

PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES
Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Present: Bill Hadley, Jane Blume, Adrienne Lederer, Jim McCabe, John Hymas, Mark Peterson, Dominique Zervas, Mike Anderson, Julie Guy, Tom Barrett

Absent: Harry Allison

Staff: Paul Leuthold, Parks & Recreation Director
Marvin Harris, Park Operations Manager
Leslie Bryson, Design & Development Manager
Marcia Wazny, Enterprise Coordinator (Bayview Cemetery)
Tim Wahl, Greenway Program Coordinator
Liz Haveman, Board Secretary

Attending: Louise Bjornson, City Council
Stan Snapp, City Council
John Blethen, Greenway Advisory Committee
Jim Zander, Greenway Advisory Committee

I. EXECUTIVE SESSION: Executive session was held from 7:00 to 7:50 a.m.

II. VOTE IN OPEN MEETING FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE SESSION: In open meeting following executive session, Julie Guy moved, and Adrienne Lederer seconded the motion; to recommend that the City proceed with the purchase of a 75-acre parcel of property in North Bellingham for \$2.352 million or 12% over the appraised value, whichever is highest, provided that City staff determine that there are enough developable uplands to warrant a community park use. Motion passed 9-1, Mark Peterson opposed.

III. NOVEMBER MEETING MINUTES: Motion made and unanimously approved to accept the November 2008 Park Advisory Board meeting minutes as submitted.

IV. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Greenway Committee Update: Jim Zander reported that he will be serving as the new liaison from the Greenway Advisory Committee to the Parks Board in place of Edie Norton. Jim reported that he was out of town for the last Greenway meeting, but learned from the draft minutes that a good portion of the meeting was taken up with the public comment period and a discussion on the development of Northridge Park. John Blethen reported that some citizens attended the Greenway meeting to voice their concerns over the planned development of Northridge Park. John said that he encouraged those citizens to address their concerns to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board. John reported that he, as well as three other Greenway Committee members attended the public meeting on Northridge Park on December 3, as did Councilman Jack Weiss and Councilman Gene Knutson. John stated that he believes that the plans for Northridge Park are at a disadvantage because the property was purchased over 10 years ago and up until now, there has not been money to develop it. The parcel purchased was originally a square 40 acres that was later carved up to provide an adequate buffer when Barkley Boulevard was constructed, and now faces issues with public access due to the location on neighborhood streets.

Paul Leuthold reported that due to the current economic crisis that is impacting City revenues including Real Estate Excise Tax, Sales Tax, and Park Impact Fees, the revenue generated on the Greenway Endowment Fund is also less than expected. The City is not able to afford to hire adequate maintenance staff to maintain the planned activity nodes in 2009. Due to this, the Parks Department will develop just the trails in Northridge Park in 2009 per the Master Plan. Further node development will be put off until 2010 or beyond depending on the status of the economy. The City is working on developing strategies to be more sustainable, which includes not building things that cannot be adequately maintained. The City cannot continue to build park facilities without also increasing the maintenance funds and spreading current maintenance resources thinner.

Jim Zander asked Paul if the Parks Department has explored partnerships with neighborhoods or volunteer groups to help maintain parks and trails. Paul responded that we do have a number of citizen volunteers and there have been successful partnerships, but there are union labor issues involved with these types of partnerships. For example, the work release program partnership has been discontinued due to union concerns that the program takes skilled labor tasks away from full time employees. Leslie Bryson responded that it can be difficult to get volunteers to regularly maintain areas. It is easier to put together a one-time planting party, but difficult to get someone to commit to regularly weed.

Mark Peterson encouraged Park Staff and City Council members not to overly weight the voice of opposition for Northridge Park development. Mark stated that as the father of 3 young children, he knows that it is very difficult for families with young children to make weekday evening meetings, but knows many families who are supportive of the development of the park. Paul Leuthold responded that following the public meeting, there were a number of citizens who approached him and contacted the Parks Office to voice their support for the development plans.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. 2009 Parks Board Chair, Vice Chair: Adrienne Lederer nominated Jim McCabe to continue as the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board Chair in 2009, and nominated Jane Blume to continue as the Vice Chair in 2009. John Hymas moved that the Board approve Jim McCabe as the 2009 Chair and Jane Blume as the 2009 Vice Chair. Mike Anderson seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously.

B. Waterfront Park Development: Paul Leuthold reported that there have been four meetings over the past month between the City and the Port of Bellingham regarding waterfront development, and that parks are receiving good attention. Paul stated that initially, the Port suggested that the number of acres of parks on the waterfront be tied to the population density of the area, but City Park staff have consistently emphasized a need for a fixed number of park acres on the waterfront. Public surveys repeatedly show that the citizens of Bellingham want more access to the waterfront; there are many who will not be able to afford to live or own a business on the waterfront and providing public access to parks in this area is a high priority. Paul stated that those involved in the planning have tried to come up with a number of park acres that will provide adequate space to develop park amenities that will compliment the rest of the waterfront development. There are currently 33 acres in total between trails and park

spaces starting at the foot of Cornwall Avenue to the log pond, extending to the Whatcom Waterway and through a potential marine trades area, to a small park near the I & J waterway. Paul stated that the discussions now are focused around phasing the waterfront development more than actual site planning.

Louise Bjornson commented that she feels it will be very important to ensure that the parks on the waterfront have adequate public access so that none of them look or feel like private parks. Louise gave the example of the public area next to the Chrysalis Hotel that is rarely used because it appears that it may be private property. Paul Leuthold agreed and stated that the layout of roads and parking areas are being considered to ensure adequate public access and appearance of the planned park areas. Stan Snapp commented that while there has been a good amount of attention paid to the disagreement between the City and the Port in regards to how the waterfront should be developed, there are some Port Commissioners who have expressed an interest in meeting with Bellingham City Council members to come to an agreement. John Blethen stated that he thinks it is important for the Port and the City to recognize that parks are not just a recreational component; they are also an economic component to the development plan. Parks will draw more people to the area.

- C. Bayview Cemetery 2009 Fees:** Marcia Wazny distributed a list of proposed price increases for Bayview Cemetery in 2009, as well as a review of current regional cemetery pricing for comparison. Marcia stated that she is recommending an increase of 3% for general goods and services and a 90-95% mark-up for retail goods, such as memorials and other re-sale items. Marcia reported that the industry standard mark-up for retail goods is a 100% mark-up, so a 90-95% mark-up would give Bayview a small competitive edge in comparison to other cemeteries. Marcia noted that retail goods currently account for approximately 38% of Bayview Cemetery's revenue and that the mark-up for retail goods has not been adjusted for the last 6 years. Marcia stated that she estimates that these proposed increases would result in an increase in revenue of about \$14,000 annually.

Jim McCabe asked Marcia if the shortage of maintenance staff in the Parks Department affects Bayview. Marcia responded that it does. Marcia reported that Bayview has 4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff members to maintain Bayview, which means that there is 1 FTE per 15 acres, for a total of 60 acres maintained. The industry standard is 1 FTE per 10 acres.

Louise Bjornson asked Marcia how much it costs for a burial at Bayview. Marcia responded that it depends on whether you bury a casket or cremains and whether you bury the cremains in the ground or in a niche. The approximate cost to bury a casket is around \$2000 including grave opening and closing and the required concrete liner that protects the grave from collapsing.

John Hymas inquired about green burials. Marcia responded that there are a number of cemeteries in the United States that allow bodies to be buried in a shroud, rather than a casket, but due to the soil profile at Bayview, concrete liners are required to keep the grave from collapsing. There are green caskets available that are made from rattan, or an increasing number of people are choosing to be cremated. Marcia said that the state

of Washington does not consider cremains to be human remains, which means that they can be scattered anywhere as long as the property owner allows it. Marcia reported that she is looking into adding a scatter garden to Bayview for cremains.

Board members expressed an interest in having a future meeting at Bayview Cemetery. Paul Leuthold stated that it would be good to hold a meeting there in the spring or summer, once the mausoleum renovations are complete. Marcia stated that the renovation is close to being done; they are currently working on cleaning the crypt fronts.

Mike Anderson moved to approve the 2009 Bayview Cemetery price increase as proposed. Dominique Zervas seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously.

- D. Nooksack Loop Trail Project:** Paul Leuthold introduced Daniel Tepper as the chairman of the Whatcom Parks & Recreation Foundation. Paul stated that the Whatcom Parks & Recreation Foundation has been very helpful to Bellingham Parks & Recreation by administrating donated funds. Paul stated that the WPRF is currently holding and distributing the donated funds for Woodstock Farm improvements. Daniel Tepper stated that the WPRF is also administrating funds for the Memorial Park paver project that was started by KGMI radio.

Daniel reported that since he attended the June 2008 Parks Board meeting, he has had conversations with a number of other advisory committees and staff from other cities and agencies to discuss the Nooksack Trail Loop Project. The Nooksack Trail Loop Project is a vision for a 45 mile loop trail beginning in Bellingham, connecting to Ferndale, to Lynden, to Everson, and ending back in Bellingham. Daniel stated that he has had favorable conversations about the Project with everyone he has approached, but everyone is operating in a vacuum; there is no communication between cities and agencies about the Project. It became clear that someone needs to be the driving force to facilitate communication and get the Nooksack Loop Trail Project going. Daniel reported that he met with Pete Kremen to find out if the County would support the Project, and who the point of contact for the Project should be for the County. The Project will likely include Parks, Public Works and Planning elements. Daniel said that Pete Kremen was supportive of the Project and while he does not have money to put toward it at this time, he stated that Mike McFarlane, the Director of Whatcom County Parks & Recreation, would be the County's point of contact for the Project.

Daniel reported that he also presented the Project to The Whatcom Council of Government's Transportation Advisory Board. The Transportation Advisory Board was very supportive of the project, but does not have money to invest in it. However, COG has offered some staff resources for the Project, including the use of their Boardroom for meetings. Daniel reported that Bellingham Mayor Dan Pike and Ferndale Mayor Gary Jensen were both at the COG meeting and expressed interest in staying involved with the Project through the COG.

Due to the support of the Project by a number of cities and agencies, the WPRF had a retreat last month and determined that they would use their 501c non-profit status to help funnel donated funds for the Project, and that they would staff a working committee

comprised of representatives from various cities and agencies to tackle the Project. The committee will begin meeting monthly with no formal by-laws or a fixed number of representatives from any one group. Daniel stated that they are mainly looking for a group of people committed to getting things done. Daniel distributed a list of possible tasks that the committee could take on. Daniel compiled the list in response to a request from Mike McFarlane for concrete tasks that need to be completed to get the Project going.

Daniel reported that so far, the City of Ferndale and the City of Lynden have both appointed representatives, as well as Bellingham's Pedestrian Advisory Committee. Daniel reported that he will be presenting the Project to the Greenway Advisory Committee and the Whatcom County Park Board next week and asking for representatives. The first meeting will take place at the COG Boardroom in January; the date and time have not been set yet. John Hymas volunteered to be the representative from the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board.

VI. ADJOURNMENT: The December 2008 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board was adjourned by consent at 9:15 a.m.

Approved: Jim McCabe, Chair
Attest: Liz Haveman, Secretary