



PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

Monday, October 13, 2025 at 4:00 PM

APPROVED MINUTES

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

Commissioner Paul Barlow

STAFF PRESENT

Brandon Sundeen, City Councilor
Dawn Richardson, Administrative Billing Specialist
Jamie Ford, Administrative Billing Specialist

OTHERS

Ashley Stanley
Bailey Feakin
Gilli Williford
Sean Williams

CALL TO ORDER – 4:00 PM

Chair Lathrope called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM. Due to technical issues with the video connection, the meeting proceeded with audio only initially before the video was restored.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve Minutes of September 8, 2025

Motion made Vice Chair Blumenthal to Approve the Minutes of September 8, 2025, Seconded by Commissioner Jacobson.

Voting Yea: Chair Lathrope, Vice Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Woodruff

Commissioner Belcher and Commissioner Pettit arrived after vote was taken.

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

No attendees present who were not on the agenda wished to address the Commission.

NEW BUSINESS

2. Round Table Questions - Lathrope

Chair Lathrope introduced the roundtable question: "In what moments have you personally felt the most joy or fulfillment while serving on the Parks and Trails Commission, and what made those experiences meaningful for you?"

Vice Chair Blumenthal shared that his most joyful moments come from visiting the City's parks and appreciating the amenities, wildlife, nature, and wildflowers. He particularly values having a park close to his home where he can enjoy beautiful surroundings without traveling far.

Commissioner Jacobson found it difficult to define a single moment but highlighted his work on the Milton Creek Reserve project as particularly fulfilling, noting it represents an ongoing positive feeling about contributing to the Commission's work.

Commissioner Green, as a newer member, expressed that the Community Day in the Park was especially enjoyable, as it provided an opportunity to engage with community members and discuss the parks system directly with residents.

Commissioner Woodruff recounted a deeply moving experience from eight or nine years ago when the Commission approved naming a ball field after a woman's grandfather who had served as a volunteer umpire for many years. Seeing the joy on the family's faces during the unveiling ceremony exemplified why he joined the Commission - to witness people enjoying and connecting with the parks.

Chair Lathrope reflected on last year's Community Day in the Park event, where Commission members worked cooperatively to create an impromptu booth that successfully engaged the public. The experience demonstrated the Commission's ability to work together quickly and effectively to serve the community.

Councilor Sundeen shared that his most fulfilling experiences, both as a former Commissioner and current Council Liaison, have been the opportunities to work together in various capacities - whether on projects in the Japanese and Botanical Gardens, field trips through Milton Creek Reserve, or manning tents at community events.

3. Interview Ashley Stanley for Parks & Trails Position

Ashley Stanley appeared before the Commission as an applicant for an open position. She introduced herself as a 20-year Columbia County resident with a deep love for nature. Ashley serves as a board member with the Scappoose Bay Watershed Council, a position she began at the start of the year. She expressed her passion for photographing, walking in, and depicting nature, and regularly volunteers for restoration work in parks.

When asked about her interest in the St. Helens Parks and Trails Commission specifically, Ashley explained her desire to help preserve natural spaces and make parks more accessible and comfortable for all community members. She wants to be informed about park issues and contribute through hands-on restoration work while listening to public concerns about accessibility and other matters.

Ashley confirmed she could commit a few hours weekly to Commission work and that the meeting schedule of the second Monday at 4 PM would not conflict with her part-time work-from-home schedule. She expressed particular interest in focusing on the Botanical Gardens through the Friends of Botanical Gardens initiative and emphasized her commitment to preserving native plants.

When asked about having friends interested in volunteering, Ashley confidently stated she had contacts, including Caroline and others through her network, who would be interested in helping with park projects.

Motion made by Commissioner Woodruff to recommend Ashley Stanley for appointment, Seconded by Vice Chair Blumenthal.

Voting Yea: Chair Lathrope, Vice Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Woodruff

Commissioner Pettit arrived after vote was taken.

4. **Wind Phone - Bailey Feakin**

Bailey Feakin returned to present updated plans for the Wind Phone installation at McCormick Park. She thanked the Commission for their patience and presented specific details about location, design, funding, and maintenance.

Bailey explained that after walking the park with Facilities Maintenance Supervisor, Buck Tupper and a coworker, they identified an ideal location near the Veterans Memorial and adjacent to the Japanese Gardens. This area offers the perfect balance of accessibility and privacy while being visible from the parking lot without detracting from existing features. The proximity to a daily-used maintenance access pathway ensures regular monitoring.

The design concept favors a smaller structure resembling a phone booth rather than a full-sized booth, based on Tupper's advice that larger structures might attract inappropriate use. Bailey showed various design options and shared that she had already purchased and assembled a red phone booth-style housing for the project, appreciating its visual appeal and ability to attract attention from across the park.

Funding has been secured through Columbia Health Services, which allocated \$1,000 for both the St. Helens and Scappoose wind phone projects. Bailey is exploring bench options, including a potential partnership with the Real Deahl gift store, whose owner offered up to 50% discount on a concrete bench with possible installation assistance.

The signage will include QR codes linking to Columbia Health Services' resource guide and the Wind Phone website for grief resources. Bailey expressed her desire to dedicate this wind phone to her grandfather, a former community member who worked locally.

Motion made by Commissioner Woodruff, authorizing the Wind Phone project to move forward with Tupper's assistance for installation. Seconded by Commissioner Jacobson. Voting Yea: Chair Lathrope, Vice Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Woodruff

Commissioner Pettit arrived after vote was taken.

Bailey mentioned plans for a ribbon-cutting ceremony once installed.

5. **By Laws Addendum - Lathrope**

Chair Lathrope apologized for not having prepared the language for removing "publicly accessible buildings" from the bylaws as discussed at the previous meeting, citing illness and the busy Halloweentown season. She committed to bringing draft language to the next meeting.

Discussion arose about potentially including language regarding the parks assessment program in the bylaws. Commissioner Jacobson suggested continuing the assessment program for a longer trial period before codifying it - possibly one full cycle of three months or through the winter months to properly evaluate its effectiveness.

The Commission agreed to continue the assessment program for several more months before considering formal adoption into the bylaws.

6. Joint Meeting Topics

- The Commission discussed topics for the October 22nd joint meeting with City Council. After extensive discussion about how to frame conversations constructively, they identified the following priority topics:
- **Municipal Code Section 2.74.090** - Discussion of Commission roles and responsibilities, specifically addressing concerns about being included in park-related decisions after projects are already underway, citing Sand Island Marine Park and the stage project as examples.
- **Urban Trail Project** - Request for progress update and formal approval to begin implementation following the motion passed at the last meeting.
- **Milton Creek Woodland Reserve** - Commissioner Green will present his slideshow highlighting the ecological and historical significance of the area, with discussion of boundary designation and rezoning needs.
- **Parks Assessment Program** - Brief overview of the new assessment tool and its benefits for maintenance planning and future master plan development.
- **Master Plan Updates** - Discussion about the process for making addendums or amendments to the 2015 Parks Master Plan.
- **Friends of Parks Groups** - Update on new volunteers for Botanical Gardens and McCormick Park.
- Commissioner Belcher suggested Chair Lathrope lead the discussion on the bylaws topic due to her diplomatic approach. The Commission emphasized maintaining a positive, collaborative tone throughout the meeting.

7. Master Plan Addition - Scott Jacobson

Commissioner Jacobson presented his vision for potentially acquiring a golf course as a City amenity. He explained that City Administrator, John Walsh had advised him the first step would be adding it to the master plan to enable future grant applications. While acknowledging the idea is "pie in the sky" and the existing golf course isn't currently for sale, Commissioner Jacobson has secured a tentative \$100,000 equipment donation commitment contingent on free access for St. Helens High School golf teams.

The concept would potentially partner with Scappoose and could generate revenue for the City. Commissioner Belcher, initially skeptical, shared his observations from Mint Valley Golf Course in Longview, where City ownership actually improved the facility and increased profitability under good management. He noted strong interest among local golfers who currently travel to Mint Valley due to high prices at Wildwood.

Discussion included potential for primitive camping, equestrian use, and various grant opportunities through ecological, salmon habitat, and historical preservation funding sources. Questions arose about maintenance responsibilities and location within City limits, with Commissioner Jacobson noting Portland operates multiple golf courses outside City boundaries.

The Commission also discussed adding dedicated pickleball courts to the master plan, as the current shared tennis/pickleball courts at Campbell Park need resurfacing and the pickleball community desires permanent nets and proper surfaces.

The Commission agreed to discuss the master plan amendment process at the Joint Council meeting rather than voting on specific additions without understanding the proper procedure.

OLD BUSINESS

8. Parks Assessment - Standing Item

Chair Lathrope presented the cumulative assessment data from the past month, showing nine new responses since the last meeting. She demonstrated the Excel spreadsheet functionality that allows sorting by park, issue type, or date, making it an effective tool for Tupper and maintenance staff to track and address concerns.

Key findings showed no instances of completely full parking lots, though many parks lack designated parking. Over half of visits found patrons present, with overall satisfaction ratings positive. The main areas of concern were safety and structures/amenities.

Commissioner Jacobson expressed feeling conflicted about repeatedly noting seasonal issues like fall tree debris that maintenance would address naturally. Chair Lathrope reassured him that documenting these observations helps track whether issues persist beyond expected seasonal timeframes.

Commissioners agreed to maintain their current park assignments for another month before rotating.

9. Milton Creek - Standing Item

Commissioner Jacobson reported on his productive meeting with Elliott and Lindsey Wilson, the Port's grant writer. Both expressed enthusiasm about completing trail development by year's end. Discussion topics included:

- Whether to pursue joint or separate grant applications
- Research into the Marina Nature Trail's funding history
- Alternative uses like equestrian trails and primitive camping on the Port side
- Multiple grant opportunities through ecological, recreational trails, salmon habitat, and historical preservation programs
- The area's rural status providing potential advantages for funding
- Possible design coordination with the St. Helens-Scappoose trail project
- Volunteer hour tracking for matching funds requirements

Lindsey Wilson expressed interest in joining a site visit to better understand the project scope. She also offered to co-write a column with Sean Clark in the Spotlight newspaper about the project, pending communication director approval.

Commissioner Belcher emphasized the Port's enthusiasm and suggested partnering with them for their portion while the City process continues. He asked what the City needs to do before trail work can begin, with consensus that rezoning and formal land designation are essential first steps.

10. Milton Creek Reserve Slide Show - Lucas Green

Commissioner Green presented his comprehensive slideshow intended for the Council meeting, featuring numbered photographs corresponding to map locations. He recommended

requesting all of "Quadrant 2" from the St. Helens Industrial Business Park plan as the Milton Creek Woodland Reserve.

His presentation highlighted:

- Extensive Camas Meadows and seasonal wetlands (vernal pools) that provide critical habitat
- The property serves as a migration stop for numerous bird species
- Essential habitat for reptiles and amphibians dependent on seasonal wetlands
- Recent publication in Northwestern Naturalist documenting this as one of Columbia County's main areas for extensive wildlife habitat
- Potential northern range limit for gray foxes and western brush rabbits
- Multiple quarry sites identified through field work and LiDAR data analysis
- Native American history including use as temporary reservation in 1856
- Only 0.25% of original Willamette Valley Camas Meadows remain (less than 1,000 acres from original 400,000)

Commissioner Green emphasized that creating a nature park would improve public health through increased access to natural areas, provide educational opportunities about native habitats, and attract tourism given the rarity of intact Camas Meadows.

Discussion addressed protecting the meadows through elevated boardwalks similar to Oaks Bottom in Portland. The Commission strongly supported including the contested five-acre Camas Meadow in their request, given its ecological significance and the presence of both rare habitat and historic quarry sites.

STAFF REPORT

Tupper was not present to provide a staff report.

COUNCILOR'S REPORT

Councilor Sundeen had no pressing items to report.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Commissioner Blumenthal announced the annual Nob Hill Nature Park work party scheduled for November 1st from 1:00-3:00 PM, meeting by the kiosk.

ADJOURNMENT – 6:00 PM

Chair Lathrope thanked everyone for the productive meeting and reminded Commissioners about the joint meeting on October 22nd. She committed to preparing a proposed agenda for that meeting and emphasized the importance of attendance for a positive, constructive discussion.

Respectfully Submitted by Jamie Ford, Administrative Billing Specialist