

**THURSTON COUNTY  
PARKS & RECREATION BOARD**

2000 Lakeridge Dr SW  
Room 280 Building 1  
Olympia, WA

**JANUARY 23, 2007**

**MINUTES**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**      Jon Halvorson, Chair  
                                  Bernie Chaplin  
                                  Donna Weaver  
                                  Grant Larsen  
                                  Larry Schaffner  
                                  Donald Krug

**GUESTS**                Blaine Wheeler, Brian Faller, Jay Emry (Capital City Bicycle Club)  
                                  Doug Cook, Thurston County Roads and Transportation  
                                  Citizens of the County

**STAFF**                 Michael Welter, Director  
                                  Chuck Groth, Park Operations Manager  
                                  Kerry Hibdon, Capital Projects Manager  
                                  Sue Poyner, Recreation Program Manager  
                                  Cheri Johnson, Administrative Assistant

**CALL TO ORDER** – The meeting was called to order at 6:35 pm.

Director Welter reported that board member Carla Rutz has resigned due to health issues. Her resignation is effective immediately.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – Member Chaplin noted that in the paragraph under Rutledge Land Swap, the first word in line 4 should be changed to assessed. With this correction noted, the minutes were approved as amended.

Due to there not being a meeting since September, those meeting minutes needed approval. Member Chaplin moved to approve the September minutes. The minutes were approved as written.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** – Jay Emry, author and co-complainant of the lawsuit dealing with the gates on the Chehalis Western Trail, spoke in favor of removing the gates and placing single bollards at road intersections. He also encouraged the board to remove any bollards that are placed midway and not near intersections, which, he states, have caused several major accidents by cyclists. Mr. Emry also suggested the board consider handing over the maintenance and operation of the trail to the County Roads Department because he feels they are better equipped for dealing with transportation corridors.

Doug Cook, who works for the Roads and Transportation Department and is a roller blader, voiced his concern around the lack of adequate maintenance on the trails. He said that he knows that the Parks Department does not have enough manpower or equipment to deal with the current maintenance issues of the trails, and he worries how they will deal with the development of the Gate to Belmore Trail. The Roads Department has the equipment and manpower to do this. He feels they should become more involved in the maintenance efforts.

Brian Faller, from the Capital Bicycle Club, wanted to follow up on the film that was shown to the board at the December meeting. He stated that the focus was to illustrate how longer wheel-based bikes maneuver the gates and how congestion can occur, which can be a safety issue. He thanked the board for their willingness to address these concerns. There being no other citizens wishing to address the board, the public comment section of the agenda was closed.

**TRAIL GATES** – The board began discussion on the issue of the gates.

Member Schaffner stated he does not feel the board has had an opportunity to hear comments from other types of trail users and he would like to have the board explore this in-depth. He is interested in learning more of the history of the gates and the accident rate. Director Welter briefed the board on the history of how the gates have evolved from the original grey gate style. The gates have served their purpose of slowing down bicyclist before they come into an intersection as was the original intent of the gates. In 2004 the new style yellow gates were installed on the Yelm-Tenino Trail because of the better design. Kerry Hibdon did research to make sure all the gates were ADA compliant. The department has not received a single report from police or emergency response of accidents between trail users and motorists. No incidences have been filed through the department, either.

The trails were acquired and developed mostly with state funds specific to recreation purposes. Only the Yelm Highway overpass and approximately 1/3 of the cost of the Yelm-Tenino Trail development was derived from transportation funding sources. The gate system was designed for recreational users. He stated that the biggest complaint the department receives is from other types of users who complain about the speed of bicyclists using the trail. Director Welter stated that which ever way the board decides to move, the department feels there should be some sort of safety device at intersections and will continue to maintain that the yellow gates are the safest device at road intersections for all users. Director Welter said that the staff has had a good relationship with the Department of Roads and Transportation during and after construction of the trails and continues to work with them on many projects.

Member Schaffner had concern that the single bollard design could escalate the motor vehicle use on the trails.

Several of the members felt there is no single solution for the whole trail but that the approach at each intersection should be evaluated. Member Larsen had concern that we may be decreasing the level of safety by taking out the gates and it could become a liability issue.

Chairman Halverson feels that there will be a liability issue either way. He recommended moving to single bollards immediately. He does not want the department to be placed in a compromising situation with the Federal government by not complying with their ADA decision on the gates. He thought that evaluating each intersection would be a good idea, but documentation should show that the gates are justified.

Mr. Schaffner suggested that the board may want to explore other design possibilities first.

Director Welter stated that the government's directive on ADA compliance needs to be considered and dealt with immediately. Consideration of gate design alternatives can be researched and addressed at a later date.

**Member Larsen moved that the board recommend to the Board of Commissioners to move toward replacing the gates with single bollards, but assess each intersection for exceptions to that and document the process. Member Chaplin seconded the motion.**

In discussion, Member Schaffner suggested documenting the traffic counts at intersections as part of the evaluation process.

**Motion carried.**

Mr. Faller expressed interest in working with trail user groups in order to educate one another on trail etiquette and signage to avoid future conflicts.

**BOSTON HARBOR LAND TRADE PROPOSAL** – The Boston Harbor Neighborhood Association is requesting the Parks Board take action on the following items from their proposed Natural Space Plan:

- 1) Create a larger, contiguous natural space in the vicinity of Burfoot Park.
- 2) Establish an additional pedestrian access to Burfoot Park
- 3) Create additional natural spaces and buffers.

They are also asking that the County not sell anymore land surrounding Burfoot Park, but to work toward consolidation so there would be more opportunity to protect the land, particularly the headwaters of the stream that runs into Zangle Cove.

Director Welter stated that the department has not taken a stance one way or another on the pedestrian access issue, but there are liability issues that would need to be addressed, along with permitting issues in order to build a trail. He said that the design of the trail could be a combined effort between the neighborhood association and the county. Staff would ultimately have to work on the permitting side and making sure the design is consistent with what would be allowed in that area.

Chairman Halverson suggested the board needs to prioritize this in the board's work plan. The board agreed that they would not be able to approve the creation of the pedestrian access at this meeting, but they are willing to move toward it by researching what permits area needed, the costs involved, and other items.

**Member Chaplin moved that the board support in principal the Boston Harbor plan for natural spaces in the greater Boston Harbor area, and support the establishment of an additional pedestrian access to Burfoot Park, with the caveat being that prioritization is done through the 2007 work plan. Member Krug seconded. Motion carried.**

**RUTLEDGE LAND TRADE** – At the last meeting the board had asked staff to check into whether it would be legally required to get a land appraisal. Director Welter stated that the department's attorney advised it was not. From what he was able to gather, the cost of surveying the land would a significant amount of work and money.

**Member Larsen moved that the board approve the Rutledge land swap with the caveat that the money from the trade be used to purchase additional land to infill around Burfoot Park. Member Weaver seconded. Motion carried.**

**PARKS BOARD WORK PLAN** – Chairman Halverson stated he would like to see the board do more public education to communicate that the maintenance needs in the parks are high, and to show how little funding the department has to work with.

Member Schaffner talked about the letter he sent to the board outlining his ideas for a work plan (attached). He feels strongly that the board should engage in some sort of retreat in the near future.

Chairman Halverson feels that the board should move toward adopting the County Ordinances that a past Park Board member took the time to revise. Director Welter will contact the Prosecutor's Office to get this moving again.

The board selected the following issues to place in their plan for 2007:

- Parks Board retreat
- Annual meeting with the Board of Commissioners

- Comprehensive Plan action
- County ordinances
- Prioritize maintenance issues in the parks
- Level of service for each park property
- Capital needs assessment

Staff will send out a copy of the maintenance prioritization that was worked on last year prior to the retreat.

Member Rutz's resignation from the board has created a question: Can a new member be appointed as an at-large member. Currently there are 2 members from Commissioner District 1, Donald Krug and Larry Schaffner. Donald was appointed as an at-large member, but resides in District 1. The board questioned whether Carla's replacement would need to come from District 1 or could the new member be an appointed as an at-large from another district. Director Welter will contact Cathy Wolfe and ask the question.

The board set the date of March 24 from 9am to 3 pm for their retreat. Staff will reserve the Kenneydell Lodge and make arrangements for lunch.

Chairman Halverson and Member Chaplin stated they would be willing to take the new members on a tour of some of the parks prior to the retreat. Member Chaplin stated he would make arrangements and contact staff.

**RECREATION REPORT** – Sue Poyner distributed copies of the recreation brochures. For the new members she gave a brief overview of some of the recreation programs the department offers. She stated in the future she would invite some of her staff to attend the meetings to talk about their specific programs. The department is getting a lot of demand for more and new programs, but staffing is in short supply. Presently, the department employs four permanent recreation staff, and between 25-55 part-time staff, mostly during the summer. The department has received approximately \$4500 from the PARC Foundation which helps offset the cost of some of the programs.

**PARKS REPORT** – Chuck Groth reported that the maintenance division is still doing a lot of cleanup from the past couple of storms. The last two months have been devoted to moving the maintenance shop out of the Delphi Shop and into the Tilley Road shop for the interim until the McLane Fire Station is ready to move in. Staffing levels have been down for the past couple of months because of medical and family leave. Last year the Department operated nine athletic fields and learned a lot about turf maintenance. This year a professional has been hired to help them assess the needs and make the fields more cost effective. Mr. Groth talked about upcoming event dates:

- February 17, at 2:00 pm - grand opening of Chehalis Western Trail bridge over I-5 (Bridging the Gap)
- April 1, all athletic fields will open
- April 12 – Arbor Day planting at Burfoot Park
- May 5 – Prairie Appreciation Day at Glacial Heritage Preserve
- May 12 – Second annual Trail Day

Mr. Groth reported that the department has hired someone to do a hazardous tree evaluation around park properties. The well has been installed at the Griffin Athletic Fields. A pump house will be built this summer. Plans are to move toward an irrigation system. An Eagle Scout has been approved to do some improvements to the landscape around in the trail in Rainier as part of his Eagle Scout project.

Mr. Hibdon reported that the Commissioners have approved funding for some capital projects at the Glacial Heritage Preserve caretaker house. He is getting bids for new windows and a furnace. Staff will be working on cordoning off the back of the house to allow the Nature Conservancy to have a place to meet. To date improvements to the house have included a new roof and carpeting. Plans are to bring in a caretaker when these renovation projects are complete.

Smith Lake Property – The property owner of the Lacey Corporate Center has contacted the Parks Department with interest in donating 3 acres of land on Smith Lake adjacent to the Chehalis Western Trail. Mr. Hibdon reported that the parcel has been offered to the Cities of Lacey and Olympia but it is not in their incorporated area, so they have come to Thurston County with their offer. Mr. Hibdon and Mr. Groth have visited the site and feel it would be a real benefit to the trail. The property owner is only interested in commercial use and this parcel does not fit into that plan. The value of the land is \$67,000.

**Member Weaver moved that the board recommend the Board of Commissioners accept the Smith Lake property donation. Motion carried.**

McLane Fire Department – There is no definite timeline for the department to move in. Mr. Hibdon continues to communicate with them on the progress.

**2007 BUDGET** - Director Welter reported that the 2007 budget includes a project position in the maintenance division for a two years period for 9 months each year. The department was able to secure \$15,000 for renovations at the Glacial Heritage Preserve caretaker house, and \$60,000 has been set aside to replace the gates on the trail.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.