

Greenway Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes November 20, 2008

Members Present: John Blethen, Eric Hirst, Steve Walker, Glenn Merrill, Scott Dorough

Members Excused: Kenni Merritt, Edie Norton, Jim Zander, Dan Remsen

Members Absent: Damon Gray

Board Liaisons Present: Jim McCabe, Parks & Recreation Advisory Board liaison

Staff Present: Tim Wahl, Liz Haveman

Guests Attending: Louise Bjornson, Bellingham City Council; Joe Yaver, Responsible Development; John Brown, Responsible Development; Jeff and Laura Hinds, Woodside Neighborhood; Gina Urcuyo, Wycliffe Park Neighborhood; Caila Grubbs, WWU student; Kathryn Frazier, WWU student; Bob Christman, South Hill Neighborhood Association

Review of Previous Meeting Minutes: It was noted that a quorum of Committee members was not present so the October Meeting Minutes will be approved at the December Greenway meeting.

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

Public Comment Period: Gina Urcuyo introduced herself as a member of the Wycliffe Park Neighborhood and stated that she is very concerned about the development plans for Northridge Park. She stated that she believes that the plans are being pushed through the public process quickly so that the park will be developed before there is time for the public to be made aware of negative impacts. She brought copies of Northridge Park development plans that were shared at the public open house on September 11, 2008, and stated that she is concerned that Greenway Committee members had not seen them or the list of public comments shared at that meeting. Tim Wahl responded that the Greenway Committee is not directly involved in the development of Northridge Park and therefore, would not routinely receive that information. Gina stated that she had emailed Leslie Bryson and asked her to provide the Committee with that information. John Blethen responded that the Greenway Committee received an email from Gina dated one day previous and that the public comment list and draft plans were brought to this meeting. John suggested that there had not been enough time between Gina's request and the meeting for that information to be disbursed prior to the meeting. Gina also shared a photograph of a sink hole and puddle in the street in front of her home and stated that she is quite concerned about the sinking street and drainage issue and how development of the park will further complicate the issue. Gina stated that she has contacted the Parks Department about the issue, who passed it on to the Public Works Department, who then passed it on to the Department of Transportation. Gina stated that she wants the street drainage issue to be resolved prior to the development of the park going to bid.

Jeff and Laura Hinds introduced themselves as members of the Woodside Neighborhood and stated that they also have concerns about the development of Northridge Park, and would like to get some direction as to where to take those concerns. Jeff stated that he is an avid park user and appreciates parks and the expansion of the Greenway Program, but has a problem with the City spending \$1.5 to \$1.9 million on paving and developing a forested area when there is a budget shortfall. Jeff stated that he has spoken to Park Operations employees who have confirmed that they are not able to keep up with maintenance on the currently existing parks and trails; it does not make sense to continue to develop more parks that cannot be staffed and maintained. John Blethen responded that Greenway Levy money is for property acquisition and cannot be spent on maintenance. However, John explained that the last two Greenway Levies do include a Greenway Endowment Fund that helps fund the maintenance of Greenway properties and projects. John Blethen also mentioned that the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board would be a more appropriate body to direct concerns to rather than the Greenway Committee because they are more directly involved with park planning and development. John reported that the Greenway Committee's involvement in Northridge Park dates back to the acquisition of the property with 1990 Greenway Levy funds. The property acquired was initially a square 40 acres from the Department of Natural Resources prior to construction of Barkley Boulevard. John stated that the property was reconfigured to help buffer Barkley Boulevard as it developed, but the intention of the property acquisition was always to provide a community, rather than neighborhood, park.

Laura Hinds stated that Leslie Bryson has said that it is likely that the two proposed restrooms at Northridge Park will be locked during the winter due to lack of maintenance staff time. Laura also stated that Jonathan Schilk has said that there would likely not be staff available to lock a park security gate at night and stated that she is quite concerned about that, and concerned that they shared this feedback at the September 11, 2008, public meeting and the Greenway Committee didn't receive their feedback. Laura stated that she came to the meeting to get some direction as to where to go to make sure that the feedback on the park development is heard. Jim McCabe introduced himself as the liaison to the Greenway Committee from the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board and stated that these concerns should continue to go to Park staff at the public meetings. Jim stated that a second public input meeting on Northridge Park has been scheduled for December 3, 2008, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Northern Heights Elementary School. Jim also stated that the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board receives updates on park development projects from Park staff and that concerns may also be addressed to the Park Board and to City Council members.

Eric Hirst stated that in reading the list of public comments received at the September 11, 2008, public input meeting, he saw comments both in favor of park development actions, as well as comments from neighbors who were concerned about mitigating park development impacts. Laura Hinds responded that she is not opposed to the park being developed, but she does feel that all four neighborhoods that surround the park should share the impact of increased public access to the park. At this time, the development plans have access points with parking only off Carrington Way and

Magrath Roads. Laura stated that the Tanglewood and Spyglass neighborhoods should also have public access points to the park. John Blethen stated that the Greenway Committee voted to purchase the Northridge Park site approximately 10 years ago with the intention of creating a community park with restrooms and parking areas for citizens who do not live close enough to walk. John also stated that the Greenway Committee does desire a positive outcome in the park's development. John said that Glenn Merrill will be attending future public input meetings on the development of Northridge Park and will serve as a liaison for the Greenway Committee at those meetings.

John Brown introduced himself as a neighbor to Fairhaven Park and a citizen involved in the effort to prevent development of Chuckanut Ridge. John distributed a CD that was created by Responsible Development for the purpose of fundraising. John stated that Horizon Bank and partners are currently asking \$26 million plus 6% interest for the Chuckanut Ridge property, and he hopes that once the draft Environmental Impact Statement comes out, there will be enough legal pressure to stall the development project and drive the price of the property down. John stated that the CD contains 3 slideshows including an overview of the project and how it would impact South Bellingham, a slideshow on infill versus sprawl, and a slideshow of a presentation made to City Council. John reported that Responsible Development is making 500 copies of the CD that they will distribute door to door and then follow up later to answer questions and accept private donations to help purchase the property. John also distributed copies of a DVD that they have created entitled, "A Treasure Beyond Measure", that displays the merits of the property and explains why it should be preserved. John Brown stated that their hope is that the bank's asking price will come down and that the public will step up, and that the Greenway Committee will also support the acquisition with Levy funds. John stated that he will come back to next month's meeting to answer any questions that Committee members might have about the CD or DVD.

Joe Yaver introduced himself as a member of Responsible Development, committed to preserving Chuckanut Ridge. Joe distributed articles entitled, "Old Growth Forests are Valuable Carbon Sinks" from the journal *Nature*, and "Puget Sound Partnership seeks input on ambitious Action Agenda to save Puget Sound" from the Puget Sound Partnership. Joe also distributed an email from Frank James that addresses why the future of Chuckanut Ridge is important to all of Bellingham and not just the Southside. Joe also stated that he had some comments to make about the previous month's meeting minutes. Joe read from the bottom paragraph on page 3, "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." Joe suggested that the Greenway Committee might pose this question to Tim Stewart. Joe stated that Responsible Development believes that the development was improperly vested, and therefore would need to abide by the New Critical Areas Ordinance. Joe stated that he has asked this question of the City himself a number of times and has not received a clear response. Joe also read from the middle paragraph on page 3, "Jim Zander asked if the general consensus of Responsible Development is to acquire the entire Chuckanut Ridge parcel, or just a portion of it." Joe responded that they do want to acquire the entire parcel. Joe continued to read, "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.” Joe stated that he does not believe that the word “adamant” is a good descriptor; to him the word conveys selfishness. Joe stated that he views himself as a person of conviction. Joe also stated that the distribution of the CD and DVD is in response to the first paragraph on page 4 of the minutes, “John stated that he will ask Joe Yaver if Responsible Development is interested in setting up another time to show the presentation.” Due to time constraints around the holidays, Joe stated that he felt it would be more convenient for the Committee to view the presentation on their own time. Finally, Joe thanked the Greenway Committee and Park staff for their efforts on the Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan. He stated that regardless of whether or not everyone agrees with everything in the PRO Plan, it is clear that it was put together by a group of imaginative, dedicated people.

Executive Session: Executive session was held from 7:50 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

New Business:

Greenway Chair and Vice Chair 2009 nominations: Eric Hirst nominated John Blethen to continue as the Chair of the Greenway Advisory Committee in 2009. John Blethen stated that if there are no others interested in serving as the Chair, he would consider another year. John Blethen nominated Eric Hirst to continue as Vice Chair in 2009. No other nominations were made. John and Eric encouraged Committee members to consider additional nominations and email the Committee. The vote will take place at the December Greenway meeting.

Letter regarding Sehome Bluff Trail and Greenstreets: Eric Hirst stated that he appreciated Kenni Merritt’s efforts to draft a letter on behalf of the Committee encouraging the Mayor and City Council to include a Sehome Bluff Trail and Greenstreet connection in the planning for the Waterfront District. Following the drafting of the letter, Committee members learned that the City’s Waterfront Connections Plan does include a multi-modal trail along the waterfront edge, as well as on-street bike lanes and a bike trail along the railroad right of way. John Blethen suggested that the Committee hold off on sending the letter until more plans for development of the waterfront are brought forward and the City and the Port come to an agreement on the plans. John Blethen and Louise Bjornson agreed that a trail along the waterfront for bikes and pedestrians is well-identified and that the City has already received some grant funding to relocate the railroad right of way for a trail. Glenn Merrill stated that during the last Committee walk, Committee members discussed the possibility of a trail along the bluff above the railroad right of way; something in addition to the trail right along the waterfront edge. Steve Walker stated that he thinks that Kenni’s letter is a good starting point and perhaps the Committee should discuss it again next month when more Committee members are present. Jim McCabe reported that Kenni’s draft letter was also circulated to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board so they could consider drafting a letter as well. Jim suggested that the Greenway Committee and Park Board make a joint effort to remind City officials that the railroad relocation needs to include bike and pedestrian access trails. John Blethen agreed and suggested that the Committee consider broadening the letter’s dialogue to address all of the parks and

trails in the Waterfront District. John said that he would talk to Leslie Bryson and Paul Leuthold to find out the latest developments in Waterfront District planning so the Committee would have a better idea how to proceed.

Sub-Committee Reports:

Greenstreets Committee: Jim McCabe reported that he has received a draft map and a written narrative to accompany the map from Kim Brown. Jim asked Liz Haveman to forward the map and narrative to Greenway Committee members.

Monthly Walk: Glenn Merrill reminded Committee members that for the December monthly walk, the Committee will be participating in the volunteer planting effort at Red Tail Reach on Saturday, December 6 from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Glenn will email Committee members with directions to a meeting location and suggested that the Committee might meet prior to the planting party for a short excursion to view another potential property. Details will be emailed to Committee members.

Parks & Recreation Advisory Board: Jim McCabe reported that the PRO Plan is going forward to City Council on Monday, November 24 as a Comprehensive Plan amendment. Jim also reported that the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board voted to approve the Greenway Strategic Plan at their November 12 meeting.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.