

MINUTES — Regular Meeting
CHUCKANUT COMMUNITY FOREST PARK DISTRICT
Wednesday, March 24, 2021 at 6 PM
Online Meeting Through Zoom
Mailing Address: PO Box 4283, Bellingham, WA 98227

Official email addresses for Commissioners, where public may send comments (subject to public disclosure):

John Hymas jhymas1331@gmail.com
Hue Beattie hue.ccfpd@gmail.com

Frank James fjames.ccfpd@gmail.com
John McLaughlin johnm.ccfpd@gmail.com
John G. Brown jbrown.ccfpd@gmail.com

Our Mission: 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.

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak and the Governor’s “Stay At Home” Order, this meeting of the Chuckanut Community Forest Park District will be conducted online on Zoom.

A visual and audio recording of this meeting will be posted on the CCFPD website. If your camera is on during the meeting, your voice, likeness, and surroundings, will be publicly available and viewable on the CCFPD website. If you choose to speak with your camera off, or by calling on a telephone, only your voice will be recorded.

Call to order: John Brown. Welcome Commissioners and Citizens. Per Chapter 42.30 RCW (Open Public Meetings Act), CCFPD board meetings are open to the public.

Roll Call: John Hymas, John Brown, John McLaughlin, and Hue Beattie. Frank James excused (did join the meeting later).

Motion: Moved to approve agenda by Hue Beattie. Seconded by John Hymas. Approved 4/0.

Reminder to Commissioners that they are obliged to turn in, by April 15th, the F-1 Public Disclosure Forms.

Introductions: Bob Carmichael, legal counsel and Robyn Albro, secretary. Also attending Vince Biciunas, Gerry Wilbour, John Servais, Richard Hartnell and John Blethen.

Motion to approve minutes for March 24, 2021 meeting by Hue Beattie, second by John Hymas. Voted to approve by 3/0 with an abstention by John McLaughlin as he was not at that meeting.

Old Business:

- **Proposed Revisions to Master Plan Outline:** John McLaughlin presented his revision to the Parks Dept. master plan outline. One of the guiding principles, per Gerry Wilbour, who has more experience in the Park’s master planning process, is that for any park master plan to succeed it needs to begin with the public. The public owns and uses the Park, and the master plan should reflect their interests and values. John McLaughlin didn’t see enough of that in the Park Dept. outline and so included information in #2 Stakeholder Participation Process and also before any decisions are made on the Park, in #5 Community Vision, Values, Interests, and Goals. He would like to see the public’s interest, values, and vision be prominent in the master plan.

Gerry Wilbour mentioned that the Park master plan will work better or worse or not at all depending on how it is aligned with the community and their values. In particular, the issue of closing trails, where there are two main approaches other groups have taken. First, to put emphasis, resources, and planning into designing a trail network that works, in that it minimizes impact and serves the interests and needs of where people want to go. Or if you have a poorly designed trail system that doesn’t align with community values, people are going to try and use closed areas anyway and you are going to spend an awful lot of resources on enforcement and increase frustration for all.

By having public participation in sections 2 and 5 it sets up #6 Desired Future Conditions, which leads to #7 Restoration (How to get from current conditions to desired future conditions.).

Hue Beattie brought up adjacent land owned by the City that haven't had a master plan done for them and that we should make sure connections are made to master plan from Hoag's Pond and other small public parcels.

John McLaughlin suggested this could be addressed when we get to trail criteria, that whatever trail design we come up with must connect to all six access points, which are connections to adjacent areas.

John Hymas mentioned a story in the Seattle Times on saving Washington forests for carbon storage not logging, conserving now to sequester carbon. This is another reason to connect the Forest to adjacent areas. He also mentioned potential for changing the conservation easement.

Bob Carmichael said expanding the conservation easement could be difficult, would take a change in will on the part of the city to include other properties, but could be done. The board looks to be close to consensus in that the master plan should at least mention adjacent properties, perhaps plan trail network for connections to those properties, identify existence of wildlife corridors that connect the Chuckanut Forest and adjacent areas, but to stop short of getting into detailed analysis of the master planning of those areas. It would be a bigger effort to make that happen and there is a lot to do in the Chuckanut Forest and might be better off recognizing focus of this plan is the Chuckanut Community Forest.

Bob Carmichael suggested the board approve this draft outline for purposes of sharing with the Parks Dept. He is very much in agreement that the planning doesn't get too far ahead of public input. To move forward, share this with the city, with the idea of collaborating with them on how we are going to move the public process forward. This is a city park, it warrants a public hearing by the Parks Dept. with notice to the whole city.

Another issue Bob Carmichael brought up, is that he suspects that the Parks Dept. budget of \$25,000 is not going to be enough to cover the level of detail our board would like to see in the master plan, and we should consider the CCFPD using some of its own funds to study some of these topics. John Brown suggested that the money discussion happen at the Steering Committee. Bob Carmichael suggested that it might make sense to contact Ann Eissinger. We couldn't make any commitments, but maybe she can help the Steering Committee.

In discussion of authorizing the presentation of this outline to the Parks Dept, John McLaughlin said he was more comfortable if it was vetted by people with more experience, such as Wendy Scherrer, Ken Wilcox, and Gerry Wilbour before it was sent in. In response to John Brown, Hue Beattie mentioned he trained at Huxley in planning and has been involved in several plans over the years. He also suggested that Robyn Albro make copies and submit them to Wendy Scherrer, Gerry Wilbour for comments. John Hymas proposed that we submit it to the Parks Dept. as a draft as we are early in the process and not get caught up in special meetings right now.

Motion by John Hymas that the Board authorize the presentation of this draft master plan outline to the Steering Committee, and it be emailed to Laine Potter and copied to Nicole Oliver. This was seconded by Hue Beattie. Approved 5/0.

- **Discussion of Trail Plans Evaluation Criteria.** John McLaughlin explained the Trail Plans Evaluation Criteria. Using the two public hearings, five best plans and the public's thoughtful comments, including if bikes are allowed and where, dog leashing and waste, he made a list of Public Desires. For the second set of design requirements and criteria, as some feelings were

so strong, he elevated them to requirements and the rest were made criteria to meet various objectives. The criteria were measurable, and you can take trail designs, score them, and see how well the trail network works. From there you can make decisions about which criteria to go with.

The Parks Dept came up with their criteria after both rounds of our processes. They are a set of considerations that are largely questions with binary answers (yes/no). This can lead to multiple designs with the same results, so it might be hard to distinguish the results. For example, if you ask the question can this trail be maintained and the answer is yes, there is no way to figure out which is the better criteria.

These are two different approaches to criteria; our course is fairly transparent and more objective. The Park Dept's relies more on professional judgement. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. The Parks Dept process is an internal process. We are advocating for a more public process.

Even an excellent design or plan is not going to work if the public doesn't trust it. They won't trust it if it is a fait accompli, but they will trust it if their work is written all over it. John McLaughlin suggested we appeal to the Parks Dept and say we both want this to succeed. In order to succeed, we have to engage the public early and often, so we end up with a trail network and plan that actually works. We see now what happens when it doesn't work. You have trail proliferation all over, festering conflicts between cyclists, dog walkers and other users. You have ecological degradation of the place and violations of the conservation easement. The master plan is the opportunity to do it right and well. We must engage the public along with people who have experience doing this and seeing what works and what doesn't in other places.

In summary, what I would do is to leverage the expertise of people who have done a lot of master planning of places like this and appeal to the Parks Dept interest in something that works. I would strongly recommend any trail design and process to first develop input on what the public wants. We have already done quite a bit of that. Then with leadership from people like Gerry Wilbour and Ken Wilcox who have experience in open space, as opposed to manicured parks.

The question was raised about asking them about volunteering their time or hiring them for a professional review. John McLaughlin said they are both retired, but there are lots of other things they could do, and we ought to respect their professional competence and contributions. "So, if they would like some sort of compensation, I think we ought to give it to them and our mandate for stewardship would justify some sort of payment."

It was suggested that this all be brought to the Steering Committee when it starts meeting and the Parks Dept as well.

Frank James commended John McLaughlin on the extensive amount of work he has put into this, not just on this document, but on two very extensive efforts of design and two very substantial processes of public involvement. "I appreciate the work you have done, and we have a much more sophisticated product than we would otherwise have for consideration for the long-term plan." John Brown and Frank James agreed that they, as representatives on the Steering Committee, would move this forward.

Frank James: The city has envisioned this as a process where we are not co-equal with the city, but that they see us as one among many stake holders. I feel we need to get more clarity about that. I believe that we are co-equal partners in this venture with the city. I think that is reflected by the entire history of the project and the financial input. I think we should assert that we are an equal partner in this, and I don't think we should just accept what the city wants us to do.

John Brown: I don't think that we should just accept what the city is telling us to do, and I think your idea of taking a pro-active step on this will emerge more and more as we go on, especially

in discussions in the steering committee. John Brown said he would contact Laine Potter and see if she could get some sort of a timeline going on the steering committee process.

John Hymas said he doesn't think that anyone has taken an initiative to a master plan as much as we have and so we are pushing it to the city now.

- **Interlocal Agreement for Payroll Service** Robyn Albro reviewed the document for the Board. It is the same document that has been approved in the past, set to cover the next two years for payroll services. Whatcom County has still been processing payroll while we waited for the new agreement from the County. Motion to approve the Interlocal Agreement for Payroll Service by Hue Beattie, seconded by Frank James. In Item 4, it has been changed from John McLaughlin to Frank James. Approved 5/0. Robyn will contact everyone about signing the agreement.
- **Upcoming Meeting on April 28th on Invasive Species in Chuckanut Community Forest.** Invitations have been sent. The South Neighborhood has their meeting on the same day at 7pm, so if we are going to keep the same date, we need to start close to the beginning of the meeting so they can get to their meeting at 7pm. Laurel Baldwin, staff member for the Noxious Weed Control Board, is planning to attend and potentially a board member as well. She said she was going to try and take a hike through there before the April meeting. Gerry Wilbour was also invited.

Analiase Burns, Habitat and Restoration Manager for City Public Works was invited but didn't feel it was the best fit for her. She said she can provide scientific information on the CCF's wildlife, wetland, and water quality to help inform your decisions. Most significantly, in the next few months they will have new data from their Urban Forestry Management Plan assessment on wildlife corridors, forest structure, restoration opportunities, and fire risk. Robyn Albro will invite her to share that information with us at one of our next meetings.

- **Public Hearing on Restoration at May or June Board Meeting.** Decision to have the hearing at the June board meeting. Discussion of what was to be included at this hearing: student developed plans and a general discussion of the broader issues of restoration priorities. John McLaughlin will write up something that Robyn can disseminate.

Public Comments:

John Blethen: I just spent 2 ½ hours on the foot of Cornwall Park and I was the only member of the public, everyone else was paid. There are big disparities. There will be a lot of interest, obviously the South Side made this happen. This is important. I personally feel that we need to include all the Greenways property that was bought for the same exact reason that you made the Chuckanut Forest happen, and we ought to have one heck of a community forest down there. I would never call it a park, because in this town parks mean playgrounds.

I am really hoping that whatever we do with the 100-acre woods, that we integrate with the other properties that we have and make one big forest. I don't know if you read the Seattle Times article on Sunday, but we need this. This is one of the most important things that the city can do to create a carbon sink and if we play it right, we can tie into the state lands, we can get to the waterfront. This could all be one giant forest and a growing forest. That whatever we do in this master plan feeds into a bigger master plan that addresses the other properties that we have acquired which don't have a plan and because of the way they were acquired, are easily overlooked.

John Brown: Sounds like a lovely idea.

Richard Hartnell: A brief hypothesis to throw in, I wonder if considering the magnitude of this study if we might not get a very good cost benefit ratio by reserving a piece of this funding to fund a graduate thesis or two in ecology at Western on the 100 acre wood, considering the scope of the funds.

Frank James: Something to consider, I think that is a larger discussion than what we are doing tonight, but we can bring that forward with the city and it is a great idea.

John McLaughlin: I would say a very clear yes, but we would want to provide very clear guidance on what would go into that.

Vince Biciunas: Whatever we do with monies after we pay the City back, we have to be super careful on anything we spend on anything else and make sure that there is public support. Remember the lawsuits we have been through.

John Brown: Duly noted. Our first obligation is to pay off the loan.

Park Advisory Board Meeting Report: John Hymas, liaison to Park Advisory Board. John Hymas has not received minutes from the last Park Advisory Board Meeting. John Blethen attended and doesn't remember anything that is particularly relevant. It sounds like the steering committee will have a Greenways Committee member. He asked to be on it. He would love to be on it.

Monthly expenses and cash flow sheets.

Petty Cash: WECU Bank account balance as of 2/28/2021 was \$2,967.11.

Treasurer's Report: As of February 28, 2021, Whatcom Co. Treasurer's Monthly Report, beginning unencumbered cash balance (2/01) \$226,977, ending unencumbered cash balance (2/28) \$220,816. We received tax revenues of \$2,187. Paid out \$7,290 in operating expenses, and \$1,058 was paid on our loan to the city of Bellingham.

Current debt outstanding as of 2/28/2021: \$647,200.71.

Motion by Frank James to approve District Payroll Input Form, seconded by Hue Beattie, for wages for Robyn Albro, 22.50 hours in February 2021, total gross of \$562.50. Approved 5/0.

Consent Agenda: Motion by Hue Beattie to approve following payments, seconded by Frank James. Approved 5/0.

- Payment on the February 15, 2021, Invoice #94115, from Carmichael Clark PS for \$1,452.50 for regular professional services.

John Hymas: When can we meet in person? Frank James: Current governor's recommendations are moving in that direction. Bob Carmichael: We are currently in Phase 3 and for local government meetings like ours is that the board may meet in person if it chooses to do so, subject to a very long list of requirements. If we can meet those requirements, we can meet in person. I believe we can meet; we have enough space at the Fairhaven Library to meet with social distance wearing masks. That all still is required for meetings to take place. I am going to suggest that we not change that for the next meeting, maybe put it on the agenda for the April meeting to decide if you want to put it up for the next meeting in May in person. Frank James: In support of that, the Governor is going to review the status on April 12th, and if Bellingham and Whatcom County continues the way it is going, likely they will not meet the requirement for being in Phase 3 and will be moved back to Phase 2. Hue Beattie will get his second shot on Monday and suggests that we meet outside by Larrabee School. There is plenty of space for 5 or 6 people to sit physically distanced and people could bring chairs and we could be dry if it is raining. Vince Biciunas: If you are going to have a speaker in April and a public hearing in June, might be better to keep those on zoom.

John McLaughlin: This issue came up with an international expert that deals with many of the issues we deal with, Ed Grumbine. He was walking in the forest, this happened while John McLaughlin was away, and found major trail building going on including bike trails. Has that been addressed? Robyn Albro: I sent an email to Laine Potter to see what the status was on that and heard back from a Parks Dept employee, Phillip said he is 99% sure the bike jumps are on private property, but without a survey he couldn't say for sure. Frank James: It is unfortunate that it leads people doing that activity directly into the Park. Perhaps we can address that issue more thoroughly later.

Next meeting: Wednesday April 28, 2021.

Adjourn. Time: 7:29 pm.