

PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES
Wednesday, August 10, 2011

Present: Bill Hadley, Rosalie Nast, Adrienne Lederer, Julie Guy, Pam Holladay, Geoff Middaugh, Bill Langley

Excused: Diane Blake, Dominique Zervas, Mike Anderson

Staff: Leslie Bryson, Interim Parks and Recreation Director
Marvin Harris, Park Operations Manager
Dick Henrie, Recreation Manager
Tim Wahl, Greenway Program Coordinator
Liz Haveman, Board Secretary

Attending: Linda Grant, Greenway Advisory Committee Chair
John Blethen, Greenway Advisory Committee Liaison
Bill Geyer, Geyer & Associates, Inc.
George Huston, Padden Trails

I. AGENDA REVIEW: No new items were added to the agenda.

II. JULY MEETING MINUTES: Adrienne Lederer requested that the word, "Park", be added to the end of "Friends of Big Rock Garden" under the Friends Volunteer Guidelines discussion topic. The minutes were approved as amended.

III. NEW BUSINES:

A. Greenway Strategic Plan Update: Leslie Bryson introduced Linda Grant, Chair of the Greenway Advisory Committee, and reported that she invited Linda to attend the meeting to be a part of the discussion on the latest draft of the Greenway Strategic Plan. Leslie stated that the purpose of updating the Greenway Strategic Plan is to bring the plan in line with recommendations and purchases that have been made since the Plan was originally drafted in 2008 and partially adopted by Council in 2009.

Linda Grant explained that the Greenway Committee looks at existing anchor parks and then looks for ways to connect them with trails and open spaces. Linda stated that this is a fluid process as opportunities change with willing sellers, money available and reasonable sale price. Linda stated that the Greenway Committee held a retreat and two executive sessions to update the plan. Linda said that the Committee wants the Plan to reflect real options now as opposed to what they thought when they first drafted the Plan a few years ago. John Blethen added that in addition to looking at existing anchor parks and the need to fill gaps, the Greenway Committee has acquisition guidelines and a City policy that they follow to ensure citywide balance.

Geoff Middaugh asked when the Strategic Plan update will go public. Leslie Bryson responded that the Plan is now public. It will be recorded during this meeting, the next Greenway meeting, and will be part of the Council packet when it goes to City Council for approval. It will also be posted on the City's website once approved. Leslie also noted that the Plan update does not identify any new project areas. The Strategic Plan started with

public meetings and an online survey. The project areas identified in that original process are still the project areas; the Plan update simply shifts money within the identified project areas to reflect changed opportunities. For example, the original Strategic Plan identified three 40-acre tracts owned by DNR in Dewey Valley as a high priority for acquisition. A wetland survey of the property showed that this property is not likely to be threatened by development and we will work with DNR for suitable no-cost trail access. Therefore, the money originally designated for these tracts would be better spent on other property in the same project area.

Julie Guy asked why the future Guide Meridian pedestrian overpass is not shown on the Greenway Strategic Plan. Leslie Bryson responded that the Greenway Strategic Plan is an acquisition plan, and the potential pedestrian overpass is a development project. John Blethen further commented that public comment received by the Greenway Committee expressed far more interest in using Greenway funds for acquisition rather than development. Leslie further stated that specific development projects were stated in the Levy ballot language, unlike specific parcels of property for acquisition.

Tim Wahl explained that the table in the Plan update shows the original Council approved expenditure guidelines, the expenditure guidelines proposed in the original draft of the Strategic Plan, the new expenditure guidelines now being proposed, as well as where all the money would end up if the new recommendations are approved. Tim spent the remainder of the discussion period on this agenda topic explaining each recommended change on the table.

Richard Henrie arrived at 7:50 a.m.

- B. Recreation Programming:** Leslie Bryson introduced Dick Henrie, Recreation Manager for Bellingham Parks & Recreation, and explained that she invited Dick to attend the meeting to address questions expressed by Board members at the July meeting about how recreation programming decisions are made during budget cuts.

Dick Henrie stated that last year, the Recreation division lost 9.5 full time equivalent staff members, 7.5 of which were benefitted positions. Dick stated that in an effort to help him decide which recreation programs are cost effective and which are not, he figured out the cost per visit for each program offered. In order to figure this, he took total attendance and figured out the number of visits for each program, then divided the cost of the program by the number of visits to determine cost per visit. Dick found that some programs cover their cost in registration fees and some do not. For example, Dick found that the Teen Volunteer Program "Summer of Service" camps had a total of 69 visits, but by only 39 different individuals. The Summer of Service program cost the Parks Department \$11,000 to run; about \$160 per person. Dick stated that Summer of Service was a great program, but it cost a lot to affect only 39 different individuals. By comparison, the Arne Hanna Aquatic Center gets about 250,000 visits per year and costs about \$1.80 per visit. Civic Stadium costs about \$0.60 per visit.

Dick stated that the youth summer day camps, adult sports leagues and races all pay for themselves in registration fees. The specialized recreation programs mostly cover their cost, and Bellingham Parks & Recreation is one of the only agencies in Whatcom County

providing programs for individuals with disabilities. Dick stated that while the teen program was very important to those participating, it was time intensive to administer, had little revenue and affected a relatively small number of individuals compared to the total number of teens in Bellingham.

Julie Guy stated that the new Cordata Elementary School has a full sized gymnasium and asked how this might affect Recreation programming. Dick responded that the Parks Department schedules the Bellingham School District's gyms for all non-school sports use. The school gets first priority, then the Parks department schedules the remaining hours for Parks programs and for general public use. Dick stated that he is currently planning for 2012 and is not sure yet whether or not they will schedule Parks programs in the Cordata Elementary School gym.

Bill Langley reported that his children have recently attended some of the Parks Department's summer day camps and have really enjoyed them.

Adrienne Lederer asked Dick if some of the programs that have been cut will be reinstated if the economy turns around. Dick responded that the Recreation Program grows when it can; they may look at bringing back old programs, or look at doing something new. Dick stated that the most important thing is creating value, and they may find that a new program provides more value than something they've done before. Dick stated that he tries to fill gaps and offer programs that no one else is offering.

Rosalie mentioned that in other cities where she has lived, the parks department has offered various art classes and wondered if Bellingham Parks & Recreation has considered offering them. Dick responded that the Bellingham Parks & Recreation has offered art classes previously, but Whatcom County Parks & Recreation offered many more through the Roeder Home. Over the years, participation dwindled and other agencies in Whatcom County started offering art classes, and the classes offered by both Bellingham and Whatcom County Parks were eventually cut out of the budget, with the exception of our Multi Media Art classes for adults with disabilities. Dick stated that his philosophy is to make sure that a variety of different classes are offered, but Bellingham Parks & Recreation doesn't have to be the one offering them. If another agency is offering an equally good program in the same niche, he would rather pass it off to them and fill a niche that no one else is filling.

- C. Pedestrian Plan:** Geoff Middaugh announced that Kim Brown, Transportation Coordinator for Bellingham Public Works Department, will be attending the September Park Board meeting to talk about the City's Pedestrian Plan. Geoff reported that the City's website has a page designated for public input on the Pedestrian Plan and encouraged Board members to review the information available on the website and give feedback. Geoff said he feels that it is very important that trails and greenways be included in the Plan.

IV. BOARD REPORTS:

- A. Friends of Big Rock Garden Park:** Adrienne Lederer announced that next year's Mother's Day Sculpture Exhibit will be by invitation like this year's show. Adrienne also reported that next month, the Friends of Big Rock Garden Park will start working on a party

to be held in 2013 to recognize the 20th anniversary of the park purchase date. They are also working on compiling a history of all of the sculpture in the park.

- B. Cordata Park:** Julie Guy reported that the second phase trail connection from the new Cordata Park trail to Meadowbrook Court is under construction and making good progress. Julie stated that the Cordata Park trail is frequently used and the neighbors have found that trail use continues to grow as more people discover it.
- C. Friends of VanWyck Park:** Julie Guy reported that they have received permission from the tenants of the house at VanWyck Park to hold a planning meeting at the house on a Saturday in August and a Saturday in September. Julie stated the primary interest group is King Mountain neighbors.
- D. Woodstock Farm Conservancy:** Rosalie Nast reported that the Woodstock Farm Conservancy did not have an August meeting. Adrienne Lederer reported that the Conservancy would like to host an art show at Woodstock Farm in October or November if they can get permission from the Parks Department to do so, depending on the septic system. Leslie Bryson reported that the remaining grant funds from the recent improvements to Woodstock Farm will be used to repair the septic system. Once the septic system is repaired, the Parks Department is considering putting out a Request for Proposals to find an onsite caretaker.
- E. Tree Keepers:** Geoff Middaugh reported that the City's Planning Department is buying database software that will be used to complete an urban tree analysis. Once completed, this information can be incorporated to the City's Comprehensive Plan. Urban forestry information has been left out previously due to lack of data.
- F. Watershed Advisory Board:** Bill Hadley reported that City Council will be considering a proposal to raise the rates on City water bills that go toward land acquisition in the Lake Whatcom watershed.
- G. Squalicum Creek Park Phase 3:** Bill Hadley also reported that he is on the steering committee for Squalicum Creek Park Phase 3 development and the first meeting is planned for next week. Leslie Bryson reported that Jonathan Schilk, Parks Landscape Architect, is the project manager and she will ask him to come give the Park Board a presentation on the project at a future meeting.
- V. DIRECTOR'S REPORT:** Leslie Bryson reported that she met with George Drake last month to discuss Mr. Drake's concern that Big Rock Garden Park could be better promoted and more sculpture could be brought in to the park. Leslie stated that the City does not have the funds to fully implement Big Rock Garden Park's master plan and that the Friends of Big Rock Garden Park are a volunteer group who have done considerable work to promote the park and fundraise for the park's needs. George Drake suggested that he may be able to come up with funding to take over the maintenance and the management of Big Rock Garden Park by leasing the park and selling art. Leslie Bryson stated that she informed Mr. Drake that if the City decided to look into that option, a public Request for Proposals (RFP) would be advertised. Leslie stated that prior to doing an RFP, input from the Park Board and the Friends of Big Rock Garden Park would be gathered. The RFP, if

done, would require that the park remain open to the public at no charge and that the annual public events at the park continue to occur.

Leslie also reported that Gina Austin is returning to work in September and will pick up the Boulevard Over Water Walkway project when she returns. Leslie stated that the new Over Water Walkway project is tied to two major environmental cleanup projects, one in Boulevard Park and the other at the Cornwall Landfill site. These cleanup projects must be complete before the Over Water Walkway can be completed so construction may be pushed back a year. The Boulevard Park cleanup project is related to the South State Street Manufactured Gas Plant that leached contamination into Boulevard Park. Leslie reported that City Attorney, Amy Kraham, recently secured an additional \$3 million grant for this cleanup project. Leslie stated that permitting for the Over Water Walkway is currently on hold pending an agreement with the Lummi Nation. John Blethen asked if the grant funding for this project could be in danger due to slow progress. Leslie responded that she feels that the grant funds are secure as long as progress is made, and reminded the Board that the project is still \$2 million short in funding.

Leslie also reported that the cleanup activity at Little Squalicum Park is making good progress. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) hired a contractor, EQM, to do the work. Leslie stated that the City has consultants on site doing regular inspections to ensure that the contamination is handled properly. Leslie stated that both EPA and EQM have been very cooperative and the work is expected to be complete within a couple of weeks. Leslie stated that the Public Works Department will begin the adjacent Eldridge Municipal Landfill cleanup project next month.

Leslie reported that the City is now working on compiling the 2012 General Fund budget. Departments were instructed that they may have 1% growth from last year's budget. Unfortunately, due to salary, benefit and other increases, the Parks & Recreation Department is going to have to make cuts to meet the budget target. Leslie stated that she, Marvin Harris and Dick Henrie will be meeting with David Webster to discuss potential Parks budget reductions and revenue increases.

Leslie reported that the Public Works Department is planning a celebration of the completion of a continuous trail route from Lake Whatcom to Bellingham Bay upon the completion of the work they are currently doing on Meador Avenue and Kansas Street. More details will follow as the event is planned.

Geoff Middaugh reported that the Parks Director selection process is underway. A public forum for the final candidates will be held on September 22 as part of a 3-day final selection process.

VI. ADJOURNMENT: The August 2011 meeting of the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board was adjourned by consent at 9:05 a.m.

Approved: Geoff Middaugh, Board Chair
Attest: Liz Haveman, Secretary