

THURSTON COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION
Tuesday, July 14, 2009
McLane Building Conference Room
Olympia, WA

MINUTES

Members present: Larry Schaffner
Ed Cael
Candice Rydalch
Donna Weaver Smith, Chair

Absent: No members absent.

Guests: Tom Patten

Staff: Cliff Moore, Director, Resource Stewardship
Lester Olson, Director Public Works
Kerry Hibdon, Public Works, Parks Division
Andrew Beattie, Recreation Supervisor, Recreation Services
Marilyn First, Parks Board Recording Secretary, Recreation Services

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM. By Chair Donna Weaver-Smith. Minutes from the previous meeting were shared, but only reviewed as the minutes were taken at a meeting with no quorum.

Public Comment

Cliff Moore, asked if anyone from the public wanted to speak. No members of the public were present at that time.

Ms. Weaver-Smith opened up dialogue about the Dog Park and details included in the previous meeting's minutes. She was not aware that the county was moving forward on this park until reading the minutes. She had understood that dog parks were needed primarily in urban areas, but not in areas in rural Thurston County.

Lester Olsen, Public Works Director, shared that the local organization, Sound Hounds is the organization that went to the Thurston Board of County Commissioners to request a dog park in the county. Sound Hounds has also approached officials in Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater for dog parks in those areas as well. Sound Hounds also worked with the Solid Waste Division of Public Works to identify sites that could meet the requirements of a dog park. The Commissioners chose to move ahead, working with Solid Waste in site selection, preparation and funding. While there was no intention of excluding the Parks Board in the project, Sound Hounds did not come to Parks to discuss, but rather, the idea for a park rose up on its own, and the Commissioners felt strongly about responding to the request. Public Works Division Solid Waste's site at the Waste and Recovery Center kept coming up as a good possibility for the park,

with possible revenue to help support the park. Revenue possibilities include fees from the new Intercity Park & Ride lot, collaboration other jurisdictions such as the Cities of Olympia and Tumwater. Using the park as a recreation enterprise opportunity with dog trials and other events to raise funds is another possibility.

Further discussion on benefits of dog parks and why they are needed in both rural and urban areas followed. Mr. Schaffner pointed out that not only the dogs enjoy these parks, but the owners also enjoy the social outreach, opportunity for exercise. He pointed out that dog parks give dogs room to roam, but within a *controlled* environment. Ms. Rydalch asked “Who will provide maintenance for the park?” Mr. Olson said that the Public Works Solid Waste Division would provide the maintenance.

Additional comments on how Thurston County might utilize this project for public relations purposes: to show that when there is a strong demand, that government *listens* to its constituents; that additional funding through enterprise activities could also be realized, and may provide revenue for parks staffing.

Tolmie State Park was the next topic on the agenda. Cliff Moore had planned to speak about this, but since Mr. Olsen was present, he was asked to share information with the Board. He shared that the Washington State Parks Department, like others, are having budget challenges and has made plans to close many of its parks. State Parks staff contacted Thurston County to see if it had interested in acquiring the park. The City of Lacey and The Nisqually Nation are also very eager to see this park remain open. Together with Thurston County, Lacey and Nisqually have entered into a memorandum of understanding for the park. Thurston County will be the owner of the park; Lacey and Nisqually will help to define how it is used.

The park will remain in passive recreational use; the Nisqually want to preserve the site as a cultural and historic resource to share with the community into the future. The property will be deeded over to the County. The site is 127 acres and would be the county’s first salt water park located outside the urban growth area. The Nisqually will cover maintenance costs for the park first few years. Agreements with the Department of Natural Resources concerning the tidelands and shell fish areas have yet to be worked out.

Recreation Services Update

Andrew Beattie reported that Recreation Services, a unit of Resource Stewardship provides multiple revenue producing events for adults, children and those with disabilities and/or special needs. These include: adult soccer & softball leagues; field & trail events; triathlon, a dog run for the Humane Society, and a “Kick in the Grass” which included over 135 teams competing from Washington and Oregon. Each of these events is covered by only bare bones staff.

Mr. Beattie also shared that due to the changes in funding for the Parks & Recreation Department, that the media coverage created doubts in the public’s mind about parks, shelters, and recreation services. Later he and other staff returned to the media with information highlighting the services & accommodations that ARE still provided. This has proven effective; numbers of registrations, shelter reservation are at consistent numbers as in years past.

Parks Update

Kerry Hibdon reported that Parks facility rentals at Frye Cove, Kenneydell, Burfoot and Griffin Field continue to have heavy use now that the “peak season” is upon them. Typically, he reported, there are 5 to 9 reservations every Saturday and Sunday in July and August. He shared that recently the Seattle to Portland Bike Ride rode through Thurston County, with over 9,000 bikers taking breaks and then moving on. Another bike ride coming up will bring 350 riders into the parks. Mr. Hibdon also pointed out that with as many scheduled events as they have at the parks in the peak season, there are few, only minor glitches in reservations...typically, just 1 or 2 per year.

Mr. Hibdon reported that in Lacey, on the Chehalis Western Trail, there have been complaints about bicyclists crossing the trail, where there are stop signs, without stopping. The Lacey Police will be providing an “emphasis patrol” which put officers and a patrol car on the trail to warn bicyclists that they are required to stop and to keep pets on leashes while on the trail.

Then, Mr. Hibdon reported on the Department of Natural Resource’s transfer of its section of the Chehalis Western Trail to Thurston County. This will add another 5.3 miles of trail, beginning with the construction of a bridge over Martin Way and continuing out to Woodard Bay. He mentioned that the timing, while not ideal, will work out well over the long term. He emphasized that no funding for the trail will be taken from the parks funding. A question about the funding for the bridge was raised; funds have been obtained through the US Department of Transportation, from the federal gas tax.

He then shifted to discuss the Kenneydell Park Phase III. Public works will be using the park for training exercises for less experienced workers to install gravel parking lots. Additional plans include addressing safety issues at the park, and proposing the reduction of current speed limits to further enhance safety in the Park, noting that some drivers frequently reach speeds of nearly 50 miles an hour. When he asked for any comments or questions, Ms. Rydalch expressed her support for the new parking area. Mr. Hibdon described how the road will be changed to allow for more and safer parking. Ms. Rydalch also asked about trees that are in planters at Kenneydell. Mr. Hibdon replied that the Department of Transportation used to provide trees to the Parks Department to plant in parks. Originally, 400 trees were provided; some were planted; others were given to groups such as the Boy Scouts and WSU’s Master Gardeners. At this time, he reported, there are just about 100 trees left that will be removed by fall.

Finally, Mr. Hibdon reported that he has 12 staff, and 8 seasonal workers who are covering lots of ground, and that the contract sites his staff maintains for other Thurston County Departments are going very well.

Board membership update:

Cliff Moore reported that the Board of County Commissioners is aware that the Parks Board has vacancies in both the 1st and 2nd districts, and that an application for the position was on the Commissioner’s website. Cliff also shared that he would call the Commissioners for an update on the recruitment process. Members of the Board shared that in the past, announcements for openings on the board were submitted to the media to encourage volunteers to step forward.

Mr. Moore reminded all present that the Commission is practically an entirely *new* board and have endless information, requests, meetings and more coming at them all the time. Knowing that there are other boards and commissions with vacancies, Mr. Moore will check with the Clerk of the Board to learn more about the recruitment process and will explore ideas suggested on advertising openings as suggested through media releases and using public reader boards etc. as in the past.

Other Business

Guest Tom Patten, who joined the meeting mid-way, was given the opportunity to speak. Mr. Patten is a member of the community, who is extremely eager to see dog parks established in each parks' jurisdiction in the area. He shared that he is writing a letter to (the Editor of the Olympian) to praise Mr. Hibdon and his staff for mowing the Chehalis Western Trail so late in the year, and how it is protecting the young & nests of many native birds. Mr. Olson suggested that posting a sign for trail users to see would also be helpful to explain why the grass is left standing longer.

Mr. Schaffner suggested that the Board should reinvigorate the Parks Plan. Mr. Moore suggested that the Board might consider writing a letter to the Board of County Commissioners asking them how the Parks Board might help the Commissioners be more successfully in helping them in their strategies and goals over the next few years.

Ms. Weaver-Smith asked the question "Is the Parks Board even necessary?" Some also shared that after members left the Board in late 2008, and it has appeared that there was no effort to replace them. Some members expressed that they did not want to simply spend an evening a month in a meeting if they were not truly needed or actually contributing in some way. Mr. Cael shared that while he did not mean to minimize the efforts of staff, that perhaps some members do not feel as much a *part* of the Parks as they might otherwise. He again, stated the need to fill the vacancies currently on the Board, missing as many members as they are, amounts to *half* the board.

Further discussion on how the Parks Board might assist the Commissioners in further developing its Comprehensive plan and that providing support and assistance to them may be very well received. One approach mentioned was to let the Commissioners know that it is clear that they have a long range vision for the future of Parks in Thurston County, and then ask, how might the Parks Board assist in helping them realize the big picture? Providing the Commissioners with assistance with their work might be very welcome.

More discussion on the members see their roles and responsibilities followed with ideas on how they might better define their roles followed. Members agreed that they would like to meet together for more dialogue outside the regular meeting schedule. Ms. Weaver-Smith will contact each member and set a time and place to meet. More discussion should be included on the next Board Meeting, on Tuesday, August 11. The meeting was adjourned at 8:13 PM.

Marilyn First, Recording Secretary