

Minutes of the Meeting: May 4, 2023

Board members present: Brian Wetcher, JoAnn York-Gilmore, Tabb Stringer, Nathan Schwark, Kit Gerwels

Staff present: Bob Vaux, Steve Phillips, Darby Jordan

Guests: Asa Deane, John Meehan

Meeting held in person and via Zoom and called to order at 6:03PM

Minutes: April minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comments:

None

ACFL Plan Update

- Board Study Session on Chapters 1 & 2

****Please note, the meeting was held in the Council Chambers, utilizing the audio system. Due to this, there were some issues with volume and clarity.****

The Board opened the first scheduled study session with extensive deliberation about the emerging themes from the public comments received so far and how this shapes the Plan review going forward. A number of the Board expressed desire to change the approach and published schedule for Plan review, opening up to any and all public comments prior to any Board study sessions or draft proposals of Plan changes.

The Board weighed the pros and cons of the section-by-section approach but came to the conclusion that the cohesive theme of the Plan could be missed if such focus is given to only certain sections at a time.

It was discussed that the Plan should have a statement of purpose in the introduction that is definable and clear. More discussion was had about reviewing the Plan in its entirety and then creating a more detailed introduction that conveys the impact of the whole document.

It was decided that the Board will open to public comment beginning at the August meeting and based on that feedback, will guide the next steps of the process.

Kit made a motion to not review Chapters 1 & 2 tonight and instead open the next meeting to all public comments. Tab voted to second this motion. All Board members voted in favor.

Bob reminded the public that any invitation to gather 3 or more Board members constitutes a public meeting and will need to be publicized.

Individual members can meet with the public, but not as a group without it being advertised as a public meeting.

ACFL Dams Update:

Bob gave an update that the FEMA planning grant for the Whistle Lake dam would need a site visit. This will include FEMA representatives, Planning, Public Works, and Parks staff. This visit has not been scheduled yet.

Friends of the Forest Update:

Asa was in attendance to give the Friends of the Forest update. He shared a letter that had been submitted to the Board and staff to clarify previously submitted comments on the Forest Plan update. He had been contacted by the Skagit Land Trust who had concerns about the Friends of the Forest's request to remove the wording and designation of "wildlife sanctuary". The letter can be seen below in full. The intention of removing this erroneous distinction was to clean up any legal language in the plan. Asa requested that if there are any concerns or questions, please reach out to him directly.

The Friends are working with the Anacortes School District and the Samish on the Impact summer school program. They are planning to continue field trips to Washington park and the ACFL. Asa asked the Board for permission to utilize the ACFL in a group larger than the approved 25 from the Forest Plan. They will have approximately 40 students that will break into groups and rotate stations and activities for learning in the ACFL. They will utilize areas such as Heart Lake and the A Avenue access, areas able to accommodate a larger group. Brian made a motion to approve this exception and JoAnn seconded. It was approved by majority vote, with Nathan abstaining his vote. The Friends are getting ready to launch training for their Trail Ambassador program, run each summer on the weekends. This program places volunteers at popular trail heads to answer questions and educate users about the ACFL. Sunday, May 7th will be the Friend of the Forest Spring Fling, a gathering to appreciate the volunteers and members of the group. There will be music, games, food and fun!

ACFL Trail Committee Report:

Bob gave an overview of the Trail Committee and their role in the ACFL. There is a representative from each user group as well as a naturalist in the group. They help inform the Forest Advisory Board about trail use and requests or needs from all users. Bob stated that John Meehan was in attendance to present a proposal about changing the approved types of motorbikes in the ACFL. He has submitted a proposal to the Board and staff outlining his request. That letter can be seen below in full.

John spoke about his outreach and education of motorbike riders in the ACFL, sharing his frustration with riders that are breaking the rules and making the entire group look bad. He is asking the Board to look at the rider/operator and education/enforcement instead of focusing on the type of motor.

The Board asked questions about what data could be collected to support the request of opening the ACFL to other types of motorbikes. John suggested he will track his interactions with other users and their feedback on the motorbikes. Nathan spoke about collecting data and quantifiable information.

He does not want to see this opportunity taken away completely as it may lead to less ownership of the ACFL by younger users.

Brian expressed appreciation for the effort and proposal but does not want to see more combustion engines in the ACFL.

Kit shared that previous two stroke engines were louder and created more pollution. He shared that there may be existing data available to show the difference between the older models and the new motors. He acknowledged that there is lots of feedback on this user group which makes this issue super challenging.

Mark Nihart shared a letter he had written regarding motorbikes in the ACFL, which can be seen in full below.

The Board accepted these comments and did not come to a decision at this time.

Staff Reports:

Steve reported on the City's new app, See Click Fix. He appreciates the use of this as it allows exact locations and photos, making his days more efficient when a downed tree is reported.

Bob shared that National Trails Day is June 3rd and there will be a work party on trail #126, the connector from south Little Cranberry to Heart Lake.

SWITMO will be in attendance to help with this project.

Parks Commission Report:

JoAnn reported on the Parks Board meeting, sharing that the Skate Park bid came in high so staff are reviewing the next steps in this project. The Washington Park restroom project is in process and moving along. The Parks Board is working on project priorities and the funding for these projects.

Other Business:

The next Forest Board meeting will be the annual joint hike with the Friends of the Forest on June 1st. There will be no business conducted at this meeting.

The Board expressed interest in visiting the Whistle Lake dam.

Adjourn at 7:53pm

Respectfully Submitted by Darby Jordan