

MEETING MINUTES
WHATCOM COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, May 15, 2024
Park Administration Building
3373 Mount Baker Highway, Bellingham, 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: Joe Hashmall, Kristen Fagan, Sheli Moore, Frank Boteler, Carl Weimer, Sonja Max, Geoff Klise

Staff Present: Bennett Knox, Christ Thomsen, Rod Lamb

Guests/Public: None

2. Approval of Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes

Kristen Fagen moved to approve the May 16, 2024 Agenda as written. Carl Weimer seconded. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Geoff Klise moved to approve the April 18, 2024 minutes as written, Franklin Boteler seconded. The Motion carried with a unanimous vote.

3. Public Comments/Communication: None

4. Director Items

- a. **Executive's Office Changes** – Bennett shared that Deputy Executive Tyler Schroeder's last day of employment with Whatcom County was May 10, 2024. Kayla Schott-Bresler has been promoted to Deputy Executive. Kayla will be in charge of strategic initiatives as well as justice system issues and health. The second newly created Deputy Executive position has been posted. That second position will cover Parks, Public Works, and the Administrative services. Jed Holmes was promoted to Public Affairs & Strategy Manager.
- b. **Grants** – Bennett shared that with the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (CPROS) plan passing the department has been in the position to reapply for grants. The department submitted, and now in second round, an outdoor facility at East Whatcom Regional Resource Center through a youth athletic facility grant. The outcome won't be known until the fall. In May the department submitted two grants. One is an Aquatic Land Enhancement Account (ALEA) Grant for Birch Bay Beach Park. The second grant submitted was Washington Wildlife Recreation Program Grant under the trail's category for the reimbursement of the Carrasco Property purchase. The grant would cover the demolition work that needs to be done as well as reimbursement for the

purchase price. Looking ahead to the fall the department is looking at a few other grants. One for the possibility of boat ramp at the Point Roberts Marina. The other one is for Silver Lake boat ramp which needs to be repaired.

- c. **Forest Management Plan** – Bennett shared that the department is in negotiations with a vendor but not awarded the contract as of yet. Recently, the City of Bellingham has expressed interest in partnering on the project and Whatcom County Parks and the City of Bellingham's Public Works Department are working on an interlocal agreement to formally partner on the development of the Forest Management Plan. City of Bellingham is looking to add 3000 acres of their properties towards the effort. Looking to have the plan go before Council in June.
- d. **Capital Budget Preparation** – Bennett shared the department is in the process of developing the Capital Budget for the year. The County is undertaking some very large capital initiatives a present and so Parks is necessarily prioritizing it's request, with priority given to critical capital repair projects are limiting limit future outlays that might result from deferring needed repairs. Recognizing capital budgets are tight given overall County needs, the department is seeking to increase its ability to generate external funding. For example, the Department is working more closely with the external partners such as the Whatcom Parks Foundation to facilitate capacity development that may benefit Departmental project in the future – an example being multi-modal reginal trail development.

5. **Operations Manager Update**

- a. **Operations Staffing Update** – Christ shared updates on extra help recruitment. Continued success in filling extra help positions, only a couple positions left to fill. Challenge the department has had is that almost all new hires are starting late this year. Typically, we would've already had extra staff started a few weeks ago but just really getting started this week with extra help starting to onboard. Christ shared that operations is going really well. The department did have a Repair Maintenance 2 position filled. The new Repair Maintenance 2 position was a promotion within the department. Next few weeks will start open recruitment for the Land Management Supervisor to work on multimodal trails.
- b. **Plantation Rifle Range** – Christ shared that site characterization work continues. At the end of soil investigation and hope to get some information soon. Starting up the terrestrial ecological investigation. Which helps understand what the effect of the contaminates on terrestrial life. Working with the Department of Ecology to set the next public meeting. Ecology would like to have the meeting in June to align with EPA comment period. Department of Ecology is targeting June 20th hybrid meeting.
- c. **Hovander Irrigation Project** – Christ shared that WC Parks has a partnership with the Master Gardeners Foundation. That partnership is for the demonstration gardens at Hovander and the Community Education work that they do, as well as helping their program train the master gardener. The Master Gardeners

Foundation approached the departments to improve the water system at Hovander Park that has been, for years, maxed out for irrigation for distribution around the Hovander house. The Foundation has a master plan and is working on enhancing the gardens as part of that plan. The department partnered with the Master Gardener Foundation to completely redo the water distribution around the Hovander house and upgraded the line size for more flow and pressure, and laid about 2000 feet of underground pipe. Christ stated that the project couldn't have been done without the partnership with the Master Gardeners Foundation. There was \$16,500 in donations to the project. \$10,00 was through the community foundation through a private donor. Master Gardeners donated \$5,000 to the project. Trans Mountain Pipeline donated \$1,500. There were also 15 hydrants installed and spread throughout the area for both current projects and future growth. Christ stated that he was extremely happy and proud of how the project went. The project was underbudget, ahead of schedule, everything that was scoped got done. Bennett shared that the next phase working with the Master Gardeners is to work with them on their project to install pavers within the gardens. There will be an opportunity to work with the Master Gardeners with fundraising for that to support their efforts.

- d. Update: Lookout Mountain Trail Work** – Christ shared that the department does not have new trail construction planned this year in Lake Whatcom area. Christ stated that Lookout Mountain is the next area planned for trail construction. Christ handed out the Spring document for budget request for trails in the Lake Whatcom watershed as far as new construction and capital maintenance. Currently working through the budget and funding is shifting. Finished construction last year on the Chanterelle connector trail. Didn't have the capacity to do planning for trail construction for this current year. The departments expect to begin planning effort next year for the trail work and construction the following year. The department is planning to do the layout, design and permitting in 2025. Construction in 2026. Also, the department plans on doing significant renovation work on the Hertz trail. The plan is to make the Hertz trail an accessible trail again in 2026. Discussion ensued regarding issues around different trail maintenance throughout the WC Parks trails.

6. Parks Design & Development Manager Update

- a. Capital Improvement Program Update** – Rod shared that the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) was on the planning commission's agenda in April. The commission submitted to council with the recommendation of approval with just a couple of adjustments. The council will hear that recommendation on June 4th, 2024.
- b. Capital Projects Update** – Rod shared that the department is continuing to make progress at the Silver Lake shower/restrooms facility for Cedar Camp. The department has made comments on the design development submittal from the

architect. A few project scope items were added by the department. Specifically, a backup generator was added to the project, and that effort will require additional engineering prior to finalizing our permit submittal. Rod said the backup generator is an important element and needs to be included for the safety and convenience of the visiting public and park staff. **Stimpson Trail Head:** The project plans for permit approval have been submitted. Parks received a notice of additional requirements (NOAR) from Planning & Development Services (PDS) staff, which has now been provided to PDS. Rod shared that the project is on track to be bid in June, probably make a recommendation to award in July, and have a notice to proceed mid-July or early August. Rod said the engineer projected it to be a 3-week project. Rod said the department is estimating a 5-week interruption to the public and be completed with plenty of time before the watershed closes.

Plantation Indoor Range: Rod shared that council approved additional funding that will allow the final elements to be wrapped up on the project. Rod shared that the department is experiencing a slow start with the contractor team's HVAC sub-contractor. Rod said he had talked directly to the President of Tiger construction and was told that Tiger's people will be onsite within a week and half with the HVAC crew to follow that. Rod said there is still not an estimate for opening date. Rod shared that there is still a lot of loose ends on the inside of the range for staff to take care of. **Light house Marine Park:** Rod shared that CIMA Construction is working through some final punch list items on the siding project at the Ranger's residence and should be finished this week. **Lookout Mountain Forest Road Repair:** Rod shared that park staff Dave Bramer had a recent conference call with the engineer and reviewed three preliminary design concepts for road repairs. The designs will be reviewed internally before making a final decision on the road repair approach. **Lake Whatcom Trail Head**

Improvements: Rod shared that the department received additional funding to do additional public outreach on the project. Rod shared that the consultants wrapped up the schematic design allowing the department to go out to the community and introduce the project and get some public feedback on the proposed improvements. The department wants to keep pushing forward so when funding does come available the project is ready to go. Rod said at this point the department will finish the design and engineering and then stop until funding is available. **Samish Park:** Christ added that Samish Park is now closed to the Public.

- c. **Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Update** – Rod shared that both he and Bennett met with PDS staff to talk about Chapter 9 – Recreation of the County Comprehensive Plan and the current update effort. Rod shared that the current plan is somewhat outdated, Rod said that it is not bad, just not been updated and contains a number of detailed policies may be better suited for inclusion within the department's Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (CPROS), and the Comprehensive Plan should focus on high-level goals and

specific policies that relate to a larger countywide recreational framework. Rod shared some of the goals in the plan need to be updated and more responsive to the current community recreational needs. However, Rod also shared that there may not be a great deal of consultant support available to facilitate a significant re-write of the recreation chapter 9, and will therefore, be up to the department to propose recommendations to the consultant for their review, and then to make a recommendation to PDS. Rod shared that it is a tight timeline, recommendations needs to be in front of the consultant for comment by the end of July 2024. The next Comprehensive Plan update will not be required for another 10 years, following the 2025 effort. **Multi-Modal trail planner update:** The department met with Human Resources (HR) to discuss the staff role in the department for the project. HR will draft the job description. The position will be a represented position. Expected new hire to start this fall.

7. **Old Business – None**

8. **New Business**

- a. **Illegal Trail Construction:** Christ shared that the department wanted to share what illegal trails look like to the Whatcom County Parks Department and how the department manages them. Also going to share what are some of the departments obligations and commitments when dealing with illegal trails. Christ shared a flow chart on how the department builds a trail, from concept to implementation. Depending on the trail it could go relatively quickly or it could take a couple years. Discussion ensued regarding the process the department does to build a trail from start to finish. Commissioner asked the question: If there is legal consequences of having unauthorized trails, if someone builds an unauthorized trail and has an accident is the County in any way responsible? If there is a pollution because of use of an unauthorized trail is the County at all responsible for that? Christ answered; yes, the County is responsible and that is part of the challenges the department is having. Christ added that regardless of who builds the trail you still have to go through the permit process. If the permit process is skipped you can be in violation and then the responsibility falls on the land owners that the trail was built on. Christ shared that if there is an unsanctioned trail on WC Parks land and the department wants to close it in, the department has to move dirt; so now the department has to go through the permit process. Christ shared that there is a section on the Raptor Ridge Trail that in 2015 there was a proposal to put an alternate trail for the Raptor Ridge that would accommodate equestrian and hiking. Christ shared that the department was not in support of the trail and went to council with the reasons; constraints on the landscape, protecting natural features, and a stairway that goes under the cliff. In 2020 the alternate trail was proposed again. At that point it came to the commission and the commission saw value in it and the department took it under advisement. The route is on both Whatcom County property and State Parks property. Washington State Parks said no, that it needed to go through a public process and it was not in any plans and the WC Parks can not do any of the

work. Washington State Parks said they have to do the work; however, it is not on their plan and it was not on the priority list. Christ shared that this past winter the trail was constructed by an unknown person and without authorization or permits. During the time the trail was constructed a WC county foot bridge was removed that the department believes was removed by the people who constructed the illegal trail. Christ shared pictures of the illegal trails showing that the trail does not meet any of the standards of trail building. Now, because the department is aware of the trail the department has to do something about the trail not at standard. Currently this is an example of a trail that is not permitted. There is a lot of wet areas around the illegal trail and trees were cut down illegally to build the trail. When the department first found that work was being done the WC parks put up cameras, the cameras disappeared. The department is putting cameras back up that are cellular enabled so if the camera is taken it will still send the picture. Christ shared that one of the challenges the department is facing is that when this happens people don't want to come out and say who it is that is actually building these trails. Christ said the department could get the prosecuting attorney involved and we can go forward and take legal action. Bennett added that the department is looking to improve the ability to identify these trails, document these trails, and how to address these trails. Bennett said that he thought that it would be beneficial for the commission to acknowledge the illegal trails situation and support the departments efforts to eliminate these unsanctioned trails. Christ handed out a map with data from Strava showing use of the WC Parks trails. Discussion ensued regarding miles of unsanctioned trails being more than the designated sanctioned trails. Christ has asked the WC Parks staff for a proposal to go out and inventory the unsanctioned trails, to get a sense of what the condition they are in. Discussion ensued if the user's groups have been informed of the consequences of building these unsanctioned trails and how the information can get out to the general public. Discussion ensued about the department's discussions with various user groups around this issue. Bennett shared that the new land Management Supervisor Position will have responsibility for soft-surface trail planning and will be tasked with developing a frequency user group meeting where the user groups and WC Parks comes together and talks about trails. Bennett shared that this topic will be seen more on the agenda in the future, especially after the new position is in place. Discussion ensued about an ideas that might be helpful and how to get various groups together to build trails, have them work side by side. Christ wanted to clarify that the department isn't pointing the finger at one specific group.

9. Open Discussion

None.

10. Commissioner Engagement Opportunities

- a. Nooksack Loop – Bay to Baker Van tour June 1st, 2024.
- b. 39th Annual Woods Tour, June 7, 2024, 9:00 am – 3:30 pm, Deming Log Show Museum, 3295 Cedarville Road, Bellingham, WA

11. Meeting Input/Evaluation

None.

12. Next Meeting: June 20, 2024, 6:00 PM, Lighthouse Marine Park, 811 Marine Drive, Point Roberts, WA

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Transcribed by: Erica Kulm, Clerk IV

Approved by: Bennett Knox, Parks Department Director