



PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

Monday, March 09, 2026 at 4:00 PM

APPROVED MINUTES

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Chair Howard Blumenthal
Commissioner Lori Baker
Commissioner Jerry Belcher
Commissioner Lucas Green
Commissioner Scott Jacobson
Commissioner Ashley Stanley

ABSENT

Vice Chair Paul Barlow
Commissioner Lynne Pettit
Commissioner Jacob Woodruff

STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator
Buck Tupper, Public Works Operations Manager
Brandon Sundeen, City Councilor
Dawn Richardson, Admin Billing Specialist
Jamie Ford, Admin Billing Specialist

OTHER

Nancy Reed
Dave Lawrence
Elliot Levin
Ben Tiscareno

CALL TO ORDER: 4:00 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve Minutes of the 02/09/2026 Parks & Trails Meeting

Motion made by Commissioner Jacobson, Seconded by Commissioner Green to Approve the Minutes of February 9, 2026 with correction that the EPA narrative should be credited to City Administrator Walsh rather than Commissioner Jacobson.

Voting Yea: Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Baker, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Jacobson

Voting Abstaining: Commissioner Stanley

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

- Nancy Reed from Unite in Prayer addressed the Commission requesting to donate a 6-foot bench to Columbia View Park. She had found an aluminum bench on Amazon with rustproof, lightweight materials and protective powder coating, but noted that Resolution 1547 requires benches to be made of wood. She also inquired about plaque requirements, specifically whether brass was mandatory or if stainless steel would be acceptable.

Public Works Operations Manager Tupper confirmed that current plaques are brass-toned and cost approximately \$225. The Commission discussed the desire for uniformity in the park system, though it was unclear if this was formally codified. Tupper agreed to research the requirements and get back to Reed with information about the approval process and location determination for the bench.

- **Motion** made by Commissioner Jacobson, Seconded by Commissioner Baker to move discussion items to earlier in the agenda to accommodate guest speaker Dave Lawrence, who needed to return to golf practice.

Voting Yea: Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Baker, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Jacobson

Dave Lawrence, Columbia City resident and St. Helens High School golf coach for 23 years, spoke about the community need for restoring the St. Helens golf course. He explained that his father had originally designed the course in the early 1960s for the Johnson brothers' dairy property, and it had served as a community focal point until its recent closure. Lawrence noted that the current owners, who had been partners, have since split up, with one owner potentially open to selling. He emphasized that the course had historically been profitable and suggested the City consider purchasing it, as was once attempted in the early 1970s. Lawrence offered that the men's club and volunteers had equipment and were willing to help restore the course to playable condition within a month.

Commissioner Belcher confirmed the course's profitability under previous ownership and suggested this could be a joint project involving the County and multiple cities. Chair Blumenthal expressed concerns about the City's current financial constraints and questioned whether funds would be available for such a purchase.

NEW BUSINESS

2. Commissioner Baker - Roles & Processes

Commissioner Baker requested clarification on the Commission's processes, particularly regarding park assessments and evaluations. She had observed confusion about round table discussions versus assessments versus assignments and wanted to understand the current system.

Chair Blumenthal explained that the Commission previously had a comprehensive park assessment tool system where Commissioners would rotate to different parks every three months and complete detailed forms. This system was implemented by a former chair but proved unpopular with Commissioners who found it time-consuming and not particularly valuable.

Commissioner Belcher described an alternative approach he had suggested: having all Commissioners visit the same park each month individually, then discuss their observations collectively at meetings. This would ensure all Commissioners see every park annually while fostering group discussion about improvements and concerns.

Commissioner Baker expressed her belief that Commissioners should be familiar with all parks to effectively advocate for the park system. The Commission agreed they are still in a transitional phase, trying different approaches to find what works best for the current group.

3. Commissioner Stanley - Friends of McCormick Park

Commissioner Stanley reported that Emily, who wants to host a Friends of McCormick Park volunteer group, has planned a work party for March 28th but was having difficulty navigating the proper channels to make the group official. Commissioner Stanley requested help facilitating the process and ensuring proper paperwork for liability purposes.

Tupper confirmed he would work with Emily to complete the simple process, likely involving coordination with Parks Field Supervisor Tory Shelby. Commissioner Stanley indicated she would provide Emily with Tupper's contact information.

4. Commissioner Belcher - Grey Cliffs Park

Commissioner Belcher presented his assessment of Grey Cliffs Park, noting it as a well-used facility with recent improvements including a new restroom and paved areas. He identified several items he wanted added to the Master Plan:

- An ADA-accessible fishing pier and non-motorized boat launch, for which the Marine Board has already provided design funding requiring a 25% City match
- A boardwalk extension to mirror the existing riverfront boardwalk, creating continuity in the waterfront experience
- Improvements to the cliff trail for better accessibility and safety

Commissioner Belcher described the park's multi-level layout, from the riverfront to a middle plateau (currently used as an unofficial dog park) to the upper residential connection via stairs. He noted the area's potential as part of the future river walk system.

City Administrator Walsh confirmed the Marine Board partnership for the fishing pier project, noting that while funding is available, the City needs to secure the 25% match. The Commission discussed the park's increasing popularity and its role in the broader vision for St. Helens' waterfront development.

Commissioner Baker praised the recent improvements and the park's connectivity to residential areas. The Commission agreed to continue monitoring needed trail maintenance, including addressing a small landslide and improving the steepest sections for better accessibility.

5. Chair Blumenthal - City Leash Regulations

Chair Blumenthal raised concerns about leash law enforcement in City parks, citing specific incidents including someone walking a cat on a 30-foot leash. The current ordinance requires 6-foot leashes for dogs, but Chair Blumenthal questioned whether it should apply to all animals to protect native plants and prevent conflicts between users.

He described damage to native vegetation from long leashes dragging across planted areas and potential safety issues when animals on long leashes cannot be quickly controlled. Tupper acknowledged seeing both cats on leashes and off-leash dogs in parks, but noted enforcement challenges, as most violations result in unpleasant confrontations with pet owners.

Tupper explained that enforcement typically falls to Code Enforcement or Police Officers, as parks staff prefer not to engage in confrontational situations. He agreed to consult with law enforcement about clarifying regulations and potential enforcement strategies, particularly for nature parks where vegetation protection is important.

6. Commissioner Baker - 250th Celebration

Commissioner Baker inquired about the Commission's potential participation in the upcoming 250th anniversary celebration of the United States, noting previous discussion about contributing to community festivities planned from May through July 4th.

Commissioner Belcher suggested organizing an Urban Trail walk as the Commission's contribution, potentially timing it with the trail's completion and grand opening. This would serve dual purposes of celebrating the anniversary and promoting the new trail system, which connects multiple parks throughout the City.

Councilor Sundeen confirmed that various community organizations are planning activities throughout the May-July timeframe. The Commission agreed to keep the Urban Trail walk concept under consideration, pending the actual completion timeline of the trail construction.

7. Commissioner Jacobson - Possible Termination of Commission

Commissioner Jacobson who had intended to lead this discussion left at the 36:35 mark in the meeting. The topic was addressed by City Administrator Walsh in lieu of Commissioner Jacobson's early departure. The City is facing severe budget constraints requiring furloughs for General Fund employees, reducing most to 32-hour work weeks beginning May 1st. A \$24 ballot measure in May could potentially alleviate some pressure, but significant cost-cutting measures are being evaluated.

The Commission discussed potential alternatives to termination, including meeting every other month instead of monthly, having Commissioners take their own minutes, or reducing staff support requirements. City Administrator Walsh noted that public meeting requirements for agendas, minutes, and staff time represent significant costs when multiplied across all boards and commissions.

Tupper suggested that if the Commission were dissolved, members could continue as a friends group without the formal meeting requirements, maintaining their advocacy role while reducing City costs. Several Commissioners expressed strong opposition to elimination, emphasizing the Commission's importance for park system advocacy and community input.

The Commission agreed to explore cost-saving alternatives and requested regular updates on the budget situation to avoid last-minute decisions.

OLD BUSINESS

8. Milton Creek - Standing Item

Port of Columbia County representative Elliot Levin addressed the Commission about the Milton Creek Forest Reserve project. He thanked the Commission for their support letter for the recent Brownfield grant application and provided an update on the port's environmental remediation efforts at their Railroad Avenue property.

Levin described the Port's excitement about the trail system proposal and their ongoing collaboration with the Commission since April 2023. The project has been included in two EPA Brownfield grant applications for site cleanup funding, with one application still pending. The contamination dates to

Pope and Talbot's operations until 1960, with the Port inheriting cleanup responsibility after the company's 2006 bankruptcy.

A recent well-attended site walk included over 20 people and two Port Commissioners, demonstrating broad support for the project. Levin indicated the Port is prepared to work on an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) and assist with grant applications for planning funds.

Commissioner Belcher emphasized the importance of including Commissioner Green in all meetings due to his extensive knowledge of the area's geological and historical significance. Commissioner Green confirmed his commitment to the project and suggested scheduling another field trip during camas blooming season to showcase the port-side property.

The Commission agreed to continue coordinating with the Port on next steps, including the IGA development and grant application processes.

9. Master Plan - Standing Item

Commissioner Belcher presented a comprehensive list of items he wanted added to the Master Plan, making a motion to include:

- Renovation of the Japanese garden at McCormick Park (historically present during the McCormick family ownership)
- Acquisition and development of the Milton Creek Forest Reserve
- Grant funding for ADA fishing and non-motorized boat pier at Grey Cliffs Park
- Boardwalk extension from Columbia View Park to Grey Cliffs Park
- Improvement of the cliff trail at Grey Cliffs Park
- Purchase of the St. Helens golf course, preferably as a joint endeavor with Columbia County and Scappoose
- Construction of a permanent structure to house the Flying Eagle canoe for its return to St. Helens
- Acquisition of two lots at the south end of Third Street adjacent to Nob Hill Park
- Expansion of Columbia Botanical Gardens through acquisition of property between Lemont Street and the current gardens

Chair Blumenthal supported including the Flying Eagle canoe, describing its historical significance as a community-carved vessel that has recreated Lewis and Clark's journeys and continues traveling the Mississippi River. He emphasized the educational value and tourism potential of properly housing this piece of St. Helens history.

Commissioner Baker suggested the Botanical Garden expansion, noting the private property's recurring fire issues and potential as oak prairie habitat. She also mentioned parking challenges for the current Botanical Garden, with only limited space near the Elk's Lodge.

Commissioner Belcher initially wanted to include relocating the artistic obelisks from Milton Creek bridge to downtown for better visibility and appreciation, but agreed to handle this as a separate City housekeeping issue rather than a Master Plan item.

Motion: Commissioner Belcher moved to add the following items to the Master Plan: renovation of the Japanese garden at McCormick Park; acquisition and development of Milton Creek Forest Reserve; grant funding for ADA fishing and non-motorized boat pier at Grey Cliffs Park; boardwalk extension connecting Columbia View Park to Grey Cliffs Park; improvement of the cliff trail at Grey Cliffs Park; purchase of St. Helens golf course; construction of permanent structure for Flying Eagle canoe; acquisition of two lots at south end of Third Street adjacent to Nob Hill Park; and acquisition of property for Botanical Garden expansion between Lemont Street and current gardens. **Second:** Commissioner Lucas Green. **Motion carried** unanimously.

Motion made by Commissioner Belcher, Seconded by Commissioner Green.
Voting Yea: Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Baker, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Stanley

10. Round Table Questions - Final Decision to Continue or Discontinue as Standing Item

The Commission briefly discussed the round table questions format, with Commissioner Green suggesting that ideas should be shared when Commissioners have them rather than being forced into a formal agenda structure. The group agreed to discontinue round table questions as a standing agenda item, allowing for more organic sharing of ideas and observations.

STAFF REPORT

Tupper reported on recent parks activities, noting that the building maintenance worker's retirement has required parks staff to assist with additional building maintenance tasks. Recent park work included rebuilding information signs at McCormick Park that were damaged by wind and completing the Wind Phone installation.

The Wind Phone ribbon cutting ceremony was well-attended and the installation has been successful with minimal issues. Tupper noted that people are specifically seeking out the Wind Phone, which was unexpected but encouraging.

Current challenges include managing softball and baseball season startup on wet fields and addressing vandalism at Campbell Park, where the softball hall of fame cabinet was damaged but is being rebuilt by the league.

COUNCILOR'S REPORT

Councilor Sundeen thanked the Commission for their work and welcomed the full board composition. He advised that future discussion items should be specifically added to the agenda rather than being general discussion topics, which would help the Chair manage meeting flow and expectations.

Councilor Sundeen explained the origin of round table questions as a method to reduce previous dysfunction and help Commissioners get to know each other better. He encouraged the current group to find processes that work for them rather than being bound by past practices.

He expressed concern about potential Commission elimination, noting that once commissions are dissolved, they are very difficult to reestablish. Councilor Sundeen indicated he would work with

Council to find alternatives and encouraged Commissioners to continue their valuable work despite budget challenges.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Commissioner Belcher reported on recent Urban Trail work, including installation of five 16x16 pads at trail intersections in Nob Hill Park that will eventually have directional signage painted on them.

He provided detailed updates on the kiosk project for the Urban Trail, showing the planned location and design concepts. The kiosk would feature the St. Helens logo, a trail map, QR code functionality, and photographs of key destinations including the boardwalk, courthouse, and marina. The main obstacle is obtaining installation approval, which Tupper indicated would wait for better weather conditions.

Commissioner Belcher emphasized the Urban Trail's potential for regional tourism and the importance of publicity once completed, mentioning contacts with media outlets including the Oregonian and Grant's Getaway television program.

Chair Blumenthal announced the annual Nob Hill Park work party scheduled for April 4th from 1:00-3:00 PM, meeting at the kiosk location. The work would focus on the lower cliff area on veneer plant property, potentially requiring special access arrangements.

Leadership Changes

Chair Blumenthal announced his resignation from the Chair position, citing stress and preference for hands-on park work rather than meeting management. He expressed his intention to remain on the Commission but not as Chair.

Motion: Commissioner Belcher moved to promote Vice Chair Barlow from Vice Chair to Chairman of the Parks and Trails Commission effective immediately, Seconded by Commissioner Stanley.
Voting Yea: Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Baker, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Stanley

Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: Commissioner Belcher moved to nominate Commissioner Stanley as Vice Chair of the Parks and Trails Commission effective immediately, Seconded by Commissioner Baker.
Voting Yea: Chair Blumenthal, Commissioner Baker, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Stanley

The Commission agreed to contact new Chair Barlow to inform him of his new role.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting Adjourned at 6:07 PM

Respectfully submitted by; Jamie Ford, Admin Billing Specialist