

Minutes of the Meeting: April 4th, 2024

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

Staff present: Bob Vaux, Jamie Burroughs, Darby Jordan

Meeting held in person and via Zoom and called to order at 6:01PM

Minutes: Board member Kit Gerwels acknowledged receipt of comments from a member of the public that sought to expand on comments made during the March meeting. The content of the comments (budgets and revenue) were noted. March minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comments:

None

2026 Forest Plan Update Discussion:

Kit provided an overview of the process for the Forest Plan update, sharing that the Board has reviewed all comments from the public as well as staff recommendations. All Board members gave their opinions, with the next steps being staff writing a first draft which will then come back to the Board and public for additional comments and revisions.

Board member comments:

JoAnn-

JoAnn shared her thanks to the community for taking time to submit their thoughts and concerns. It was clear that climate change is at the forefront of many people's minds. JoAnn expressed her gratitude for the community partners such as the Friends of the Forest and Transition Fidalgo that are studying the science of the ACFL. She feels it is important to recognize the future changes and adjust the governance accordingly. She noted that the community is growing and changing, with increasing population a factor in the ACFL. She anticipates that rules and regulations will become stronger City wide. JoAnn would like to see the plan have an improved format and be easier to read. The Board has looked at examples from other entities for ideas and guidance. She feels that the City staff have a good relationship with other agencies at the county and state levels as well as the community partners. JoAnn gave her recommendation that staff move forward with drafting a plan to bring back to the Board and community.

Nate-

Nate shared that he works at the Shannon Point Marine Center and through that network has access to the expertise of many professionals and scientist colleagues. Nate also expressed his thanks to the public for their comments and time. When reviewing the current plan, he noted one sentence that shared

the goal of the plan: "...to develop a plan that works to conserve and enhance the unique environment and habitats within the ACFL while maintaining recreational opportunities for local residents." He shared that the comments expressed the struggle of balancing conservation and recreation. Nate is hesitant to make any major changes to policy. He shared a quote from a 1947 text book on the definition of conservation, that states in part "...the wise use of existing supply...".

Tabb-

Tabb expressed his gratitude to be part of the Forest Board and have the opportunity to give back to the community. He shared that last April and May, he felt that no changes should be made to the Plan without full public input. Tabb thanked the community for their support and comments, as this allows for informed decisions. Tabb stated that he had spent the last 12 months on the Board listening to the public. He said that it has become clear that everyone ultimately wants the same thing-for the natural beauty of the ACFL to be kept for future generations. However, there are lots of opinions on how to accomplish that goal. Tabb expressed that there has been no major degradation to the ACFL from recreation which he feels shows successful management by City staff and the Forest Board. The comments reflected the concern about population growth and the popularity of the ACFL. He shared that the City and the Board look at science in addition to Transition Fidalgo and their studies. Tabb felt last year that the Plan was disjointed but now feels that it makes more sense and needs minor changes instead of sweeping changes. He expressed his support in the staff starting to draft an updated Plan.

Kit-

Kit shared that the Forest Plan has been around for over 43 years and much of it has stood the test of time. He mentioned a few things that have changed; in 1998 the CEP was started as a new form of revenue which was a big change from the 1981 plan that focused on logging the ACFL. The latest Plan focuses on forest education and the help of non-profits. He shared that more land has come under the City's management but the needs and desires of the community have been at the forefront of the decisions. Kit expressed his thanks to those that took the time to submit comments and opinions, stating that out of 17,000 people in town, the 40 that shared their thoughts show a core group committed to caring for the ACFL. He also expressed that it is tough to find the balance between conservation and recreation. He acknowledged that out of town uses have increased and the modes of use have evolved over time. The goal is to consider how all of those users can exist on the trails together. Kit gave an example of the increase in seasonal use at Whistle Lake during the summer. Rules and constraints can be put in place, but if there is not a way to enforce the rules, there will still be issues. The Anacortes Police Department are helpful, but there needs to be more resources for enforcement. Kit stated that budget and staffing are large parts of this

issue with hopes that the Plan can have a general outline of the needs now and in the future to anticipate the increased needs. He shared that the Plan is updated only every five years, so this should be general actions and guidance. Kit would like to see the updated Plan have the increase in acreage and show the new areas, possibly an overlay map showing the CEP, previous state park and what is left to achieve full protection under the CEP. Kit also stated that there should be monitoring of ecosystem health included as this would allow the Plan to be forward looking and more informed to help guide decisions.

Brian-

Brian also thanked the community for the comments and suggestions. He shared that he has read every comment and that most site conservation as the principle concern and priority and recreation should be second. Brian feels that “less is more” when it comes to user groups and any expansion. He shared that the Board has looked at other documents such as federal, state, county and City regulations that cover the ACFL and would like to see these in the Plan in a clear and concise manner. Brian stated that many of the comments mentioned things already being done, such as moving trails away from the water, but that the Plan could be clearer in some areas. He recommends staff begin to write a draft in preparation of going forward with a new Plan.

Friends of the Forest Update:

Ellie was in attendance and reported that April and May have been busy with the Spring Break camps. They hosted two sessions with about 30 kids. The Naturalist Club is up and running with 15 participants and they are almost half-way through the program studying the ecology of Fidalgo Island. The Friends are looking for summer volunteers to help with their Trail Ambassador program. The Friends held a work party recently to pull invasives and despite it being wet and muddy, the volunteers were all smiles. Brian asked about replanting with native species when an area is cleared of invasives. Ellie answered that they have not replanted in the past as the native plants quickly fill in the open spaces.

Staff Reports:

Bob and Jamie had nothing to add to their written reports. Kit expressed his thanks to Jamie for his hard work.

Parks Commission Report:

JoAnn reported on the Parks Board meeting, sharing that the most up to date information is in the packet. The last Park Board meeting involved a discussion on the small courts area at Storvik and what the community would like to see. The other big announcement is that the new restrooms are open at Washington Park.

Other Business:

None

Adjourn at 6:52pm

Respectfully Submitted by Darby Jordan