a committee in Birch Bay that will be part of the process. Bennett also shared that there's county commitment for funding, however, a significant amount of

funding needs to come from the community. The committee has in part been formed to spearhead a fundraising initiative. Bennett shared that this might be an opportunity for involvement for the WC Parks commission. Bennett shared that he thought that the members of that committee would appreciate of some level of commission involvement. Commissioners asked if any potential dates on when the Carrasco house will be demolished and when public access allowed. Bennett answered that the structure removal will likely be this year, however, public access won't occur until a more definitive park programming element has been established. Although some renovation work has been completed, there's more work to be done including accommodating ADA access, and providing restrooms. Bennett shared that there is still a lot of questions that need to be addressed before the facility can accommodate public access.

**b. Capital Projects Update –**

Rod stated that the department submitted a revised Six-Year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to planning and development services. The CIP included modifications that added several projects making them eligible for specific funding dollars. The CIP will go before the planning commission next Thursday. Rod said once the planning commission acts on it, it will go before the council for introduction in May, and then approval in June.

Rod shared that the 2024 grant cycle has started with Recreation and Conservation Office. Applications for the first round of grants are due on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Rod said the department is looking at one of the grants for the Carrasco property to get reimbursement for the acquisition costs.

Rod said the department is also looking at making a grant application to partially fund needed repairs at the boat launch facility at Silver Lake. The launch facility is about 50 years old and needs significant repairs and accessibility upgrades.

Discussion ensued regarding the parking lot of the Hertz trail after a commissioner asked status. Rod said the trailhead improvement project is progressing. The department submitted a supplemental budget request for additional funding to facilitate a public outreach effort. The department has completed the preliminary design and environmental analysis for trailhead improvements and now the timing is right solicit public input on the preliminary proposal.

**8. Old Business - None**

**9. New Business**

**a. Master/Vision Plan Community Engagement (e.g. Hovander Homestead Park)**

Bennett shared that the department is viewing the Hovander Homestead Park master plan as an opportunity set a standard on how the Department approaches community engagement around some of the larger master plans moving forward. Bennett shared that Hovander Homestead Park is a regional park and while there has been planning for certain aspects of the park, this will be the first comprehensive park Master Plan. The department recognizes the growth that is happening around the park (e.g., Ferndale is one of the quickest economically growing cities in Whatcom County). The department wants to consider issues associated with that that growth that affect the park in the

Master Plan. Bennett said this is an opportunity for the commission to give voice as representatives of the community regarding what the process will involve.

Commissioner asked: What kind of feedback is valuable when the department is doing that kind of Master Plan. What information is useful from the commission?

Bennett answered: A typical planning process would be the department would have a steering committee, stake holder groups, and then an opportunity to talk to different user groups. The other part is the demographic data collection. Bennett shared that at this time the department does not have a great system in reaching out to community members. So, Commissions are encouraged to participate in the process and provide input on how outreach can best be conducted.

Discussion ensued regarding flooding and environmental design at Hovander Homestead Park.

Discussion ensued around the Master Plan and community engagement.

Commission asked if Bennett would like to address other parks that might be going through the Master Planning process?

Bennett responded that the department has plans for a Master Planning process later in the year for Lighthouse Marine Park. It will be a similar process as the Master plan for Hovander Homestead Park but scaled to reflect visitation and range of opportunities at the park.

**b. Departmental Metrics**

Commissioner Sonja Max shared that she thought it would be best for the department to let the commission know how the department evaluates the benefits of different properties, and what that process looks like. Sonja gave some history of why this question came up from questions in the past; i.e. why does the County hang onto things that might cost a lot of money if seemingly less value to the public than something else could? Sonja stated that she thought it would be good to review what all the WC Parks assets are what are the metrics that the department uses to decide if those are worth keeping. Sonja said she is not suggesting putting anything on the chopping block, just to review what the department has and make sure these are good things we are investing money into and worth keeping.

Bennett asked the question if there can be a discussion on what the commission might want the department to put together? Discussion ensued on what the commission would like to see.

Discussion ensued of what WC Parks is currently doing to track data of park usage and how to broaden the departments vision on how to solicit the input from people who might not normally provide input.

**10. Open Discussion**

Letter from Phil Thomson: Commissioner Sonja Max stated it appeared that Phil would like feedback from the commission. Sonja stated that she would reach out to Phil to get a better understanding of what he would like from the commission and report back.

Bennett shared that the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission now has members approved and the WC Parks is interested in finding a way to get their input into the departments master plan process.

A commissioner asked if the WCParks are in charge of inspecting power lines that run through the parks and removing hazard trees? Bennett said it was a mix of responsibilities. Bennett said it is something the department needs to have a discussion regarding responsibility. Commissioner asked Bennett if there are specific asks for commission involvement in the public engagement for Hovander and in general. Commissioner asked if involvement means working within the community they live in or specific outreach that the WCParks doesn't have as part of the budget? Discussion ensued on what involvement could look like.

11. **Commissioner Engagement Opportunities**
  - a. **39<sup>th</sup> Annual Woods Tour, June 7, 2024, 9:00am – 3:00PM, Deming Log Show Museum, 3295 Cedarville Road, Bellingham, WA**
12. **Meeting Input/Evaluation – None**
13. **Next Meeting: May 16, 2024, 6:00 PM, Parks Administrative Office, 3373 Mount Baker Highway, Bellingham, WA**
14. **Adjournment** The meeting was adjourned at 7:29 PM

Transcribed by: Erica Kulm, Clerk IV  
Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director