

## **Parks, Recreation and Fair Board Minutes**

**Thursday, April 17, 2025**

**The meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm with the following Park Board members in attendance:**

**Board Members Present:** Tim Manns, Gery Cardenas, Barry Brower, Chris Allen, John Semrau, and Kevin Loy

**Staff Members and Representatives:** Brian Adams

**Members from the Public:** None

***A motion was made to approve the March minutes with corrections was approved and passed unanimously.***

### **Board Discussion:**

#### **Northern States Recognition and Art Piece**

Brian discussed the recognition of history and past events at Northern States, including the Olmsted Brothers and water features. He mentioned a group of people involved in the process, including Mary McGoffin, Amy Muia, Joellen Kesti, Julia Johnson, Michael Boss, Jay Bowen, Peter Whited, and Lynn McJunkin. Brian mentioned the possibility of an art piece near the trailhead and the involvement of a consulting firm called Studio Understory. John discussed the significance of the agriculture and cannery at Northern States, and the potential for funding from the community. Brian also mentioned the idea of interpretive signs and reflection benches.

#### **Northern State Hospital's Closure and Impact**

Brian discussed the history of Northern State Hospital, which was closed in 1972 due to budget cuts. He emphasized the importance of outdoor activities and nature for mental and physical health. The group also discussed the deinstitutionalization of people with mental health challenges in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They noted that the closure of Northern State Hospital led to the transfer of patients to Western State Hospital and resulted in the loss of 500 jobs. The conversation also touched on the judicial decisions in the 1960s that led to the shutdown of similar facilities.

#### **Rexville Project Land Swap Progress**

Brian discussed the progress of the Rexville project, which involves a land swap with the drainage district to improve access to the site. He mentioned hiring a structural engineer to assess the strength of the concrete cistern on the property and the possibility of building on top of it. Brian also mentioned the need to show progress on the project to keep attorneys at bay and to utilize the site's potential for public benefit. The family that provided the land wants to ensure its used for the original intention or be

given back, as per the condition of the deed. Kevin and Gery asked questions about the project's location.

### **E-Bikes Gain Popularity in Community**

Brian, Gery, Kevin, John, and Barry discussed the increasing popularity of electric bikes in their community. They noted that the e-bikes are particularly appealing to a new demographic of trail users. Brian mentioned that he has not received any complaints about allowing e-bikes on the trails. John shared his personal experience of using an e-bike, which has helped him overcome knee injuries. Barry informed the group about a state program offering up to \$1,200 in grants for e-bikes, with applications due on April 23rd. The group agreed to spread the word about the program to potential users.

### **Trail Work and Land Donations**

The group discusses several ongoing projects and updates. Brian provides information on the status of the Big Rock trail work, which is progressing well but not officially open to the public. They also discuss a recent land donation by Ellen Ratt and her husband, which will add 20 acres to the park. Brian updates the group on the RCO grant for Big Rock, expressing confidence that it will be funded despite potential budget cuts. The group also discusses the Waterfall property acquisition, which is delayed due to permitting issues, and the upcoming auction of a house on the Presenteena property in June.

### **Update on Rec/Current Projects:**

#### **NSRA**

The new Song Sparrow bridge is open and attracting large numbers of hikers. A ribbon-cutting ceremony and campus tour is scheduled for September 19. We met with a consultant to discuss how to better recognize NSRA's history and significance. A team of historians and artists discussed this for three hours and with the information we have gathered, we will be formulating plans prior to our next May meeting. The SW Olmsted Park project is in motion and is scheduled for completion in November. This will add needed parking to the west side of the campus.

#### **HMSP**

The CXT restroom has been installed and is in service. We are still aiming to have our online reservation system operational by October 1, 2025 (last quarter). Additionally, we will be submitting a fee adjustment proposal for our campgrounds prior to the new fee adjustments. Revenues for 2025 are already above 150k and we anticipate the reservation system will only increase our revenue potential.

#### **Recreation**

Since our sports seasons are also tied into our calendar seasons, spring brings renewed optimism for all the sports teams getting underway. Recreation still has programs going 6-7 days per week, split about evenly between indoors (Adult & High School Basketball Leagues) and outdoors (Adult Softball Leagues & Youth Baseball/Softball Field Rentals). We've seen a slight uptick with adult program registrations this spring and are curious to see if this trend continues into the summer and fall. We're also starting to see

sign-ups come in for our Summer Youth Basketball Camps as families begin looking ahead towards summer break planning that's now just two months away.

### **Fairgrounds**

A busy Spring is underway at the Fairgrounds. Events the past month have included Blossom Bash Vendor Market, SICBA Home Show, Wood Expo & Marketplace, Spring Garage Sale, Circus on Ice, Leadership Skagit recruitment event & Veterans Stand Down. The Spring Garage Sale had over 200 vendors occupying over 350 booth spaces with vendors reporting great sales, which is impressive considering the current economic turbulence. The Fall Garage Sale and Car Show will be back September 19-20. The Veterans Stand Down, led by Chris Diaz reported a significant increase in people (223) served as well as a huge volunteer base (260) that helped put on a very successful event. The Fall Stand Down will be Oct 3-4.

Upcoming events through Mid-May include the Chuckanut Dog Show, School Testing, Auto Swap Meet, Sensory Event with Law Enforcement (SCSO & WSP), Master Gardener Plant Fair, JBF Consignment Sale and Pac NW Vendor Spring Fest.

The bathroom project bid has gone to Trico Construction. We eagerly anticipate the new facilities to be in place and ready to go ahead of the Skagit Valley Highland Games and the highlight of the summer, the 2025 Skagit County Fair.

The First Fairgrounds Advisory Board meeting was held on April 21<sup>st</sup>, and Fair staff is very excited to be supported by such a great group of respected community focused people. The advisory board, combined forces with the newly formed Fairgrounds Foundation gives the staff a great group of community liaisons moving forward to support Fairgrounds events, operations and capital projects.

### **Swinomish Boat Launch**

After two years, we have secured our permit from the Army Corps of Engineers! We also have final approval on our local permits. Work is scheduled for completion in October 2025. In the meantime, keeping the docks afloat for the upcoming boating season will be a challenge.

**Adjourn: 7:15 pm**