

Chuckanut Community Forest Park District Review and Report

June 2, 2018

Vince Biciunas, for the Commissioners

A citizens' vote in February, 2013 created the Chuckanut Community Forest Park District (CCFPD) and citizens of the district deserve our thanks for making that a reality.

Five Commissioners were elected at that same election, and we are honored to continue to serve to this day. Besides the current commissioners of Sue Kaun, John Hymas, John McLaughlin, Frank James, and myself, we are indebted to former commissioners Cathy McKenzie and John Brown for their perseverance.

As one of its first official actions, the Commissioners adopted the following Mission Statement: "The mission of the Chuckanut Community Forest Park District is to ensure the entirety of the property is protected in perpetuity in public ownership, with respect for its ecological, recreational, and educational functions and to serve as a fiscal mechanism through which the district, via a tax levy, will repay the City of Bellingham for the Greenways Endowment Fund loan."

We have endeavored to protect the ecological functions, in part by preparing and finalizing a Baseline Documentation Report, completed on May 8, 2017 and signed by Mayor Kelli Linville and Parks Director Leslie Bryson. We are grateful to Ann Eissinger and Common Futures, LLC, for creating, dare I say it, an exciting document, recording the ownership history, parcel descriptions,

physical features, and biological habitats, wetlands and buffers, and temporary disturbances and impacts. Thanks also to Chris Behee of the City's Planning and Community Development Department, for excellent and prolific maps. When we get to the park's Master Planning, this document will be an invaluable tool.

Another official action we took the first year was negotiating and signing a Conservation Easement to forever protect the forest and an Interlocal Agreement between the City and the District. These documents, recorded January 6, 2014, allowed us to formally enact a levy each year since 2014, to collect the tax dollars to repay the City's Greenways Endowment Fund Loan of just over \$3.2 million, within ten years.

Now that we're four years into our projected ten years, everyone wants to know how we're doing in the loan re-payment aspect. We can report that despite having to spend \$111,000 to successfully defend against a legal challenge, we are roughly on schedule, one third of the way towards collecting and re-paying that debt. You can see our yearly budgets on our CCFPD web page, and also see our Annual Audit Reports for the State of Washington.

We plan on engaging this year with the Whatcom Land Trust to initiate the transfer of the Conservation Easement, and we further encourage you all to fully participate in the City's Parks Master Planning process when it is initiated in 2020.

Most of all, we urge you to get out there and hike the established trails, bring your kids, teach them about the plants and animals, enjoy our forested skyline, breathe deeply, and know that our air is cleaner and our waters flow clearer, because of our efforts.