



BENTON COUNTY Park Board

MEETING MINUTES MAY 2024

Board Members Present

Dave McNeal, Chair
Robin Emmingham, Vice Chair
Karla Brown, Secretary
Michael LeCompte, Member
Kit McBurney, Member
Frank Cooper, Member
Ismael Mendoza-Jimenez, Member

Benton County Employees

Adam Fyall

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Roll Call

Chair, Dave McNeal called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM and the Pledge was recited.

Review & Approval of Agenda

The agenda for the May 14, 2024, meeting was approved by the Board.

Review & Approval of Minutes

The April 2024 minutes were reviewed and approved by the Board, with the correction that the Campout referred to by Carole Schuh was April 27-28 not May 11th. Adam will make that correction and finalize the minutes for the Board.

Chair's Report

Dave McNeal reported to the Board that it's going to be hard for us to do better than we did last month with the progress on the development of our operations and development priorities. He gave thanks to Adam for explaining the nature of our priorities in the resulting document. Mr. McNeal added that the Board might want to think about establishing committees to develop the plans that are in those priorities. The Board should add one or more of those priorities as an agenda item once a month and schedule some working sessions on some of the priorities, such revision of the ordinance to work with the County on so it's more effective and appropriate for us. We have created an excellent gateway to build Pride in Parks.

Committee/Subcommittee Reports

Mr. Cooper met with Mark, George, and Mike with the Tri-Cities Shooting Association to review the archery range. Mr. Cooper reported that there are no separate membership fees, it's very primitive and only a handful of people are using it. It's everything that we had hoped it had been. When speaking with Mark, the Tri-City Shooting Association and others should take advantage of free promoting and with Frank's connections to the radio stations he could help get those on air. If we could incorporate that with our Pride in Parks program, it wouldn't cost anything if we used it under the 501(c)3 that groups are associated with.

Mr. Mendoza-Jimenez shared that he spoke to the pastor of Hispanic Seventh-Day Adventist Church and they are interested and they are looking into getting their Pathfinders (which is equivalent to Boy Scouts) involved. He will call the pastor after tonight's meeting to see if they are interested.

Staff Reports

Adam shared Benton City's idea for a new disc golf course, which was inspired by Two Rivers. They also might put in a small paddlecraft boat launch at this location as well. They might want to use one of the County's economic development funds to assist with the project. Adam will talk to the mayor to see if they need any further assistance from us.

The Two Rivers boardwalk and the Hover Park parking lot are in the hands of Capital Projects office now.

Business

- Badger & Candy Mountain Dog Behavior Campaign

Bob Bass and Dale Lindsey with Friends of Badger Mountain (FOBMM) shared with the Board that there is an increasing incidence of people on the Badger and Candy trails with dogs off-leash and not picking-up their dogs' droppings. They had initiated a committee including Adam to look at signs to put up to prevent dogs off leash to mitigate the impact on the wildlife, to protect hikers if not on leash it's difficult to control the dog, there's rattlesnakes and other things harmful to pets. It's also a County ordinance in the parks. The first 200 yards of the trails are particularly bad for dog poop left behind. Some people pick up the poop, some pick up the poop and keep the bag in place, it doesn't degrade, and it will remain for a couple months. People will step in it, especially children. The proposal is to look at some signs and start a campaign to raise awareness of the issue and the reason why we want dogs on leashes. Looking at the three major trailheads to have signs that talk about the protected area to preserve wildlife, etc. As well as small campaign signs for a couple months to place around like "pick up after your dog", etc. Adam suggested we get the word out that these are County requirements to get the message across. They also have someone contacting local pet businesses to get ideas of how to handle the issues.

Adam added that they are going to refresh the signage already there and make a point that this applies to all the parks. They have had leash loaner stations before. Potential blowback may result.

Discussion ensued between park board members and Bob and Dale regarding ideas to control the issue.

- Water Stargrass at Horn Rapids Park

Benton Conservation District has been harvesting stargrass near the lower 30-40 miles of the Yakima River. It warms the river up so it's not good for salmon, etc. The Conservation District was able to get the "Star Grazer" waterborne harvester on the river. On the areas they have already hit, the grow back is slow, so it has been effective. The last couple of years they have worked upstream of Wanawish Dam, they offloaded harvested stargrass onto a trailer at the boat launch and the County has allowed them to dump at the south end of the Horn Rapids' Horse Camp. The stargrass is 90% water and it dries out. They are having to offload it twice, once on the trailer and once on the ground. In addition to using the boat launch they want to investigate other places to offload the stargrass off the river, they want to be able to pull the stargrass and dump it off on the bank instead of offloading it twice. They have asked the County if they could do this. Adam is fine with this and doesn't have a reason as to why we wouldn't allow them to do this. The two areas are not going to cause a problem with access.

Mickie Chamness with the Native Plant Society questioned how good that is for the vegetation along the shoreline or whether it causes a problem for the river. It might choke out other vegetation that is there. She doesn't know what the ramifications are with the vegetation and wildlife. Bill Mast has property along the shoreline in Benton City who has seen beavers eat it like it's a treat. It might be beneficial to ask him.

There have been some considerations at trying to do something with the stargrass, such as using it as a soil amendment or home garden use. They said it looks like it has some value.

Adam is fine with having Tom Sexton coming back out to discuss this issue again. It's time expensive and fuel expensive to haul this stuff from the boat to the truck to the dump spot. Adam will contact Tom to talk more before the Board makes a recommendation.

- Parks Comprehensive Plan

The core of the Plan was adopted last month but Adam doesn't have the final document ready. The plan is to have it done next week.

Public Comments/Poll of the Board/Adjournment

Public Comment:

Mark with the Tri-City Shooting Association extended thanks to Frank for the PSA idea to get the word out on radio stations. He is amazed to get calls from people that didn't even know TCSA existed.

Gary with the Purple Sage Riders questioned what the end game is at Wallula Gap. Adam replied that there is hope of a bigger vision in the future. The core properties belonging to the County are mostly cliffs with no connection right now.

Cindy Faith with the Purple Sage Riders suggested that FOBM do a reward for good behavior option. She thanked Adam for including a copy of last month's meeting minutes. She was interested in the Wallula Gap area as well.

Michael Seelinger with Mid-Columbia Airsoft Club reported that they had a cleanup game in April and hauled out a truck load at Hover. Their next business meeting is in June. He also added that he was raised in the Seven Day Adventist Church and was a part of the Pathfinders and that's a good organization to partner with.

Poll of the Board:

Robin Emmingham is really encouraged by what he heard from the FOBM and suggested to put up a sign with the map to the dog park. He added that, perhaps we could get a grad student at WSU to do a study and give guidance on the stargrass.

Ismael Mendoza-Jimenez read up on the state of Washington research and they talk about the river and stargrass and he will try to make a connection to see what they can give him and advise. He will see what he can come up with at the next meeting. He would love to hear from Tom and possibly be in the boat with him to see how the process works.

Michael LeCompte thinks the signage problem is a great idea for FOBM even if ignored. He could probably get a reporter on the boat when their stargrass harvest season starts.

Kit McBurney appreciates everyone's attendance and participation this evening and thanked Dale and Bob for coming and for their presentation.

Frank Cooper thanked Mark and is looking forward to getting the PSA with the TCSA. He also has a close family member with the Department of Ecology, and he will see if he can get her involved with the stargrass situation.

Dave McNeal led the team in a chant "Pride in Parks".

The public meeting adjourned at 7:51 PM so the Board could go into the executive session.

Executive Session:

The executive session began at 7:51 PM and ended at 8:19 PM when the public meeting re-commenced. A motion was made by Mr. Cooper to recommend to the Commissioners for Benton County to purchase the property off Ayers Road, the motion was approved by the Board.

There being no further comments or business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:21 PM.

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