

**PLANNING COMMISSION
 COMMISSIONERS HEARING ROOM, COUPEVILLE, WA
 TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 23, 2008**

	<i>Members Present</i>	<i>Members Absent</i>
<i>District 1</i>	<i>Val Hillers</i>	
	<i>Ray Gabelein</i>	
		<i>Mike Joselyn</i>
<i>District 2</i>		<i>Terry Reynolds</i>
		<i>Bill Massey</i>
	<i>Alan Schell</i>	
<i>District 3</i>		<i>Wayne Havens</i>
		<i>Deb Eidsness</i>
		<i>Scott Yonkman</i>

Chair Alan Schell called the meeting to order.

ROLL CALL

Ray Gabelein, Alan Schell, Val Hillers

ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC

None

DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Director, Jeff Tate advised the Planning Commission of several items:

- ✓ The Findings of Fact from September 9th deliberations would be sent this week by email to the Planning & Commission for review.
- ✓ A March 13, 2009 trial date has been set for the Agricultural Ordinance, to be heard in Thurston County Superior Court. (WEAN asked for the date to be pushed back until after the Ruckleshaus Center finishes its work and passes recommendations on to the State legislature in 2009 or 2010).
- ✓ This Thursday, September 25th at 10:00 a.m. there is a Growth Board Hearing in Department 3, Island County Superior Court on the Accident Potential Zones that were adopted by the Board of Commissioners. A decision should be out two to four weeks after the hearing.
- ✓ At the last Planning Commission meeting, the Planning Commission was briefed on the work program over on Camano Island for the Camano Gateway corridor study; looking at land use and land use regulations as they pertain to commercial development. The second meeting was held last week, the group narrowed the issues down to setbacks for commercial uses, height standards, signs and lighting, density allowed within mixed use development, intensity of commercial development and fire station standards. There are three more meetings scheduled and the results will then be forwarded to the Planning Commission.

Education: Home Owners Septic Training (HOST)

Mr. Tate explained that the State Board of Health had established requirements for local jurisdictions to set up programs where septic system inspection is a requirement. Septic systems will need to be inspected once each year or once every three years, depending upon the type of system. A homeowner can hire a professional to do that work or they can take advantage of the Home Owner Septic Training program, which is a program set up locally to allow people to be certified to inspect certain systems themselves and file inspection reports with the Health Department.

Mr. Tate introduced Jan Smith from the Resource Enhancement Program within the Planning Department.

Ms. Smith began by stating that in 2005 when the State Health Department passed rules and regulations requiring regular inspection and maintenance of residential septic systems, Island County Public Health Department also passed these regulations.

It was a big undertaking for the Health Department to not only conduct home owner septic training, but also to conduct training of license maintenance service providers, so they too can be certified and meet the Health Departments standards for proper inspections of residential septic systems.

The Planning Department was brought in on coordination of the community education for residential septic inspections. The Planning Department and the Health Department met with the direction of the County Commissioners to make this training easy for property owners and to be at a low cost.

The basic rules:

- If you have a conventional residential gravity flow or pressurized gravity system you may do your own inspection if you're certified under the County's HOST program.
- Those who have alternative systems cannot do their own inspections and will have to hire a professional to inspect their septic system each year. (The value of the HOST program for the homeowner with an alternative system is that they will have a good understanding of how to care for their system and what to expect of the inspectors they will have to hire.)
- Conventional systems will have to be inspected every three years.
- Alternative systems will have to be inspected on a regular annual basis.
- A certification is required to be filed with the County Health Department.
- In sensitive areas such as Holmes Harbor Shellfish District, there are stricter requirements:
 - Only gravity systems may be inspected by the homeowner
 - Those with a conventional pressurized system **or** with an alternative system such as a sand filter, mound system or another type of proprietary system must be inspected by a licensed maintenance service provider.

A multi-media presentation was determined to be the best way to provide the information in order for it to be easily understood by the broadest group of people. The program is presented using some hands on training, utilizing actual examples of what a riser looks like, there are lots of questions and answers, providing personal time with the students and then an actual field demonstration, where there is a working park septic system that can be looked at to see how an actual septic system works.

For Whidbey Island, Patmore Parks shop was determined to be the best location for both a class room and a demonstration workshop. It has a working septic system, which allows the students to open the riser and see an actual system working. On Camano Island, the facility at Four Springs House Lake Preserve is being used for a classroom, and they are also constructing a demonstration model, not an aspect of a real working septic system, but still something very practical.

Part of the multi-media presentation included the creation of a DVD that goes through the steps of inspection a septic system as well as providing information on how to properly maintain a septic system.

Creation of the DVD:

1. Engaged a group of students from a local community college who are skilled and learning about video production.
2. Enlisted the help of Chris Wilson, a registered sanitarian and the Assistant Director of Planning & Community Development, who was the guiding light behind this production and provided a non-scripted step by step demonstration.

Handout – HOST folders

Ms. Smith distributed a folder, which is the same packet of information supplied to homeowners, when they take the HOST, Home Owners Septic Training classes. The contents of the folder include:

1. A copy of the DVD
2. The current HOST training schedule
3. Your Home Sewage System, A Homeowners Manual and Maintenance Guide.
4. Training agenda
5. Island County HOST Study Guide
6. HOST Study Questions
7. Our Water Our Future
8. Pressure Distribution Septic System Operation & Maintenance
9. Caring For Your Conventional Residential Septic System, Gravity-Flow
10. Island County Health & Island County Planning joint pamphlet: On-Site Septic Glossary
11. Island County Health & Island County Planning joint pamphlet:
12. Information on creating your own sludge judge or scum sticks.
13. Septic Do's & Don'ts
14. Landscaping Your Drainfield
15. Island County Code, Chapter 8.07D – On-site Sewage (OSS) Systems

16. Health Department Form H; On-Site Sewage System Evaluation Form for Homeowners

A portion of the DVD was played for the Commission.

Ms. Smith then stated that to date, 783 people sign up for the class and the Department averages around 25 people a day, signing up for these classes. They have trained 100 people so far, 100 more are being trained at the class today.

Chair Schell stated that he felt there was some confusion for members of the public regarding these State mandated septic regulations. He asked if there were plans for further public education regarding State mandated inspections.

Mr. Tate replied that the Health Department was in charge of the overall outreach regarding what the rules are and the implementation of the rules, enforcement and monitoring.

Ms. Smith stated the local media have provided significant assistance, for instance there was a front page story called "Septic University" run in the Whidbey News Times approximately a month ago. People have saved that article and are following up. The Department of Health is also doing a mailing to all the island home owners to explain the requirements they now fall under.

Chair Schell asked if there were ways to follow up to determine if people are not having their septic fields inspected.

Mr. Tate replied that the Health Department has additional staff to implement this program that weren't there before the program started. They have developed a database that shows where all the systems are and ways of letting people know it is a requirement. They also have developed a way to follow up. The Planning Department's portion is the program to certify a home owner to perform their own inspections. The Health Department will be looking at the inspection reports received and tying that into the database and then determining what properties do not have an inspection report submitted and they are geared up to follow up on those results.

Commissioner Hillers asked about the timeframe for implementation.

Ms. Smith replied that for alternative systems it is effective July 1, 2009 and for conventional systems it is July 1, 2010.

Chair Schell asked what the general cost for professional inspection of the alternative systems was.

Ms. Smith replied that the cost runs \$100 to \$300 depending on the complexity of the system.

Chair Schell asked if there was any assistance available for low income households to help with this cost.

Ms. Smith replied there have been a lot of different discussions, such as off island relatives of elderly homeowners who would like to come up to assist the local homeowner and other discussions along these same lines. These issues are still under review. Should a low income person have a failed system there is a grant program and a low cost loan program to help assist these individuals.

Regarding education, a lot of people who have homes here have come from an area or grew up living on sewer systems and have no concept of what is involved with septic systems, the maintenance of the systems, how to protect the systems, what can go down the system and what can't. Education in this area is important. She stated she believed the County Commissioners were looking to determine what more can be done. She also stated that is why the training in Island County is available at no charge. Other counties are charging \$100 per resident, just for the privilege of being certified to do their own inspection.

Chair Schell asked if a person is certified can they inspect their neighbor's system.

Ms. Smith replied no. It is only the homeowner, each person that is certified is getting a unique identification number and that number stays with them, not with the property. In the case mentioned earlier of an elderly family member it has been recommended that if the person is able to come to the training and bring the family member along both can be certified, but the person that owns the home is the only one who can sign the form that has to go to the Health Department to show what has been done.

The current emphasis is on those homes that are in the sensitive areas, such as Holmes Harbor. Through cooperation with our Planning Department's Water Quality Monitoring Program, when there is an indication of a problem through surface water and tracking is done they will then work directly with the Health Department and the homeowner.

The HOST program is a broader program, thousands have septic systems and even though the Health Department has a new database and additional people to be doing follow up, it will be a long time before everyone can be ready, certified and monitored.

Chair Schell stated that a failed system, no matter where it is pollutes the environment and he feels education before it happens is essential and might save a failed system.

Commissioner Gabelein stated that the feeling among septic designers and installers is that maintenance and monitoring has been a missing piece. In the early days of septic installation (1950's) disposal was the focus. It has now evolved into doing treatment prior to disposal. The systems therefore have gotten more complex but it is still more economical than being on a sewer system and proper maintenance is more cost effective than having to install a new drain field.

Private industry has been in favor of this for quite a while, knowing that proper maintenance and monitoring was important. The older systems have long been an issue; homeowners have often stated they know their septic system is functioning well because they have never had to pump it. Unfortunately that is like saying your car is running well because you've never had to change the oil.

As a part of the outreach, the suggestion that homeowners associations or neighborhoods get together and approach private industry with the suggestion of arranging a group rate to help bring the cost down. Fuel and set up are both areas that add to the cost incurred by the industry and they may be open to an idea of working in one area for several days, working with a specific neighborhood.

Commissioner Hillers asked if there was a list of certified inspectors.

Ms. Smith stated the Health Department maintains a list.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Handout - initial draft of the Countywide Parks Plan.

Public Hearing: Countywide Parks Plan

Mr. Tate provided a couple of notes about the Parks and Recreational Element of the Comprehensive Plan. It is one Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. The last time it was updated was in 1998. Because the Plan is ten years old it precludes Parks from eligibility for different grant funding sources. The Planning Department assumed responsibility for Parks at the beginning of the year and updating the Parks Plan became a priority in order to become eligible for different sources of funding for parks projects and to provide more planning behind parks, rather than just maintenance.

The 1998 Plan is basically a summary of current inventory with a few policies and guidelines, but doesn't provide much of a strategy for where Parks heads in the future as these park properties are managed.

Mr. Tate stated the draft Plan is a September '08 Parks & Recreation Element and is a broad policy document, it applies universally to Whidbey and Camano Island.

Page 5 establishes a vision statement. The vision statement is a new vision statement that was not in the 1998 version. The Planning Department brought to the Board of Island County Commissioners a draft vision statement because it was important to have the Board help provide direction and it helped round out the work plan as the Department approached the update. Although the Board helped craft the vision statement it is still on the table for discussion.

The second portion of the Plan Mr. Tate brought to the audience's attention began on page 9, a table that includes an inventory of lands owned and managed by public

agencies. There are fourteen different public agencies in Island County that own, operate and manage Park and Recreation property. The Federal government has holdings and management responsibility, State Parks has nine holdings in the County, other agencies include Fish and Wildlife, DNR, two cities and a town. There are two Port Districts, two Parks & Recreation Districts, there are two schools listed, two more need to be added (data is still being collected). For a small jurisdiction like Island County, that is a large number of managers of open space and park land.

The Interagency for Outdoor Recreation established what goals and standards a community should strive for in park lands. This is translated into something called a Level of Service; it is essentially how many acres per thousand people. When the Planning Department started thinking about Parks planning, the appropriate Level of Service that should be provided to the public was considered.

The Interagency for Outdoor Recreations recommends 3 ½ acres of county park per thousand residents. The preliminary calculation countywide of 7,000 acres and approximately 80,000 people translates into 88 acres per 1,000 people. If you break it down into the County owned and managed properties it is about 22 to 23 acres per 1,000 people, which far exceeds the recommendation. Island County is very lucky to have a lot of acreage to work with. A lot of that is due to the Department of Natural Resources properties being transferred into County ownership as they have divested themselves from this county for forestry purposes. If you look back at the 1998 plan, Island County was below that 3 ½ acre Level of Service.

On pages 11 - 15 it begins breaking down the different type of service within the County Park System. Table 2 on page 11 describes the different types of services; it looks at what the different types of features are found on park property, ranging from active to passive. It looks at how much exists throughout the County and who is managing what. The services include ball fields, play grounds, waterfront access, boat launches, camping, community halls, trails and picnics areas.

The next four pages attempt to break that down further into regional areas. It may be an appropriate management tool to look at these different regions and perhaps in addition to establishing Level of Service in the sense of how many acres per thousand people also possibly look at how far someone needs to go to get to these resources.

That pushes the Department into the implementation strategies, one of the things that need to be done as part of this planning effort is found under item #2.

2. CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR COUNTY PARKS

Evaluating demographics and population and Level of Service within these different regions to determine what the needs are and then prioritize those needs. Ascertain through community outreach and through research that some of the state agency have done to determine what are the services, where should they go and where Park resources should be directed in the future.

Currently Parks operates primarily on a maintenance and operations protocol; mowing lawns, fertilizing, weeding, raking ball fields, emptying trash and maintaining. There is not a lot of park specific planning being done, which is implementation strategy #1

1. DEVELOP PARK SPECIFIC PLANS

Mr. Tate explained that without park specific plans it is hard to develop a fiscal strategy or package without a plan. One of his goals is to look at individual properties to identify the needs. He would like to be able to answer the publics' inquiries regarding a need for a specific park with an estimated date for that improvement based on a list of priorities that will come out of the needs assessment.

There are a number of implementation strategies and he stated he hoped to get good feedback on, such as item # 3.

3. EXPAND FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Develop a Donation and Fund Raising Strategy. Looking at ways of expanding the financial resources and identify community efforts for donation to the parks system other than taxation.

4. ESTABLISH LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

Determine which services should have a Level of Service standard. Currently there is a Level of Service that deals with acres per thousand people, but there other services and levels that should be provided.

5. MAXIMIZE VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE

There is a very good volunteer workforce now, the Department wants to maximize that and continue to take advantage of those volunteer groups and work closer with those groups in a common direction, discussing what the best outcome for each property is.

6. DEVELOP A PLANT SALVAGE PROGRAM

One arm of the Department is the group that is responsible for issuing permits that allow for Clearing & Grading activity. There are going to be opportunities to recognize where those projects are and draw on a core group to collect plants from these areas to be cleared and perhaps enhance some park properties with those plants.

7. INCORPORATE LID TECHNIQUES INTO PARK PLANNING

Using the park properties as examples of Low Impact Development techniques the Planning Department is advocating.

8. UTILIZE PARK PROPERTIES TO SUPPORT SALMON RECOVERY OBJECTIVES

Areas in the County could benefit not only from the environmental benefit of salmon recovery, but also by providing a leverage of funds from salmon recovery by identifying and implementing projects on parks properties adjacent to salmon habitat.

9. DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE DOMESTIC PET MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

10. DEVELOP A INTEGRATED AND CONSISTENT STANDARD FOR PARK SIGNAGE

11. INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY OF PARK PROPERTIES

12. INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF PARK PROPERTIES

13. INCORPORATE PARK PLANNING WITH NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION GOALS AND STRATEGIES

There are a lot of properties that could serve as a link between different non-motorized infrastructure improvements or trails and bike paths.

14. RECLASSIFY THE ZONING OF ALL PARKS PROPERTIES TO PARK ZONE

Properties that are in the Park system that are zoned improperly should be re-classified; these need to have the zoning and the use aligned correctly.

15. ARRANGE AN ANNUAL MEETING OF ALL AGENCIES THAT PROVIDE PARK SERVICE AND AMENITIES

There has never been a meeting between all fourteen agencies. An annual meeting would benefit all, having collaboration at a broader level would be a good idea.

16. SEEK PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES WITH OTHER PARK AGENCIES

Seeking partnership opportunities with other agencies would also be beneficial. Sharing resources and leveraging financial resources against each other and hopefully achieve some efficiencies.

In Appendix A, since the last discussion data has been collected to fill in some of the blanks and the different properties described. These are continuing to be completed.

Commissioner Hillers asked if the listing of properties beginning on the bottom of page 25 were all County Parks.

Mr. Tate stated everything that starts at the bottom of page 25 where it says Island County and continues on page 26 is a County Park.

Commissioner Hillers then asked if there were other properties owned by the County but not listed.

Mr. Tate replied that he thought all of the County properties were now listed, but that they may be taking in some more of the DNR property. This list will continue to expand.

Commissioner Hillers wanted to point out again that if the County owns that Kettles area, that area is used by many people for recreation and its' omission should be noted.

Mr. Tate stated the reason it is not in there is that there are properties managed by Public Works and are not County Parks, such as Deer Lagoon, Swan Lake and Kettles. They still offer recreation opportunity and open space.

Commissioner Hillers stated they should be included, possibly in a separate listing.

Chair Schell stated it was his understanding that by law it cannot switch from Public Works to County Parks; at least in the case of Kettle Park.

Mr. Tate stated that the designation of a park requires an action by the Board of Commissioners.

Chair Schell stated it was his understanding that the Kettles area was bought with Public Works money and therefore it could not go to the County Parks.

Mr. Tate stated it depended on the restrictions that went with the purchase. There are restrictions within the different acquisitions, stating he had not looked into the particulars with Kettles, so it may be true.

Chair Schell stated it should be listed in the same manner that SPU is listed, it also can't be counted as a public park, but people use it.

Mr. Tate stated it was totally appropriate, it is a Parks & Recreation Plan, the Plan itself isn't designating all these properties as parks; the Plan recognizes the recreation value. Some of these properties fall under their own specific plan under Public Works' Non-Motorized Plan. It absolutely deserves a location to describe its recreation value.

Commissioner Gabelein stated under Community Halls, there are listings for Federal, State and County, but there are also some that are owned by members of the community such as Bayview, Clinton Progressive and one at Saratoga that are available for public use. Should there be an additional category for these in order to keep these in mind and better coordinate when considering the overall Plan.

Mr. Tate stated he thought it would be a good idea.

Chair Schell asked about property owners that have provided public access or walkways to various lakes for tax benefit.

Mr. Tate stated there are properties where there is a trail easement that connects properties. South Whidbey is a good example with Saratoga Woods and Putney Woods. Those two areas are connected by an easement connecting two very significant trails. Public Works has a greater wealth of knowledge regarding these areas and the Planning Department has been talking with Public Works regarding the Non-Motorized Trails work they are doing to see what areas might be mutually beneficial.

There are also properties that are within the County's Public Benefit Rating System, which is the tax program. A number of those properties are required to provide public access for recreation, beach access, walking, and access to private trails. On the last few pages of the draft Plan there is a beginning of a listing of non profit organizations and private owners that play a role here. Whidbey Camano Land Trust has holdings, the Nature Conservancy, Seattle Pacific University, but then you get down to properties that are within subdivisions that have dedicated open space and then properties enrolled in the Public Benefit Rating Systems. He further stated he was hesitant to list everything, but summarizing would have a place in the Plan.

Chair Schell stated he thought it should. There is nothing listed at Silver Lake, but there is public access to Silver Lake by a property owner that is enrolled in the Public Benefit Rating System. If the public is unaware there is a beautiful pathway down to Silver Lake then what good is there in giving out that tax break.

Mr. Tate replied that maybe that was something that should be more specifically enumerated in # 12, the implementation strategy that deals with increasing public awareness of park properties. Perhaps public access should be added.

Commissioner Gabelein asked if the county roads that access salt water should also be included in regards to public access. Parking can be a problem at those, but people can choose to bike or walk to these areas and many of these are also unknown to the public.

Mr. Tate then provided procedural information on the Public Hearing. The Parks Plan was transmitted to the Planning Commission on September 9th, there is a hearing today and another scheduled for Camano Island on October 14th. There is a deliberation date set for October 28th. This particular element is not operating under a GMA mandated or annual review docket schedule, so the dates are somewhat flexible. He stated they were eager to get something moving so the Parks Department will become eligible for grant funding.

Chair Schell stated that if deliberations were going to occur on the 28th a cutoff date for public comment would be needed prior to that date.

The date of October 21, 2008 was selected as the cutoff date for public comment.

Elvera Pitsch, 2527 West Beach Rd.

Ms. Pitsch stated she was shocked to discover earlier in today's meeting that Swan Lake was not considered a County Park, stating if it isn't, then why was it purchased. At the time Swan Lake was purchased it was supposed to be a wildlife refuge and viewing area with walkways and possibly a viewing shelter.

It is an important coastal estuary accessible to migrating birds and maybe juvenile salmon. The trail or the shelter that was discussed when it was first purchased are not out of reach monetarily. The lake is a very valuable asset to the community and critical to migrating birds and should be preserved and protected for future generations. She further stated it should go back on the list as a County Park.

Al Williams, 1875 Fort Nugent Rd.

He began by saying he would like to echo much of what the previous speaker said. He expressed a concern about the Swan Lake area and thought it strange it has not been part of the Parks system.

He said he would like to also comment on Commissioner Schell's statement that a lot of availability of parks is unknown to the public; he too thinks that should be improved.

There are a lot of things going on in the Swan Lake area with regard to the Swan Lake project that seems to be undercover or surreptitious and somewhat suspicious, for instance it is his understanding it was purchased with Conservation Funds, but it is being engineered so it can be used for other purposes.

Swan Lake was a freshwater, combination saltwater estuary and then the Sunset Beach area was built with materials hauled in and isolated it from the ocean. Then there was a tide gate for it so that the ocean water could not come in. This was neglected and left open for many years, so it became an estuary that salmon fry were able to grow in and go into the ocean. He stated this was an important thing.

On page 19 of the draft Plan it indicates an important item is to utilize park properties to support salmon recovery objectives. Many living around there are concerned about what is going on with the Swan Lake area and feel one of the most important things that could be done is to open that up as it originally was as an estuary for salmon fry.

The salmon industry and situation is getting quite severe, this year there was such a dearth of salmon return that both Oregon and California both banned salmon fishing. Anything that can be done to improve that situation would be good; opening up Swan Lake as it originally was a combination saltwater, freshwater estuary would be very important and valuable. He urged the Planning Commission to consider this.

GayLynn Beighton, 2507 West Beach Rd., Oak Harbor;
A member of the Swan Lake Watershed Preservation Group.

Ms. Beighton began by congratulating everyone at Island County for the work done on the septic issue, stating it was very well done. As a part time resident of West Beach with another home in a different community, served by a sewer system, she pays monthly for the privilege of flushing without the need for further worry. It is important for those used to sewer systems to understand how the ecosystem can be impacted very severely.

Regarding the 2008 Parks Plan update, the Swan Lake Watershed Preservation Group is a group of people who seek to preserve a unique critical ecosystem and quality island lifestyle for future generations, stating her comments relate specifically to this area.

The community values the rural character with its open vistas and abundant, healthy wildlife corridors. Parks and normally functioning ecosystems will become rare and precious as the county population grows. She further stated that it was wrong not to have the Swan Lake habitat and wetland complex provided special protection in the 2008 Parks Plan update.

Ms. Beighton provided a brief history of Swan Lake.

- Purchased by Island County in 1999 with citizen tax dollars from Conservation Futures funds.
- The purchase was discussed at the 12/14/98 Board of County Commissioners meeting by Larry Kwarsick, Island County staff, where Swan Lake was referred to as "...one of the most important habitats and wetland complexes on North Whidbey Island."
- Commissioner Shelton during the same meeting expressed a commitment to preserving wetlands and wildlife habitat and viewed the purchase as a valued County asset.
- Subsequent to the purchase it was designated a Habitat of Local Importance.

The Swan Lake Watershed Preservation Group advocates for restoration, enhancement and protection of this marine fish and wildlife habitat conservation area, including wetlands and uplands of Swantown Creek. One of the purposes of this update was to qualify for grants for exactly these kinds of projects.

She supported both previous speakers' comments, the salmon need help. Her group advocates the restoration and enhancement of this area, they seek to foster biodiversity, conserve natural resources and advance a safe, healthy aquatic and territorial environment for the Swan Lake Watershed as it relates to the greater Puget Sound. They believe Swan Lake should be reserved a very special place in the Parks Plan for passive management and preservation.

When Swan Lake was designated a Habitat of Local Importance by the Island County Commissioners, the then Assistant Director Jeff Tate stated, "...the ordinance highlights those areas, indicates they are special and should be treated as such and notifies people of the existence of the areas and the sensitivity of these areas and where they are located".

Ms. Beighton further noted that the designation of Swan Lake as a Habitat of Local Importance was a GMA action. *A copy of her comments and the minutes referenced were submitted for the Record.*

Ms. Beighton then submitted a citizen petition in support of their efforts. They aim to hold County Officials accountable to meet Washington State mandates for growth management and the restoration of Puget Sound.

Angie Homola, 2362 Happy Lane, Oak Harbor.

Ms. Homola began by stating she felt it was a fantastic program for the septic system and that it was very important in order to do park restoration and take care of the land.

- In regards to the Parks Plan she wanted to make sure to get public feedback and suggested sending out a survey, getting the publics' top ten priorities. She then stated she felt the October 21st deadline for public comment was premature.

Commissioner Hillers asked for clarification regarding whether Ms. Homola intended a public survey to address implementation strategies or a public survey related to this document.

Ms. Homola stated it related to what the public feels is important regarding how we are going to describe our parks, what the vision is and what the goals are and how all these different open lands are going to be put under the umbrella of Parks.

- Regarding Park zoning, there are so many uses for all of these different open spaces it concerned her to call them Park zoning. She felt public input on this would also be good, stating there seemed to be a problem getting good public feedback.
- She felt the big picture needed to be looked at before looking at the parks and what is wanted. All of the Critical Area Ordinances need to be finalized. She stated we have taken a look at our wetlands but we haven't really taken a very good look at how to protect slopes and forested areas, which are all tied together in how we protect all of this.

There is an option for wetland mitigation and wetland banking, but there isn't a banking program, there isn't anything established as to how to have connectivity in a watershed that would culminate in a wetland that might become one of these public parks.

- Growth is a big concern, as the population grows looking at how to accommodate them with parks; park impact fees for development needs to be considered. Growth is a big impact and needs to be planned for. About a year ago we were all here looking at the Comprehensive Plan amendments for 2005, it was the same idea, planning ahead and where do we go. One of the things that came up during that study is whether there were enough emergency services and whether there is enough water for this growth. None of these questions were answered.

In the Findings of Fact there were some answers provided to move on to the next step. One item addressed in regard to the City of Oak Harbor expanding into county land, was stating there was sufficient water available by using the Navy tank; that expansion has been halted. However, the city taxpayers of Oak Harbor are faced with a seven percent increase in their taxes to pay for a water tank that needs to go in on Fort Nugent that will cost over two million dollars. They are going to wait until next year because they need to raise seven percent for stormwater runoff. That is not for the growth, it is for what is there right now. If the big picture is not looked at it is not good planning.

- Regarding the Swan Lake area, it is called a Habitat of Local Importance. There are more than one of those and she doesn't see a really good definition of what they mean. What do we want out of the Habitat of Local Importance? GayLynn read the purchase of the land and what it was intended for, but last summer there was a man hunting right next to the road, parallel to the road. He shot a duck within thirty feet of the road, is that an acceptable practice on this Habitat of Local Importance?

There was also a windsurfer out there on numerous occasions during an early breeding time for the waterfowl that were migrating there. It looked like a lot of fun, but is it appropriate there.

- Regarding a catch all zoning label. There are areas where we don't necessarily want people. When meeting with the Land Trust to consider ways to purchase some of the land one of the things they expressed as a concern is that when land is turned into a park, in some cases it doesn't do a service to the wildlife there. There are areas that need to be left pristine and untouched by humans. Viewing platforms may be more desirable than cutting it up with trails.
- When the City comes to the County and asks for land to cut the island in half from east to west with city that culminates in a wetland, it is a bad idea. We need to be thinking really big picture, this could damage some of our parks systems.
- For the beach access; it is fantastic to think about getting down to our coastal areas, to our shoreline. This may need to get to the State level, but there are other states like Hawaii and California, where you don't own the beach, the public does. It is frustrating for people not to be able to get down to the water or not be able to go right or left because they are going to step on someone's private property.
- The grant money; a concern with grant money is that they comes with strings and caveats attached. She said she felt we should be careful in putting a label on all of our open space to get grants if they are going to have such heavy strings attached.
- Medicine; a year ago fifteen premature baby seals were found on the beach. The Beach Watchers and the Navy assistant were concerned that they are finding hormones and this may be why they are finding premature births. This has a lot to

do with the medications that are being put into our water. She stated she went to the County to find a place to take outdated medicine and there wasn't any. The pharmacy did not have one either, but suggested putting it in a bag with cat litter and take it to the dump. She stated she thinks she we can do better, adding small scale batteries should also have a place to be disposed of. There is a place for car batteries, but not small batteries.

- Regarding the Navy land; she said this may fit in the category of maybe people don't need to go everywhere. Lake Hancock has explosives there so people haven't been able to get there and as a result there is an amazing ecosystem that is basically untouched by people and thinks we need to be aware of that.
- Mountain biking and bicycling, she stated she didn't see an emphasis put on these. Fort Ebey used to be accessible to bikes; they were created, developed and maintained by mountain bike riders and have now been cut out of a lot of it. She would like to see some bicycle connectivity incorporated into our parks to help get away from vehicle use.
- Swan Lake, going back to the Comprehensive Plan. When they looked at the City of Oak Harbor expanding into agricultural, rural and forested lands, we ended up costing the taxpayers at the County level and the City level a lot of money while they took a close look at all those documents. This group of people, especially GayLynn Beighton did an amazing job of looking at the City of Oak Harbor's capacity analysis. She would like to make sure the big picture is looked at and they don't cost people a lot of money by making a mistake.

Paul Gillon, 2355 West Beach Rd., Oak Harbor.

He stated his concern was Swan Lake and the proper stewardship of that. The County over 18 years ago was given this property, part was purchased and part was donated under the agreement. The County was responsible for developing it. To him it seems to have been somewhat of a disaster.

He stated he has personally measured the salinity of the lake and it has been passed along to the bay watchers and in turn submitted to the State Ecology. The problem with the lake is that the water comes from fresh water sources and the tide. The tide gates were broken for a number of years and consequently there has been a high degree of salt water. He stated that last summer he measured and it was thirty-two parts salt water per thousand in the middle of the lake, which was the same as the Puget Sound at that same time.

Since it has been repaired, it is down to twelve parts per thousand. It is now close to fresh water. He stated his thoughts were that the ecology was being killed, and the size of the lake has been substantially diminished. He stated he felt the tide gates could not be properly repaired. They will break open again and the reason is that the tide boxes are not designed correctly. The tide boxes have no sill underneath the flapper valve; there is no capability of sediment settling out properly. It will settle and jam the flapper valves open.

He further stated that only two of the flapper valves were repaired when Public Works performed maintenance. One was left open and broken, it is a redundant valve, but this valve is in a jammed open position so it should either be taken out or repaired. It will probably jam again and salt water will come back in, which he thought would probably be good. He stated that you couldn't keep the salt water out of the lake.

The volume of the lake has been reduced by about half and the depth. He stated that Mr. Tate had told him the County doesn't track the salinity of the lake.

Mr. Gillon said this is a property that can be developed into a park, but the gate to the area is locked, keeping cars out. Then tide gates are repaired that were never installed properly in the first place. They should be left open and he doesn't see why it isn't left as salt water and just remove the flapper valves, letting it be a natural situation until it is determined exactly what is going to be done with that piece of property.

Mr. Gillon provided a copy of a letter he had sent to Mattia Boscolo.

Chair Schell thanked Mr. Gillon for his comments, stating the discussion at hand is regarding the draft Countywide Parks Plan. The details of Swan Lake are important, but those are issues to be addressed at a later point in time and it is a property managed by Public Works, rather than Parks.

Steve Erickson, Whidbey Environmental Action Network, P.O. Box 53, Langley. He stated he was looking forward to a version with all the numbers updated. The County needs more designations for its lands than just parks and non parks; especially if you are defining parks in terms of recreational value and opportunity. Different places are going to differ greatly in their ecological sensitivity. There are some county owned lands that can withstand a fair amount of intensive recreation. There are some that are very sensitive and really should not have any recreation on them at all.

They do not all neatly fall under the Parks designation. There needs to be a more holistic management, rather than just land that is managed by Public Works and land that is managed by Parks. Some lands Public Works manages would probably be more appropriately managed under Parks, some that are not and some lands that need a different designation because of their sensitivity, but need to remain in public ownership.

Commissioner Hillers asked if he has a suggestion as to what that designation might be.

Mr. Erickson replied there had been various studies in different location done at different times that have looked at how much conservation protection there is for different designations in an area. Different agencies and entities manage lands for different purposes. The Nature Conservancy is going to be managing land for a different purpose than a Parks agency. Whidbey Camano Land Trust has a mix of properties, but they are very explicit in that mix about the different properties and what they are to be used for.

He stated the real challenge long term was managing recreation so that it doesn't degrade environmental functions and values. This is a problem everywhere for every agency because recreational demand is always increasing. Determining where it is appropriate to have mountain bikes and how they will be managed to avoid erosion as an example is best addressed at the start, rather than waiting until there is a problem. This type of systemic approach should be incorporated into the Plan at the outset so that uses are managed so they won't be a problem later.

Chair Schell stated the public comment such as Parks designation would be discussed again further during deliberations.

Mr. Tate stated there were many comments that need to be explored. The current schedule includes a public hearing on Camano Island; the public comment deadline of October 21st, which may possibly be just a first round. It is good to have a milestone established to stop, collect, think and then incorporate; emerging with another draft version to consider.

Chair Schell stated that a lot of what was addressed today are things that need to be done when drafting the specific Parks Plans. This draft Plan is needed to start the process of thinking ahead, getting the big plan, making sure trails are not placed in sensitive areas. He further stated that by deliberation time he would like to address the Kettles, Swan Lake and other Public Works properties that people consider parks or want protected and determine what kind of coordination may need to be done with the draft.

Mr. Tate stated when talking about properties like Swan Lake, it is not because they do not have parks or recreation value, but there are different purposes, labels and management strategies for different properties. Places like Deer Lagoon, Swan Lake or the Kettles, which are more intact open spaces than a park with a ball field for instance all need to be looked at specifically with that property in mind.

He stated that as he considers the comments, the Countywide Parks Plan implementation strategies are areas he will look at and developing the Site Specific Parks Plan is key. A comment of Mr. Erickson's that resonated with him was the fact that recreation can't overwhelm conservation. That is why you need individualized plans for each of them. This Parks Plan won't do it all; there will be strategies and actions that follow. This Plan tells us what the priorities are and what should be done from here on out and must be done in steps.

Commissioner Gabelein stated that he agreed. This is just the beginning. Just having Parks zoning doesn't mean that property will be cut up with trails or parking lots, each property will need to be looked at individually to finalize what happens on each property. He felt it was important to have the Planning Department as the leader on this to be able to have the critical or sensitive areas considered as these plans are developed.

Mr. Tate stated that what often happens is the County will acquire a piece of property, then local groups get excited about improving that property, putting in trails and having

parking areas. Properties have been acquired without having a plan in place and then end up with properties where improvements have been made that preclude or make difficult achieving other goals. For example, on Camano Island there is a piece of property that has had a lot of trails installed and built by volunteers without any County coordination. It has made it challenging to move forward with a salmon recovery project there because it would eliminate those trails. Everyone has a noble objective, but they need to be on the same path.

Chair Schell stated that what may need to be addressed for part of the draft is the concept of designating wilderness or something that people don't walk on. Maybe you would view it, but not walk on it.

Commissioner Hillers moved to adjourn, Commissioner Gabelein seconded, the motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 11:24 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula Bradshaw
Administrative Assistant