

MINUTES
GIG HARBOR PARKS COMMISSION
Wednesday, December 1, 2021 – 5:30 p.m.
Virtual Meeting (via Zoom webinar)

CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

Parks Commission Members: Present – Chair Ben Coronado, Vice Chair Mary Barber, Roger Henderson, Will Appleton, Anastasia Wright. Absent – Louise Tieman (excused)

City Council Liaison: Spencer Abersold

Staff: Public Works Director Jeff Langhelm, Public Works Assistant Terri Garrison

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of November 3, 2021 Parks Commission Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Move to approve the November 3, 2021 Parks Commission Minutes, as amended to correct the spelling of Vicki Diamond's name.

Barber / Appleton - Motion passed unanimously

PRESENTATION: Conservation Property Acquisition – Mayor Kit Kuhn provided a presentation highlighting six parcels totaling 23.9 acres that the City is proposing to purchase as conservation property located between Burnham Drive and the Cushman Trail, to the north of the Wastewater Treatment Plant.

OLD BUSINESS

- 1. PROS Plan Update** – Vice Chair Barber provided an update of the PROS Plan Update. Chair Ben Coronado gave an overview of the virtual Open House results. Commissioner Henderson reviewed the draft Goals and Policies. Commission members may provide any additional comments to the Subcommittee by December 2. The next step is to review the draft plan at a Joint Work Study Session with City Council on December 9.

NEW BUSINESS

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Georgina Armstrong, 4340 Borgen Blvd, GH – Provided the following written comments regarding the PROS Plan Update survey results:

I'm really pleased that the City offered a public survey to guide it in future planning in the PROS Plan Update.

I thought the number of people who submitted answers to the August survey - 1,352 - was impressive. Even though the number was much lower for the November survey (203), it was still a very good number for a second survey, as such surveys aren't likely to achieve the same high participation rate as the first. Also, it replaced an in-person meeting at a much higher participation rate than would likely have been seen at a Parks Commission meeting at city hall. Additionally, it gave an opportunity for more detailed information on previously-asked questions.

On the August survey, I wanted to draw your attention to the reference in the introduction that informed respondents about "projects underway that will add new amenities to the park system" and the "addition of a new sports complex." While I understand the reasoning in bringing them up, the survey itself regularly used the words "current" and "existing" and, in the final sentence of the introduction, it said, "We ask that you consider needs for the future as you evaluate recreation amenities." You can't evaluate an amenity that currently doesn't exist. So, it will be important not to infer that respondents would have included projects in the pipeline as they answered questions about the current status of the park system, and what they want to see added that isn't already included in the list of parks that was in the August survey. If the City had wanted the public's opinion on those, they could have inserted such questions into the survey. The pickle ball supporters appear to have understood that point as is reflected in their comments in the addendum of the November survey, even though they have been assured of pickle ball courts being added in the first phase of the Sports Complex.

The next thing is that the summary of results of the August survey does not appear to be complete. Under "Survey Methodology" it states: "This report includes findings of community opinions based principally on mailed survey responses. Each section also notes differences between demographic groups and among responses to the online-only survey, where applicable." I now understand that the online surveys changed the interest and support percentages, and because there are groups that will be proposing adding amenities to existing parks, I would like to request that the full summary of results be posted on the City's website as well as the November survey results.

When I saw how much the dog park numbers had fallen in the Online Open House, I was wishing that the community garden had been included so that I could see if it, too, was unable to maintain its similar level of interest from the August survey. As you know, there's a great deal of work that goes into planning an amenity, and any information on the level of interest in the community can be indicative of whether it might end up being under-utilized as some of our parks currently are.

Since the consultant will be writing the PROS Plan Update, an area of concern that I have is when words in questions are changed in the narrative. Even if it's a subtle change, it can infer a slightly different context than was perceived by respondents in answering the original question.

An example of this would be from Question #4 of the Online Open House survey which asked respondents to put in order of priority how the city should "Develop existing city-owned park property" and the consultant's analysis of the results was that "Respondents indicated the top priority as building new parks on city-owned parklands." There is a small, but significant difference between "developing existing park property" and "building new parks on parklands," especially given that the results of the survey were strongly in favor

of not building new parks, but maintaining and adding new amenities to existing ones. So, whatever is suggested for the PROS Plan Update that comes from the survey results should be specific to the questions that were being asked.

One thought I had, as to why respondents put the acquisition of additional open space or natural areas and the acquisition of additional parkland as their lowest priorities in the August survey, was that it asked respondents to rank any such acquisition against maintaining existing, developed parks, trails and open space, installing new amenities in existing parks and expanding trail opportunities. As you know, respondents just want to work with what we already have, but I had another thought as to why the two questions asking about whether or not Gig Harbor should acquire more land to develop received the lowest priority. I, too, had ranked both at the lowest level, but my thinking for doing so was that I didn't want to risk any new acquisition being used to develop anything since there's been an incredible amount of construction and an even more concerning destruction of forest and wildlife habitats. This might also have been the case when the respondents were asked the two questions: if there was "enough land for today" and "enough land for the future." The former scored 13.3% and the latter a very low 5.0%, but the reasoning appears to have been verified in the various questions on the topic that were included in the November survey.

One example would be that there was strong support (76.4%) for adding "natural areas that allow trails, boardwalks and wildlife viewing." When adding "passive activities like picnicking" to that acquisition, the score dropped by almost 10 percentage points to 56.9%. I think it reflects that respondents just don't want to have anything constructed in natural areas, but prefer to leave the open space as unaltered as possible, with the exception of trails. It was also interesting to note that respondents are also not interested in preserving and restoring the land for "habitat and not people" which came in at 30.5%. This indicates the desire to use the land and incorporate it into the daily exercise activities of respondents. In that way, they view natural land as spaces for active use.

Again, the purpose for acquiring natural areas is affirmed with the question dealing with "adding natural areas for viewing wildlife and expanding trails" which received 53.1% as a first priority. Coming in at a very distant second was using such an acquisition for more traditional modes of active recreation, such as sports fields and playgrounds, which received 20.3% support. If you combine the first priority and second priority rankings for these two acquisitions, the former gets a score of 77.7% and the latter 37.3%. (It should also be noted at this point, that the August survey showed a total of 11% of respondents using sports fields a few times a week, with 17% using them a few times a month; in the November survey, when asked which parks they visit, a similar question resulted in 19% of respondents indicating that sports fields were the main reason their household visits Gig Harbor parks which ranked 13th out of a list of 18.)

Aside from the possibility that respondents are tired of construction, it is also possible that they no longer want to see the destruction of our forest, and they value land conservation and wildlife habitat protection over more construction of new parks which would entail the removal of more forest. In fact, wildlife habitats have suffered greatly with all the development that has taken place over the past ten years as Gig Harbor's population growth increased 59% which is a phenomenal figure.

Development in north Gig Harbor has brought with it increased impacts of noise pollution and heavy traffic. We can easily hear traffic on highway 16; in fact it's become my alarm

clock around 6 am. While expanding trails throughout Gig Harbor for better connectivity for walkers, joggers and bikers had a lot of support, it is the north area of Gig Harbor that feels the most unconnected. Finding a way to combine trails and sidewalks to link directly from Harbor Hill to the waterfront would be a boon for those living in that area and is reflected on both surveys. It was also discussed at a stakeholders' meeting I attended, as well as conversations I've had with residents in that area.

The results of the surveys show, quite convincingly, a demographic of residents who enjoy walking, jogging and biking within natural, open space areas. They want to be more connected to all parts of the city while leaving their vehicle at home and it would be great if the City could help them accomplish that goal.

I would request that, before the City takes down any more trees, even if there is a new park in the pipeline, that an environmental impact study be required that includes: noise and light pollution, traffic, parking, and anticipated impacts on natural resources, wildlife habitats, stormwater runoff, and Gig Harbor's storied aesthetic. Without fully understanding the extent of such impacts, we run the risk of losing the Gig Harbor everyone, including tourists, have come to love and admire.

Ann and Bob Alness, 4340 Borgen Blvd, GH – Provided written comments regarding the PROS Plan Update:

As a retired primary school educator I would love to see more opportunities for children, of all ages, to explore with sight, sound, touch and smell nature through trails, paths, displays and designated viewing stations for water and woods creatures.

As a resident of Herons Key I see activity at the musical stations and walking the pond and I envision the long view.

A community garden section would offer families a place to grow a garden with their children and most likely our senior citizens at Herons Key would join in with their knowledge and skill!

PARKS UPDATE REPORT – Public Works Director Langhelm provided general park update information and answered questions, noting a few recent developments not included in the published update.

- Parks Manager position – Matthew Keough has been hired as the City's Parks Manager and will be starting on December 27.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Arts Commission Report – Lynn Stevenson provided updates on the following Arts Commission projects: Harbor Arbor Art in Grandview Forest, Call for Artists for art in to go in the sidewalk at the Harborview/Stinson roundabout and plans for the 2022 Creative Endeavor Grants.

ADJOURN

MOTION: Move to adjourn at 7:22 p.m.

Coronado / Henderson - Motion passed unanimously