

PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES
Wednesday, March 12, 2008

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

Staff: Paul Leuthold, Parks & Recreation Director
Leslie Bryson, Design/Development Manager
Marvin Harris, Park Operations Manager
Rae Edwards, Greenway Volunteer Coordinator
Liz Haveman, Board Secretary

Attending: Edie Norton, Greenway Advisory Committee Liaison
Louise Bjornson, City Council
Stan Snapp, City Council
MaryAnn Crawford, Big Rock Garden Committee
Nadine Kaaland, Big Rock Garden Committee
Scott Blume, Big Rock Garden Committee

I. FEBRUARY MEETING MINUTES:

Motion made and carried unanimously to accept the February meeting minutes.

II. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Executive Session was held from 7:05 to 7:22 a.m.

III. VOTE IN OPEN MEETING FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE SESSION:

In open meeting following Executive Session, Mike Anderson moved to recommend acquisition of a parcel of property located on Old Fairhaven Parkway by way of a 50/50 split of the purchase price with the Public Works Department. John Hymas seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously.

IV. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Greenway Committee Update: Edie Norton reported that Dewey Desler, Whatcom County Director of Administrative Services; Mike McFarlane, Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Director; and David Stalheim, Whatcom County Planning Director, attended the February Greenway Advisory Committee meeting to discuss collaboration and coordination on designating parks and open spaces in the Urban Growth Areas. Edie stated that no definitive projects were discussed, but there was a lengthy discussion on overall cooperation in the planning and design of parks and trails. Edie also reported that the Greenway Committee held a work session on Saturday, March 8 to prioritize properties for potential acquisition in North and South Bellingham. Leslie Bryson stated that the Greenway Committee is scheduled to vote on the priorities at their March meeting and the lists will then be presented to Park Board and City Council.

B. Boulevard Park parking: Paul Leuthold reported that a citizen emailed him and City Council members with concerns at Boulevard Park in regards to limited parking and The Woods Coffee business operating in the park. Paul stated that the Whatcom Independent ran an article in February that voiced similar concerns. In response to the parking concerns, Paul reported that the "Project for Public Places" workshop indicated that it is not

necessary to build a parking lot at each desirable location; if the location is truly desirable, people will be willing to walk to it. Moreover, the Taylor Dock Master Plan included angled parking spots on 10th Street that would have provided additional parking, but in response to the neighborhood's request, City Council voted to amend the Master Plan and keep the limited parallel parking.

In response to the concerns about The Woods Coffee business agreement, Paul stated that the Parks Department put out two Requests for Proposals for the lease of the facility that would provide the necessary capital improvements to the facility as well as improve the park experience. Paul reported that he and Marvin Harris approached a number of businesses including Cruisin' Coffee, Starbucks, IWanaMoka, and Mallard's Ice Cream and none of these businesses were interested in moving their business to the park facility that required a great deal of capital improvements. The two Requests for Proposals received limited responses; one from a coffee proprietor without the money necessary to improve the facility, one from a kayak business to open a commercial store, and one from The Woods Coffee. Paul stated that at the time of negotiations with The Woods, there were no other comparable facilities to base the lease amount on; particularly because it was unknown how well the business would do during the winter months when typically park use is reduced. The Woods lease is a 5 year agreement with a 5 year renewal option and the lease was based on the amount that Whatcom Community College was willing to spend on the facility as a pottery studio. Marvin stated that the lease increases by 3% each year. The lease agreement also stipulated that The Woods would receive rent credit for capital improvements made to the facility up to \$170,000. Marvin stated that The Woods has currently invested approximately \$250,000 in capital improvements to the facility which will remain under the ownership of the Parks Department if The Woods decides not to renew their lease in the future. The Woods also shares responsibility for maintaining the park restrooms near the business. In summary, the Parks Department followed the necessary public process for The Woods Coffee lease agreement and no one expected that it would be as successful as it has been; which is a benefit to the park and the community.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. Resolution for Multi-Modal Trail Corridor:** Tom Barrett asked Parks Board members to consider a resolution supporting a multi-modal transportation corridor that would include a trail or trail and road under I-5 connecting Birchwood Avenue to James Street near Sunset Pond. This is the proposed route for the Bay to Baker Trail. Tom reported that last year City Council asked Public Works to study this possible traffic corridor and they will discuss it again this year as part of the Transportation Improvement Program. Tom also reported that the Planning Commission recently approved a resolution supporting this project. Tom stated that there are a number of varying opinions on the project and the effect that it will have on traffic around the hospital. Tom also observed that the project will be quite expensive due to the extensive wetland mitigation that will be required and a resolution from the Park Board will be helpful to City Council as they consider it for budget purposes.

Some Parks Board members expressed concern about the current traffic situation around the hospital and generally agreed that the proposed road could make the situation worse. Concern was also expressed about whether there would be room for both a trail and the road as the corridor includes significant wetlands. Ira Hyman observed that the railroad

tracks are the only dry, raised portion of the corridor, which would be ideal for a trail, but not for a trail and a road, particularly a road with a 60 foot right of way.

Jane Blume moved that the Parks Board recommend to City Council that construction of the Bay to Baker Trail corridor be planned to connect Birchwood Avenue to James Street under I-5. Mike Anderson seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously.

VI. PRESENTATION:

A. Big Rock Garden Committee: Rae Edwards began the presentation with a brief history of Big Rock Garden. Big Rock Garden was originally created as a private nursery focused on rhododendrons and Japanese maples by the Drake family. The City of Bellingham purchased Big Rock Garden and an additional 6 acres of adjacent forested open space for a park in 1992. The Garden is 2.7 acres and has 35 permanent sculpture pieces. The Big Rock Garden Committee is a citizen advisory group that was formed in 1998 to actively guide the development of the Garden as a sculpture and botanical garden. The mission of the Big Rock Garden Committee is "To preserve and enhance the garden." In 2003, the Big Rock Committee, Park staff and the Whatcom Horticulture Society weeded, mulched and planted the bank facing Sylvan Street. In 2007, the Committee secured a Small & Simple Grant to create the "Friend's Grove", a tree sculpture with names engraved on leaves, in order to consolidate recognition and reduce visual clutter around other sculptures. Currently, the Big Rock Committee is working on a juried sculpture show and the annual Mother's Day garden party, docent walks on sculptures and plants during the summer, Sunday concerts during the summer, volunteer work parties to clean sculptures and weed twice a year.

Rae stated that there are some immediate needs to improve the aesthetics and function of the garden. These needs include replacement of creosote retaining walls with rock or other hard-scaping, replacement of aged fencing around the garden, establishment of additional concrete pads for show sculptures and establishment of permanent markers for the sculpture collection. Rae pointed out that these projects at Big Rock meet two of the City Council's goals for 2008: 1) Maintain or improve the current level of City services, ensure that all city programs and services help protect or enhance the quality of life in Bellingham and assure the City's financial and human resources are allocated to achieve the Council's goals; 2) Protect and enhance the City's cultural, educational, recreational and environmental assets.

Rae also stated that there are some long term funding needs including implementation of Big Rock's Master Plan, specifically including development of the west side of the park and expansion of the park that will add about 2 acres from an adjacent 8.3 acre natural area. Another long term funding need is revision of the Master Plan in the area of parking and access. In the Master Plan developed in 2001, the parking identified near the reservoir is now fenced due to Homeland Security measures taken after 9/11, leaving only 4-6 parking spaces depending on car size. There is a parcel of property located at the south-west corner of the park on Sylvan Street that has been in the Greenway Advisory Committee's inventory for a number of years for potential acquisition. Acquisition of this parcel may provide the necessary additional parking.

MaryAnn Crawford shared that the Big Rock Committee's goals to accomplish their mission statement come right out of the Big Rock Master Plan. The Master Plan calls for long-term, strategic planning for the future. The Committee plans to do this by engaging the Park Board and the community by making Big Rock's needs known, by joining the National Garden Conservancy Pacific Northwest chapter, and by fundraising to help pay for the needs. The Committee plans to join the National Garden Conservancy next year in order to receive help in enhancing the natural and horticultural elements of the Garden. Fund raising ideas include a garden membership program, a special event such as a fall sculpture auction, fund drives, grant writing and a Capital Campaign.

Mike Anderson asked if the Committee has a cost estimate for any of the needs. Rae Edwards responded that they got cost estimates in 2001, but now things have gone up in price and they need to do so again. Marvin Harris reported that some of the less expensive short term needs may be met by Park Operations staff and covered by the capital maintenance budget this year. The rest of them will be included in the 2009 budget process. Leslie Bryson stated that the Master Plan revisions can become part of the Design & Development Division's 2009 work plan if Paul Leuthold gives direction to do so. Ira Hyman asked if monetary donations to Big Rock are tax deductible. Paul responded that they are; donations go through the Whatcom Community Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Upon further discussion, it was decided that the Big Rock Committee will meet with Park staff to develop a work plan. That work plan will then be presented to the Park Board for a resolution at their April meeting.

VII. ADJOURNMENT: The March 2008 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board was adjourned by consent at 8:55 a.m.

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