

PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES
Wednesday, September 12, 2007

Present: Ira Hyman, Julie Guy, Bill Hadley, Jane Blume, Mike Anderson, John Hymas, Adrienne Lederer, Tom Barrett, Stan Snapp

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

Attending: Louise Bjornson, City Council Member
Anara Thomas, Grateful Dogs Off Leash Association
Mollie Faulkner, Grateful Dogs Off Leash Association
Trish Lemon, Grateful Dogs Off Leash Association
Sharon Bishop, Grateful Dogs Off Leash Association

I. JUNE MEETING MINUTES:

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

II. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Greenway Committee Update: Stan Snapp reported that the Greenway Committee has been working on an extensive priority list for property acquisition that covers North and South Bellingham. The Committee plans to use this list to create a North Bellingham map and a South Bellingham map to label greenway corridors and track land acquisition priorities and progress. Stan also reported that the City just closed on the purchase of the Durham property on Aldrich Road in North Bellingham and Laurel Cook will be looking for some interested Park Board members to help plan a celebration of this first North Bellingham property acquisition. John Hymas inquired about Greenway acquisitions on Samish Hill. Leslie Bryson reported that the purchase agreement on the Skeers property has closed and closure is pending on the nearby Muljat property. Leslie also reported that she and Tim Wahl have been meeting with the developer of the Seguin property to gain a connected greenway corridor on Samish Hill.

III. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Park Plan Update: Leslie Bryson reported that it is time to start working on updating the Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan and all Park Board members will be a part of the steering committee to do so. Leslie also asked for one volunteer to extensively review the current plan and sit on the interview panel to select a consultant to oversee the Plan update. Julie Guy volunteered. All Park Board members will be asked to attend steering committee meetings beginning in November. Public meetings will begin after January 1, 2008.

IV. DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Paul Leuthold reported that the 2008 Parks Department budget has been approved by the Mayor and is now waiting for City Council approval. The budget includes money for the purchase of much needed park maintenance vehicles and equipment. The largest unapproved budget request was \$1.5 million in Real Estate Excise Tax for the completion of the Whatcom Creek Trail from Meador to Ellis. No portion of that request was approved. The Parks Department may be able to get up to \$270,000 in Neighborhood Initiative Grants to help fund the project, but this will not be enough to complete it.

Paul also reported that the new Woods Coffee shop at Boulevard Park has opened and all public feedback has been positive.

The Skate Park renovations have also been completed and the Parks Department has received positive feedback and has noted a high volume of park users.

Paul reported that the City has reached a settlement agreement with Grandslam Management (the Bellingham Bells) on a lawsuit regarding the 2006 Joe Martin construction conflicts with the Bells game season. The terms of the settlement include no monetary payment from the City to the Bells and a fee waiver for the Bells' 2007 season because they have already paid for the 2006 season. The Bells were also awarded a 2 year contract with the option to renew at a flat rate of \$9000 per year. The previous contract stipulated that the Bells pay per game, as well as a percentage of their concession and advertising profits. Leslie Bryson commented that the Bellingham Herald reported that under the previous contract, the Bells paid the City close to \$10,000 per year and that now they will only be paying \$9000. Paul stated that this is true, however, the Herald did not mention that the Bells will also be paying lease on a storage unit at Joe Martin that will be charged at a rate of \$4.00 per square foot. Once this lease is included in the \$9000 contract, the Bells will be paying somewhere in the neighborhood of \$10,500 to \$11,000 per year.

Paul reported that there was only one response to the Request for Proposal for the lease management of the Lake Padden Golf Course. The bidder who responded is the party currently leasing the Course. The next step is for the Lake Padden Golfers Committee to decide if they want to formally interview the party or move directly into lease negotiations because the party is already known.

Paul reported that a meeting is scheduled for September 19 between the City, the Port of Bellingham and the Waterfront Advisory Group to begin the process of creating a Waterfront Master Plan. Paul noted that Byron Elmendorf, former Parks Department Director, and John Blethen, current Greenway Advisory Committee member, are both on the Waterfront Advisory Group. The time of the meeting will be confirmed and emailed to Park Board members. Paul stated that the plan is to create a map of the area with bubbles labeling areas designated for commercial use, housing, parks, etc. Paul said that he would like to see a fixed number of parks in the Waterfront Master Plan rather than a variable number based on the density of the area.

Paul also reported that the Parks Department is in negotiations with Western Washington University for the Alumni Association and Athletic Department to host "tailgate parties" in the concession area of Joe Martin Stadium that will include the sale of beer before WWU football games at Civic Field.

V. PRESENTATION:

A. Dog Off Leash Areas: Paul Leuthold explained that approximately 1 month ago, members from the Grateful Dogs Off Leash Association met with Mayor Tim Douglas and requested that a City staff person be appointed to address their concerns regarding dog off leash areas. In response to that request, Paul recommended Jonathan Schilk as the City expert on the topic as Jonathan has done considerable research on dog off leash areas in the process of designing one for Squalicum Creek Park. The Grateful Dogs Off Leash Association also requested a joint meeting between the City, the County, the Port and the State to address the confusion of property boundaries and differing off leash regulations. Paul reported that approximately a week ago, this meeting took place with officials from the City, County and Port; State Park officials were not able to attend due to short-staffing.

Jonathan Schilk reported that he has completed three in-depth case studies of dog off leash areas in Puget Sound that are operated by government agencies. These three areas are Warren G. Magnuson Park in Seattle, Marymoor Park in Redmond, and Grandview Park serving SeaTac, Auburn, Burien, Des Moines, Federal Way, Ken, Renton and Tukwila. In these case studies, Jonathan found that all three of the dog off leash parks were developed through trial and error with considerable partnerships between government agencies and non-profit organizations. Each park differed in their design; the off leash area at Warren G. Magnuson Park is fenced, an old clay soccer field is used as an off leash area at Grandview, and Marymoor is an off leash area entirely. Despite these differences, Jonathan has found some design features that are generally agreed upon:

- Short fences (approximately 4 feet tall) with wire mesh are all that is needed to contain the dogs;
- Rules are posted to dictate the behavior of dogs and owners;
- Shade is necessary;
- Hog fuel (a course ground wood fiber) is the preferred ground surface material.
- Obstructions such as boulders, logs and mounds of hog fuel create a more interesting play area for the dogs;

Jonathan discovered that the partnerships between the government agencies and the non-profit organizations to create and maintain dog off leash areas developed out of budget shortages. The government agencies own the land and take care of the creation and maintenance of fixed assets in the off leash area; such as fences, and water spigots, and the non-profit organizations raise funds and create work parties to spread hog fuel and maintain the sites. S.O.D.A. (Serve Our Dog Areas) is the name of the non-profit organization working with all three of the case study parks.

Jonathan also learned that it is important to discover and mitigate the environmental impact of the dogs. For example, the City of Seattle has incorporated a SEPA checklist in the planning of dog off leash areas to address issues such as storm water run-off. Some trails in Marymoor Park are closed during some months of the year to protect the nearby waterway from dog waste contamination.

Jonathan reported that the future dog off leash site at Squalicum Creek Park has been graded and hog fuel has been spread. The cost of the entire project to construct the dog off leash area will be approximately \$250,000. Funding for Phase 2 construction of Squalicum Creek Park is included in the Greenway 3 Levy and scheduled for budgeting in 2011. Mollie Faulkner stated that Grateful Dogs would like to donate trees and other plantings to assist with the project. Anara Thomas of Grateful Dogs offered their partnership in the design of the off leash area. Jonathan Schilk and Paul Leuthold stated that if Grateful Dogs would be willing to help raise funds, they would be open to forming a partnership to complete this project ahead of the phase 2 timeline.

Marvin Harris reported that the next step is to make sure the future dog off leash area at Squalicum Creek Park has good drainage and suggested that this winter will be an appropriate time to assess the drainage and see how the hog fuel holds up. Ira Hyman requested that Marvin report back to the Advisory Board in March 2008 as to his findings.

VII. BOARD REPORTS:

Leslie Bryson stated that the North Bellingham Trail Plan is completed and was sent to the National Park Service for feedback. The next step is formal adoption. The plan will also be included in the Park & Recreation Open Space Plan update. Julie Guy reported that neighbors in the Cordata area are very interested in hearing more about it at a future meeting; Leslie Bryson stated she would be happy to attend a meeting.

John Hyman reported that on September 29 from 10am to 2pm at Elizabeth Park there will be a celebration kicking off October as Urban Forestry Month. The event will include a mayoral proclamation, tree tours, a tree climbing demonstration and a slideshow. John also reported that a Heritage Tree Ordinance is in the final stages of completion and will be presented to City Council sometime in October.

Adrienne Lederer reported that the Woodstock Farm Conservancy is looking into replacing the roof on the big house and that they are working with the IRS to gain non-profit 501c status. Adrienne also reported that lack of transportation and parking to Woodstock Farm is an issue and she has written a letter to Whatcom Transportation Authority to request regular bus service to the site.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT: The September 2007 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board was adjourned by consent at 9:00 a.m.

Approved: Ira Hyman, Chair

Attest: Liz Haveman, Secretary