



PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

Monday, July 14, 2025 at 4:00 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Chair Dana Lathrope
Vice Chair Howard Blumenthal
Commissioner Paul Barlow
Commissioner Jerry Belcher
Commissioner Nick Flory
Commissioner Lucas Green
Commissioner Scott Jacobson
Commissioner Lynne Pettit
Commissioner Jacob Woodruff

STAFF PRESENT

Commissioner Brandon Sundeen
Dawn Richardson, Admin Billing Specialist
Jamie Ford, Admin Billing Specialist

OTHERS

Sophie Verdoorn
Gilli Williford
Ashley Stanley
Sean Williams
Bailey Feakin

CALL TO ORDER – 4:00 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approval of Minutes from 06/09/2025

Chair Lathrope asked if everyone had a chance to review the minutes from the last meeting. Belcher confirmed he had reviewed them. Chair Lathrope then asked for a **motion** to approve the minutes.

Motion to approve the minutes of May 12, 2025 was made by Belcher and seconded by Pettit.

Vote: Yea: Chair Lathrope, Vice Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Barlow, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Flory, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Pettit, Commissioner Woodruff

TOPICS FROM THE FLOOR: From attendees not otherwise of the agenda

Chair Lathrope asked if there were any visitors who would like to speak. It was clarified that some attendees were on the schedule to present later in the meeting, including representatives for the Wind Phone project and the Botanical Gardens group.

NEW BUSINESS

2. Round Table Topic: Parks-Related Questions (Lathrope)

Chair Lathrope introduced a roundtable discussion question, asking Commission members to share their favorite memory from one of the City Parks. She emphasized the importance of this exercise in reminding everyone why they are serving on the Commission and the impact parks have on the community.

Chair Lathrope shared her own memory of playing at McCormick Park when she was 11 years old, catching crawdads and throwing rocks into the creek. She expressed joy in seeing children today playing in the same water she did growing up.

Belcher shared two memories: one of walking his dog in the botanical gardens years ago, and another of attending an Easter egg hunt at Godfrey Park with his children when they were young.

Jacobson mentioned visiting 13 Nights events shortly after moving to the area.

Green recalled biking down to Campbell Park when he was younger to play on the playset and seesaws.

Woodruff, who didn't grow up in the area, shared memories of coaching softball in various parks and playing softball himself. He remembered when the park got lights installed.

Vice Chair Blumenthal spoke about discovering wildflowers at Nob Hill Nature Park and recently showing the park to Caroline's grandson.

Flory, who has lived in St. Helens for five years, shared a memory of taking his puppy to play in the creek at the McCormick Park off-leash dog park.

Barlow, having lived in the area all his life, recalled spending time in Campbell Park as a child, which was his neighborhood park growing up.

Councilor Sundeen shared a memory from his childhood of planting a tree in McCormick Park during a day camp. He noted that the tree was recently removed during playground updates, describing the experience as bittersweet.

Chair Lathrope concluded the discussion by emphasizing how these memories demonstrate the importance of parks in creating connections and joy within the community. She stressed that these experiences are not unique to Commissioners but are shared by all park visitors, underlining the significance of their work in serving the community through park management.

3. BMX Track - McCormick Park (Barlow)

Barlow provided an update on the BMX track at McCormick Park. He explained that he would be staying on to help with the track but would no longer be the primary person in charge after 20 years of involvement. A new group of volunteers would be taking over, with Barlow remaining to assist indefinitely.

Barlow discussed potential improvements for the track, including paving the starting hill and possibly the corners. He explained that this is becoming common practice in many BMX facilities and would make the track more sustainable and easier to maintain. He noted that they have funding for paving the starting hill but would need volunteer help for the work.

The Commission members discussed the potential benefits of paving, including reduced maintenance and increased safety. Blumenthal asked about the impact on falls, to which Barlow responded that both dirt and pavement can be equally hard in the summer.

Barlow mentioned that he wanted to inform the Commission about these plans and would be having conversations with City Officials to get approval for the improvements. He assured the Commission that they have the necessary funding for materials but would need manpower to complete the work.

Chair Lathrope and other Commission members expressed support for the project and offered to help if needed. They encouraged Barlow to keep them informed of any further developments or needs regarding the BMX track improvements.

4. Wind Phone (Bailey Feakin)

Bailey Feakin presented a proposal for installing a "wind phone" in St. Helens. She explained that a wind phone is a disconnected rotary phone placed in a public space as a symbolic tool for processing grief and loss. Bailey, a mental health therapist specializing in art therapy and grief counseling, shared her passion for bringing this resource to the community.

Bailey provided background on the origin of wind phones in Japan and their growing popularity worldwide. She presented statistics on the number of wind phones globally and in Oregon, emphasizing that there are currently none in Columbia County.

The proposed benefits of a wind phone for the community included:

- Offering a unique and comforting outlet for expressing loss and grief
- Providing a therapeutic space for reflection and healing
- Serving as an affordable and private resource for those who may not have access to grief support services
- Potentially connecting people with other community resources

Bailey requested support and collaboration from the Commission to install a wind phone in a public location, preferably in St. Helens. She mentioned she had already collaborated with various community members and was considering potential locations, including Heritage Park in Scappoose.

Commission members expressed support for the idea, with Green suggesting McCormick Park as a potential location. Concerns about vandalism were raised, and Chair Lathrope advised considering a location with enough visibility to deter vandalism while still providing privacy.

The Commission suggested that Bailey return with more specific plans, including:

- Proposed locations
- Design concepts
- Cost estimates for installation and maintenance
- A plan for who would be responsible for ongoing maintenance

They also recommended reaching out to Tupper, the head of Parks Maintenance, for insight on suitable locations and installation considerations.

Bailey was encouraged to return to the next meeting with more detailed plans, and the Commission expressed enthusiasm for supporting the project moving forward.

5. Friends of Botanical Gardens Group (Ashley Stanley)

Ashley Stanley introduced herself and expressed interest in starting a Friends of the Botanical Gardens group. She explained that she was at the beginning of the process and had filled out an online form but hadn't received much guidance beyond that.

Commission members discussed the process for establishing a Friends group, noting that there seemed to be some confusion about the current procedure. They agreed to look into updating the information on the city website and clarifying the steps needed to form a Friends group.

Ashley shared her reasons for choosing the Botanical Gardens, including:

- Living close to the park and seeing its potential
- Desire to remove invasive weeds and plant more native species
- Improve biodiversity and attract more wildlife
- Enhance accessibility in the park

Commission members expressed support for Ashley's initiative and offered to help with future work parties. They advised Ashley to create a Facebook page for the group and to work closely with city staff to ensure proper procedures are followed.

Chair Lathrope agreed to reach out to city staff to clarify the process for establishing Friends groups and to ensure Ashley receives the necessary guidance to move forward with her plans.

6. Urban Trail Signage (Lathrope)

Chair Lathrope presented a design for a stencil to be used in marking the urban trail. The design featured a stylized representation of the river and would be approximately 6 to 8 inches in size. The stencil would be used to paint directional markers along the trail, with the tip of the design pointing in the direction of the trail.

Commission members reviewed the design and discussed its potential implementation. They agreed that the design was suitable and could be sized up as needed. Chair Lathrope mentioned that she could provide the design in any required format for production.

The Commission approved the design and agreed to forward it to the appropriate city staff for implementation.

7. Scappoose Bay Watershed

Representatives from the Scappoose Bay Watershed Council, including Sophie Verdoorn, Rachell Meyers and Gilli Williford presented an update on their activities related to St. Helens parks. Their accomplishments included:

- Conducting a weed survey in McCormick Park with high school students
- Setting up a Mediterranean oak borer trap in McCormick Park (no borers were found)
- Collaborating on a community health forum
- Participating in a Dalton Lake Nature Preserve work party
- Surveying and removing pokeweed in certain areas
- Supporting Friends of Knob Hill work parties with tools, plants, and promotion

Future plans include:

- Continuing collaboration with Friends groups
- Ongoing bio surveying in McCormick Park
- Planning an educational forum about local natural areas

The Commission expressed appreciation for the Watershed Council's work and discussed potential future collaborations, including addressing invasive species in specific park areas.

Vice Chair Blumenthal raised a concern about invasive species growth in a recently disturbed area near the park. The Watershed Council representatives offered to assess the area and potentially develop a plan for addressing the issue.

Chair Lathrope thanked the Watershed Council for their valuable contributions and expressed hope for continued collaboration, despite recent budget constraints that had affected their formal agreement with the city.

OLD BUSINESS

8. Bylaws (Jacobson)

Jacobson was not prepared to discuss the bylaws at this meeting and suggested postponing the topic to the next meeting.

9. Milton Creek Reserve - Standing Item

The Commission discussed recent developments regarding the Milton Creek Reserve project. Key points included:

- A recent fire incident in the area, which was contained quickly
- Concerns about unauthorized camping in the area
- An update on a joint meeting with the Planning Commission and City Council about the project
- Discussion of potential boundaries for the reserve, particularly focusing on areas that might be developable in the future

The Commission agreed to conduct a field trip to the site on Wednesday, August 6th at 4 PM to assess the area and determine specific boundaries to propose. They plan to use topographical maps and other resources to make informed decisions about the proposed reserve boundaries.

Chair Lathrope agreed to coordinate with City Staff to ensure proper public notice for the field trip and to obtain necessary materials for the site visit.

STAFF REPORT

Tupper Absent. No Staff Report was provided.

COUNCILOR'S REPORT

Sundeen provided a brief report, mentioning the success of recent events in the parks, including Community Day, Fourth of July celebrations, and 13 Nights. He encouraged Commission members to enjoy the parks and the new features, particularly at Columbia View Park.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- Parks Assessment Tool: Chair Lathrope updated the Commission on the progress of the parks assessment tool. She mentioned ongoing meetings with City Staff to finalize the virtual form and launch it on an appropriate platform.
- Urban Trail Promotion: Belcher shared information from an Oregon State University study emphasizing the importance of access to outdoor recreation for public health. He used this to underscore the value of the Urban Trail project for promoting City Parks and encouraging walking as a form of recreation.
- Columbia View Park Grand Opening: Jacobson commented on the successful grand opening of the first phase of Columbia View Park, noting its potential and overall positive reception.
- Knob Hill Park Updates: Blumenthal provided updates on Knob Hill Park, including plans for a new bench (potentially the 100th Lions Club bench in the community), recent minor vandalism issues, and a fallen tree blocking part of the trail.

ADJOURNMENT – 5:32 PM

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Lathrope.

Respectfully Submitted by Jamie Ford, Administrative Billing Specialist