

## **Greenway Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes October 16, 2008**

**Members Present:** John Blethen, Eric Hirst, Steve Walker, Glenn Merrill, Edie Norton, Jim Zander, Damon Gray, Dan Remsen, Kenni Merritt, Scott Dorough

**Staff Present:** Tim Wahl, Leslie Bryson, Liz Haveman

**Guests Attending:** Barbara Ryan, Bellingham City Council President

**Review of Previous Meeting Minutes:** Motion made and carried unanimously to accept the September 18, 2008 minutes as written.

**Agenda Review:** No new items were added to the agenda.

**Public Comment Period:** No public comment.

### **New Business:**

Special Guest, Barbara Ryan: Barbara Ryan stated that she was pleased to have the Greenway Strategic Plan presented to City Council last week. She has been concerned that some projects and proposals presented to City Council in executive session in the past have not been fully analyzed by Council members. Barbara stated that she would like to see City Council perform more due diligence on property acquisition issues than they have done in the past. Recently she was surprised by the acquisition proposal for a 5 acre parcel in the Birchwood neighborhood because 3 of the 5 acres were on a cliff and undevelopable; she thought that neighborhood parks needed to be of a minimum size. Barbara stated that she was also surprised by an acquisition proposal for a parcel on Marine Drive near the airport outside City limits. She stated that these acquisitions made her realize that there was not a process for Council to analyze the property acquisitions as fully as the Greenway Committee does. She stated that the Strategic Plan will be a useful tool for Council and she hopes it will help answer the questions that she receives from citizens about the difference between Greenway funds and the Parks Department's budget.

Jim Zander asked Barbara if Council has ever received a Strategic Plan from the Greenway Committee before. Barbara responded that she is not aware of having received one before. John Blethen stated that every Greenway levy has had a strategic plan of sorts, but this current Strategic Plan represents the most cogent attempt made to nail down specific priorities. John stated that the Strategic Plan is a snapshot of where the Greenway Committee is now in their understanding of the levy and their charge; priorities may change over time as acquisition opportunities change, but the goals of the Strategic Plan came straight from the levy ballot. John stated that the Strategic Plan will be a useful tool for Greenway members, Park Board members, and Council members alike to ensure that everyone is on the same page so the acquisition decision-making process can go more easily. John stated that the 5 acre parcel in the Birchwood neighborhood was purchased with a combination of Block Grant, Real Estate Excise Tax dollars and Greenway funds. The property provides a green space and

neighborhood park in an under-served, dense neighborhood where the opportunity for larger open spaces no longer exists due to surrounding development. John stated that the property on Marine Drive provides a link where a gap existed previously in the Coast Millennium Trail and may also provide an opportunity for a disc golf course outside of Cornwall Park.

Leslie Bryson stated that the Greenway Program is incorporated into the Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan and is part of the comprehensive park system. Greenway levy funds are a portion of the Parks Department's budget. Leslie stated that the Greenway Strategic Plan is more comprehensive with this levy because this levy is less project specific than previous levies. Kenni Merritt noted that this Strategic Plan is just the acquisition plan; there is also a good portion of money in the Greenway levy for development that the Strategic Plan does not address. Kenni stated that she would like to see the Greenway Committee devote time to the recommendation of development projects in the future as they have spent much of this year focusing on acquisition. Damon Gray noted that he appreciates Barbara's desire to see due diligence on both sides; City Council and the Greenway Committee. Barbara stated that the City Council is ultimately responsible for every tax dollar spent and they should be performing more due diligence.

Greenway Strategic Plan Draft: Leslie Bryson reported that she spoke with Tim Wahl regarding the numbers for the North side and why they do not add up to \$12.1 million in the Draft Strategic Plan. Tim said that there are some acquisitions that have already been completed with North side money that were not included in the Strategic Plan. Eric Hirst stated that when he added up the North side money including the already completed acquisitions, he came up with more than \$12.1 million. Leslie Bryson responded that the money for the Cornwall Park expansion and the Bay to Baker Trail are their own line items; they are not included in the \$12.1 million for the North side. Committee members generally agreed that the money for the North side in the Strategic Plan should add up to \$12.1 million; the already completed acquisitions will be added for accuracy.

Kenni Merritt noted that footnote 2 on page 1 of the Plan states that "\$866,000 remains from the 1997 Beyond Greenways levy, recommended for work on the Bay-to-Baker Trail." The words "work on" imply that the money is for trail development rather than acquisition. Eric Hirst suggested removing the words "work on" from that footnote. Kenni also noted that item N5 on page 4 of the Strategic Plan addresses the same Bay to Baker funding from the 1997 Beyond Greenways levy, but it states that \$860,000 is remaining. That number needs to be corrected to \$866,000. Jim Zander asked that the table on page 2 state that the dollar amounts are in millions.

Jim Zander expressed concern over the North side worm map, particularly the worm labeled "N1". Jim stated that he does not feel that N1 accurately represents the property under consideration in that area because the worm is so large. Leslie Bryson responded that the description accompanying N1 states that the goal is to acquire trail connections as well as parcels of property, which explains the larger worm. The worm is intended to show the general area without disclosing too much information that needs

to remain confidential for negotiation purposes. Jim stated that this is reasonable, but for consistency, there ought to be a worm showing the connection between N2 and N3 as well. Staff agreed and Eric Hirst suggested including wording in the Plan that states that the worms designate general target areas rather than specific properties; the goal is not to acquire everything within the worm areas.

Jim Zander moved that the Greenway Advisory Committee approve the Greenway Strategic Plan Draft as amended. Dan Remsen seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously. Eric Hirst will make the corrections discussed and email the final Plan to Committee members. The final Plan will be presented again to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board and to City Council.

### **Sub-Committee Reports:**

Chuckanut Ridge Research: Dan Remsen reported that he hosted a meeting at his home attended by John Blethen, Eric Hirst, and some members of Responsible Development. Responsible Development showed a fundraising presentation, but did not get into much detailed discussion about specific fundraising ideas. The presentation largely focused on the merits of the property and the need to preserve it, and included some impressive 3 dimensional views of what the property could look like if developed and statistics on the number of trees that would be removed and killed due to development. Dan stated that he would have liked to have more in-depth discussion on specific fundraising ideas. Eric Hirst reported that a good portion of the discussion focused on the collapse of the housing market and the decrease in the Chuckanut Ridge property value. Eric noted that this is true of other property value as well and stated that he is not sure that the collapse of the housing market changes the balance of priorities. Jim Zander asked if the general consensus of Responsible Development is to acquire the entire Chuckanut Ridge parcel, or just a portion of it. Dan responded that Responsible Development would like to acquire the entire parcel. Barbara Ryan stated that she has spoken to some people who are adamant about the need to acquire the entire parcel and some who would be satisfied with a trail connection to Fairhaven Park; opinions vary.

Eric Hirst stated that he understands that Responsible Development believes that even if a large portion of the parcel has to be set aside due to wetlands, the developer would still be allowed to build all 700 units more densely on the developable portion. Kenni Merritt stated that she believes this is correct. Dan Remsen stated that he believes that the new Critical Areas Ordinance could significantly change how the area is developed, depending on whether or not the project is determined to be vested under the old Critical Areas Ordinance or the new one. The new Critical Areas Ordinance requires larger set-asides. Barbara Ryan stated that she understands that Planning Director Tim Stewart has to determine whether or not the Fairhaven Highlands development is vested under the old Critical Areas Ordinance or not. As far as she knows, he has not made this determination yet.

John Blethen stated that Responsible Development would like to have the opportunity to share their presentation with the entire Greenway Advisory Committee. Committee members agreed that they would like to see the presentation, but that a time separate

from their regular monthly meeting should be used to do so. John stated that he will ask Joe Yaver if Responsible Development is interested in setting up another time to show the presentation. Kenni Merritt asked what the next step for the Chuckanut Ridge Research Sub-Committee is. Dan Remsen responded that he suspects that they need to wait for the release of the Environmental Impact Statement to be released. Dan has heard that a draft may be released as early as November 2008.

Greenstreets Committee: John Blethen stated that there is nothing new to report from the Greenstreets Committee. Kim Brown was given very limited time to devote to the project. John explained the purpose of the Greenstreets Committee to Barbara Ryan. Barbara stated that the City Council is currently working on developing a Transportation Commission that will roll the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee and the Parking Commission together so that they work cooperatively to ensure that street and parking plans mesh with bike lanes and trails. Leslie Bryson stated that the Greenstreets Committee identified 34 hot spot priority areas where signage and/or connections are needed between trails and bike lanes, but the project has been put on hold pending a report of the findings that Kim Brown is producing. Dan Remsen volunteered to follow up with Kim Brown on the status of the report.

Guest Invitations:

Kenni Merritt asked John Blethen and Eric Hirst for direction as to whether or not she should invite guests to the November and December meetings. Both of these meetings fall on the week before holidays, which is a busy time to ask guests to attend a meeting. Eric Hirst suggested that a guest be invited to the November meeting, but not the December meeting. Eric and John will discuss this further and decide who they would like Kenni to invite and get back to her.

Monthly Walk: Glenn Merrill reported that the location of the next monthly walk has not been determined yet. Glenn also distributed copies of the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association's work party schedule and noted that in December, they are having a planting party at the Red Tail Reach project. Glenn suggested that the Committee consider volunteering for this work party in place of their December monthly walk. Committee members agreed.

Northridge Park: Leslie Bryson reported that the planning efforts for the second phase of development at Northridge Park are underway. So far one public open house was held for review and comment of the proposed development plans. A second public meeting has not yet been scheduled.

Parks & Recreation Advisory Board: Jim Zander reported that he attended the October Park Board meeting in Edie's place. Jim reported that Edie has asked him to consider serving as the Greenway liaison to the Park Board, which he is willing to do if the Committee agrees. The Committee unanimously selected Jim Zander to serve as the Park Board liaison. Jim reported that the Park Board reviewed the Greenway Strategic Plan Draft, received an update on the progress with the Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan, discussed the recent Lake Padden Golf Course lease, and reviewed a

proposal for a Salmon Art Trail along Whatcom Creek between Bloedel Donovan and Maritime Heritage Parks.

PRO Plan Update: Leslie Bryson reported that the Planning Commission voted to recommend the PRO Plan as a Comprehensive Plan amendment at their October 2, 2008 meeting. The City Council is having a public hearing on the PRO Plan at their October 20, 2008 meeting. Eric Hirst asked Barbara Ryan if she expects that Council will vote on the PRO Plan at this meeting or not. Barbara responded that she is not sure, there is quite a lot of information to review, including the public comment tracker and there may not be enough time.

Public Outreach Committee: John Blethen reported that now that Janie Pemble has resigned from the Greenway Committee, a new Public Outreach Committee person is needed.

**Executive Session:** Executive Session was held from 8:15 p.m. to 8:50 p.m. The Committee invited Barbara Ryan to attend executive session.

**Report Following Executive Session:** Following executive session, John Blethen reported that he received a phone call regarding the two new Park Operations positions proposed by Marvin Harris at the August meeting. The Greenway Committee voted to approve funding for these positions from the Endowment Fund interest. John reported that the two new positions were not approved and furthermore, the Mayor and the CAO are suggesting that the Endowment Fund interest money approved for these positions instead be used to fund a currently existing Park Operations position. John stated that he is concerned about this because the Endowment Fund is intended to provide money for maintenance of greenway projects; not to supplement the City's general fund. John asked Greenway Committee members if they would like to look into this further and perhaps draft a letter stating their concerns. Committee members generally agreed that they would like to look into this further and suggested that the Strategic Planning Sub-Committee take the lead on getting more information.

Barbara Ryan reported that the City Council will be discussing a proposed 1% property tax increase at their October 20 meeting. Barbara stated that the Mayor is opposed to the increase and asked Committee members if they would like her to take a recommendation from them back to the City Council. The estimated \$44 million that the Greenways III Levy is expected to bring in is based on certain assumptions, including increases in property taxes throughout the 10 year levy period. If property taxes are not increased, the estimated proceeds of the Greenways III Levy could change. Greenway Committee members showed with a raise of hands whether they would vote to increase property tax by 1% or not. The Committee was divided on the issue so no recommendation was suggested.

**Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.