

PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES
Wednesday, October 8, 2008

Present: Bill Hadley, Jane Blume, Adrienne Lederer, Jim McCabe, John Hymas, Mark Peterson, Harry Allison, Dominique Zervas

Absent: Mike Anderson, Julie Guy, Tom Barrett

Staff: Paul Leuthold, Parks & Recreation Director
Marvin Harris, Park Operations Manager
Leslie Bryson, Design & Development Manager
Liz Haveman, Board Secretary
Heather Higgins-Aanes, Environmental Program Coordinator
Wendy Scherrer, Environmental Program Intern

Attending: Louise Bjornson, City Council
Jim Zander, Greenway Advisory Committee

- I. **EXECUTIVE SESSION:** Executive session was held from 7 a.m. to 7:20 a.m.
- II. **SEPTEMBER MEETING MINUTES:** Motion made and unanimously approved to accept the September 2008 Park Advisory Board meeting minutes as submitted.
- III. **OLD BUSINESS:**
 - A. **Greenway Committee Update:** John Blethen reported that the City Council asked for a presentation of the Greenway Strategic Plan at their October 8 meeting. John stated that the Strategic Plan has not been finalized and adopted by the Greenway Committee yet so a draft was presented to Council. The Greenway Committee plans to vote on adoption of the Plan at their October 16 meeting. The final Greenway Strategic Plan will be brought back to the Park Board.

John stated that the Strategic Plan is based on the levy ballot, which designated \$12.1 million for northside property acquisitions, \$6.0 million for southside property acquisitions, \$2.0 million for undesignated property acquisitions, \$5.3 million for land acquisitions to complete various projects, and \$1.0 million for expansion of Cornwall Park and the Squalicum Creek corridor. The Strategic Plan includes three maps; the northside, the Whatcom Creek corridor, and the southside. Each map is accompanied by a narrative that states the Greenway Program goals for each area and lists acquisition target areas and intended allocation dollars for each area. The maps illustrate the target areas with "worm" corridors. Leslie Bryson stated that the intent is to purchase parcels within the "worm" corridors on the maps. Leslie also stated that the intended land purchases can be supplemented with property acquired through dedications and easements.

Jim McCabe stated that he recognizes the fine line between the duties of the Greenway Advisory Committee and the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board and he recognizes the need to protect the confidentiality of property purchase price negotiations. Jim stated that the Greenway Strategic Plan should give the Park Board the background information that they need to make an informed decision when they are asked to vote on property acquisition items; they can use the Strategic Plan to see how the property fits into the goals of the Greenway Program. John Blethen reminded Park Board members that the

Greenway Committee does walk all of the properties before deciding to acquire them and stated that Park Board members are invited to attend those walks as well.

Jim Zander stated that approximately half of the current Greenway Advisory Committee are fairly new members who have been appointed in the last couple of years. The exercise of creating the Greenway Strategic Plan was quite an educational process and will serve as a useful tool for Greenway members as well. Leslie Bryson reminded the Board that the target acquisition areas were not determined solely by Park Staff or the Greenway Advisory Committee. Shortly after the most recent levy passed, a number of public input meetings were held and a large quantity of public feedback was received about where citizens want to see parks and green spaces. All of the input received at meetings, as well as all of the letters, emails and phone calls was logged in a public comment tracker that the Committee studied in depth in order to narrow the focus to the projects in the Strategic Plan.

- B. PRO Plan Update:** Leslie Bryson reported that at their October 2 meeting, the Planning Commission voted to recommend the PRO Plan to City Council as a Comprehensive Plan amendment. City Council will have a public hearing on the PRO Plan on October 20. Jim McCabe reported that the Planning Commission vote was 4-1 and stated that as he perceives it, the one vote against recommending the PRO Plan was based on the perception of reduction of level of service. Jim stated that depending on how you look at the level of service measurement, the new Plan can be seen as a reduction. It will be important to present the PRO Plan with a good explanation of the level of service issues. Leslie Bryson stated that the current Plan focuses on properties that are accessible to citizens with active parks and trails. In the 2002 Plan, there were many watershed properties and critical area set asides outside the UGA that were included in the Plan as parks and green spaces. These are not accessible to the public so they were not included in the current Plan, which is one reason why there is less acreage than the 2002 Plan.

Louise Bjornson noted that when the Plan was presented to City Council in June, some Council members felt that the Plan was not affordable and asked staff to reduce it. Louise asked if anything has been done to reduce cost. Paul responded that the costs for a community center and for land and a new office building have been removed from the Plan. Leslie Bryson also noted that the current Plan proposes 4 different land ratio options and the least expensive Base Plan Option is recommended. The Base Plan Option views people living in the UGA as already served by the parks and trails within City limits nearest them. If these people were not counted as those served, there would be an immediate deficit of park acres per thousand with every annexation. Annexation financial modeling shows this to be unaffordable for the City, which is problematic because without annexation, some areas would continue to be developed, but the City would not be receiving any park impact fees or real estate excise taxes, and the City would have limited input in the area's development.

Jim McCabe asked if the October 2 draft of the PRO Plan is currently posted on the website. Leslie Bryson responded that it is; she is also working on an updated clean draft for the October 20 City Council hearing that will replace the October 2 draft on the website. Jim McCabe thanked the Steering Committee members and Leslie Bryson for all of the effort put into the PRO Plan.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. **Lake Padden Golf Course Lease:** Jim McCabe asked Paul and Marvin to take a few minutes to discuss the recent changes to the Lake Padden Golf Course. Paul Leuthold responded that the Lake Padden Golf Course was constructed in 1972 for the purpose of creating a great golf course at an affordable rate for the citizens of Bellingham. The Lake Padden Golf Course is run as an enterprise fund, which means that it is not subsidized by the City. In addition, the City collects business & occupation tax from the Lake Padden Golf Course; \$35,000 of which is designated to fund youth sports programs each year.

Marvin Harris stated that the Lake Padden Golf Course clubhouse building was remodeled in 2000 to expand the kitchen, dining room, and renovate the pro shop. A \$700,000 loan was taken out for the remodel that will be paid off in 2010. Marvin stated that the course was originally maintained and operated by City staff, but over time the City contracted golf pros and turf maintenance workers, and eventually leased the pro shop operations to a group who taught lessons, rented golf carts, collected greens fees and set up tournaments. State auditing became difficult under this arrangement because a private party was collecting the public greens fee funds. At one point in time, there were two separate cash registers running at the golf course; one for the public greens fees and a separate one for the various private funds collected. This prompted the City to combine the course maintenance and operations under one lease agreement.

Marvin stated that the City put out a Request for Proposals and only one response was received from the current pro shop leaseholder. The City entered into a lease agreement with this group who now runs the course entirely and keeps all of the greens fee revenues. In return, they pay the City a monthly leasehold amount of \$16,794.35 (\$14,883.33 rent + \$1911.02 leasehold excise tax). The leaseholder has the liberty to gift greens fees for promotion and raise fees; they just cannot raise them more than 3% annually without City Council approval.

- B. **Trails Sub-Committee Project Ideas:** Jim McCabe reported that at the September meeting, it was decided to devote more time at a future meeting to discuss the list of possible projects for the Trails Sub-Committee in 2008. Tom Barrett first distributed this list in February 2008, but due to full meeting agendas, there has not been time to discuss the ideas during the monthly meeting until now. Jim McCabe also noted that now that Ira Hyman is no longer on the Park Board, an additional Trails Sub-Committee member or two are needed.

Jim McCabe noted that the Share The Trails campaign got off to a good start with a one page flyer of the Share the Trails guidelines that was distributed to a variety of citizen interest groups and printed in the Leisure Guide. Jim also noted that there was a spot on BTV10 devoted to the Share the Trails campaign that ran for a number of months. Since that time, there has not been any follow-up. Mark Peterson noted that he does not believe that he ever heard about the Share The Trails guidelines as a member of the WHIMPS organization. The guidelines have not been printed in the Leisure Guide since last year either.

Another idea is to draft a letter to Pete Kremen asking for low impact public use of watershed property. Dominique Zervas stated that she has been attending County watershed board meetings and at their last meeting, the board put together a number of questions for county staff in regards to future use of watershed properties. Dominique stated that she has that list of questions and would be happy to share them with other Park Board members if anyone would like. Paul Leuthold stated that he would get in touch with Mike McFarlane at Whatcom County Parks & Recreation and ask him for more information.

The third idea on the list is to provide input on priorities for funding for park and trail projects, particularly trail connections. Jim noted that Park Board members were given the opportunity to participate in the Greenstreets sub-committee that included Councilman Jack Weiss, Greenway Committee members, Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee members and Public Works staff member Kim Brown. Kim was going to generate a report of the findings of the Greenstreets sub-committee that could then be used to determine funding sources. As far as Jim knows, Kim has been waylaid with other projects and has not completed the report yet.

The fourth idea is to continue to work on trail signage, as well as signing new property acquisitions. John Blethen stated that about 10 years ago, he manufactured some signs for greenways properties to inform the public of the purchase. Over the years these signs have disappeared due to wear and tear, but the concept is important. John suggested that signs should be included as part of the closing cost on all new acquisitions.

The last idea on the list is to become involved in the planning of a possible street corridor and Bay to Baker Trail segment along the railroad right of way from Birchwood to James Street under I-5. The Park Board passed a resolution in March 2008 recommending to City Council that construction of the Bay to Baker Trail corridor be planned to connect Birchwood Avenue to James Street under I-5. At this point in time, this project is under the jurisdiction of the Public Works Department and is part of the Transportation Improvement Program.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Salmon Art Trail project: Heather Higgins-Aanes introduced herself as an Environmental Program Coordinator for the Parks Department and for the Public Works Department. Heather also introduced Wendy Scherrer, former director of the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association, and current environmental program intern. For her internship, Wendy proposed the idea of a Salmon Art Trail along Whatcom Creek similar to the "Confluence Project" along the Columbia River in Eastern Washington. The purpose of the project is to connect children and adults to salmon and the natural creek habitat through artwork along Whatcom Creek between Bloedel Donovan Park and Maritime Heritage Park. Wendy stated that because a number of pieces of art already exist along the lower creek near Maritime Heritage Park, the initial phase of her project will focus on this area.

Wendy distributed copies of an inventory that she has created of all of the signs and artwork currently along the Whatcom Creek greenway and trail areas. In the inventory, Wendy noted the agency responsible for placing the signs and their current condition, as

well as the artist who did the work, when it was completed, and the art medium. Wendy stated that vandalism and wear and tear to signs and artwork is an issue. Many signs are in poor shape and need repairing. Wendy reported that she has learned that the City of Seattle discovered that children's artwork at bus stops is 80% less likely to be vandalized by graffiti than artwork done by adults. Wendy suggested that future pieces of art installed along the creek in areas more likely to be targeted by vandalism be pieces done by children.

Wendy has identified a number of places that could serve as new locations for artwork along the creek in the future. Wendy stated she has spoken with some members of the Lummi Tribe who are very interested in having some art representation in downtown Bellingham. Wendy suggested that the Lummi elders might work with the leaders of the Bellingham Senior Center to install a new piece of artwork on the Senior Center grounds. Wendy also suggested that a recently installed concrete retaining wall between the Environmental Learning Center in Maritime Heritage Park and Dupont Street might be a place to integrate some ceramic tiles that could be created by children. Wendy suggested that new artwork be integrated into functional spaces such as benches, railings and in cement. Wendy also suggested partnering with the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association and the Bellingham Technical College and other local agencies to secure new pieces of artwork.

Wendy also passed around a brochure of the art collection at Western Washington University and brochures on Whatcom Falls Park and Cornwall Park. Wendy stated that she is looking for examples of brochures in order to get ideas for a brochure that she could create for the Salmon Art Trail that would map all of the pieces to tie them together. The addition of new pieces will be a long term goal, but a brochure of the currently existing pieces could be created in the short term of her internship, which is over in December 2008.

Wendy will also be taking her project proposal to the Bellingham Arts Commission. Wendy stated that she will be hosting a walking tour on Thursday, October 16, at 11 a.m. for Arts Commission members and invited all Park Board members to attend as well. They will depart from the Environmental Learning Center.

Wendy asked Park Board members for feedback on the project proposal, including concerns and other ideas. Jim McCabe inquired about maintenance of the artwork. Wendy stated that the Arts Commission is very concerned about maintenance issues; they are currently working on revising their acceptance requirements to include a maintenance plan and a fund to deal with maintenance. Marvin Harris stated that park staff are not equipped to repair vandalized artwork, the artist really needs to be the one to do the repair and there are no funds currently to do this. Heather Higgins-Aanes stated that the criteria for new artwork will include a vandal-proof design and long-lasting construction.

Adrienne Lederer asked Wendy if she has considered including Woodstock Farm in the project. Wendy responded that she has not; at this time she is focusing on the Whatcom Creek corridor. Adrienne encouraged her to consider incorporating Woodstock as a long term goal because of the farm's rich local history and connection to nature.

Mark Peterson stated that he likes the idea of the Salmon Art Trail and the detailed thought and planning going into it. Mark suggested that they continue to be conscientious of the project planning to ensure that the creek corridor does not get crowded with art and signage in a way that will distract trail users from the natural creek experience itself. Wendy agreed and thanked Mark for the observation.

Adrienne Lederer moved that the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board approve continued work on the Salmon Art Trail concept. Mark Peterson seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously.

V. ANNOUNCEMENT: Adrienne Lederer announced that the Woodstock Farm Conservancy and the Parks Department hosted a very successful art show at Woodstock Farm in September and a number art pieces were sold. Adrienne also announced that the current seasonal sculpture exhibit that opened on Mother's Day at Big Rock Garden will be removed by the end of October.

VI. ADJOURNMENT: The October 2008 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board was adjourned by consent at 9:00 a.m.

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