



PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

Monday, May 12, 2025 at 4:00 PM

APPROVED 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

STAFF PRESENT

Brandon Sundeen, City Councilor
Buck Tupper, Facilities Maintenance Supervisor
Sheri Ingram, Public Works Office Assistant
Dawn Richardson, Admin Billing Specialist

OTHERS

Kevin Loomis

CALL TO ORDER – 4:00 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve Minutes of April 14, 2025

Chair Lathrope asked if everyone had a chance to review the minutes from the April meeting. Flory confirmed he had. Blumenthal made a **motion** to approve the minutes.

Vice Chair Blumenthal moved to approve the minutes. Commission Member Flory seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

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

Kevin Loomis, a citizen of St. Helens, addressed the Commission. He introduced himself as someone who had recently achieved 9 months of sobriety and was looking for safe places to stay clean and sober outside. Loomis expressed interest in creating a designated area for RC (remote control) car enthusiasts, particularly for rock crawling. He offered to donate time, resources, and labor to make this possible.

Tupper, the Facilities Maintenance Supervisor, engaged with Loomis about the specifics of RC rock crawling. They discussed potential locations, including an area near the BMX track where trees had been removed. Tupper suggested they could explore expanding that area.

Loomis described the type of space needed, emphasizing that even a small area would suffice. He explained that the RC cars are electric and slow-moving, focusing on technical maneuvers rather than speed. Loomis shared his experience in creating RC courses and expressed enthusiasm for establishing a local spot for the hobby.

Tupper offered to meet with Loomis to walk through potential areas and discuss the possibilities further. He noted that while they couldn't promise a large track immediately, they could work on finding a suitable location that wouldn't interfere with existing facilities like the BMX track. Jerry Belcher, a Commission member, volunteered to act as a liaison for the RC car project if needed.

NEW BUSINESS

2. Round Table Topic: Parks-Related Questions – Lathrope

Chair Lathrope introduced a roundtable discussion question: "If you could add one single item to a new master plan, what would it be?" Vice Chair Blumenthal suggested more parks employees. Tupper clarified that in the spring, he could use three more employees. Green expressed support for the urban trail idea, noting it would help connect the community. Flory suggested a rock crawler park for RC cars, referencing Kevin Loomis's earlier presentation. Belcher proposed a fenced-in off-leash dog park at Gray Cliffs Park. Vice Chair Blumenthal emphasized the importance of continuing to set aside land for future trails as the community grows. Pettit agreed with Tupper about the need for more Parks maintenance staff. Chair Lathrope suggested adding educational signage in places like the Botanical Gardens and Knob Hill, including plant names and information.

3. Parks Assessment Tool Review – Lathrope

Chair Lathrope presented a digital assessment form she had been working on to replace the paper forms previously used for park assessments. She demonstrated the form's features, including its ability to store time-stamped information, gather demographic data, and allow for photo attachments. The digital form was designed to be more accessible and efficient than the paper version, with the potential to gather more comprehensive data for future master planning. Chair Lathrope explained that the form could be easily modified and updated as needed. Commission Members expressed interest in the digital form. Flory asked about the possibility of limiting the number of submissions from a single email address to prevent spam. Tupper raised concerns about potential misuse if the form was made available to the public but acknowledged its potential benefits. He suggested starting with Commission Members using the form before considering public access. Chair Lathrope agreed to work with the IT department to explore implementation options and address any technical concerns.

4. Trail Cameras – Blumenthal

Vice Chair Blumenthal inquired about the legality of using trail cameras in parks to monitor for problems. Tupper said he would need to consult with Law Enforcement Officers to determine the legal requirements, such as whether signage would be necessary to notify the public of camera presence. Tupper confirmed that the parks department currently has ten cameras, with some being cellular-enabled and others using SD cards for storage. Vice Chair Blumenthal explained his interest in using cameras to monitor areas where signage had been repeatedly stolen and to observe wildlife activity.

5. Waterfront Landscaping Maintenance – Blumenthal

Vice Chair Blumenthal expressed concern about the increasing amount of landscaping in the parks, particularly in the waterfront area. He noted that the expanded green spaces would require significant maintenance efforts from the parks department.

6. Budget Increase for Parks & Trails – Blumenthal

Blumenthal suggested that the Parks and Trails Commission should advocate for increased funding for the Parks Department, given the new landscaping responsibilities. He proposed that other departments might need to face budget cuts to accommodate the Parks Department's growing needs.

Tupper cautioned that the current budget situation was challenging, with potential cuts being discussed across departments. He advised that asking for additional funding or staff at this time would be difficult.

After discussion, Belcher made a **motion** regarding the staffing needs for maintaining the new riverfront landscaping:

Belcher moved to make the City Council aware that with the additional landscaping that's going to be taking place on the riverfront project, the Parks Department will need another person to maintain it adequately with current staffing levels. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Blumenthal. The motion was passed unanimously.

Vice Chair Blumenthal suggested exploring the possibility of implementing a small gas tax to generate funds for parks maintenance, though Tupper noted that previous studies had shown limited potential benefit for St. Helens compared to neighboring communities.

OLD BUSINESS

7. Milton Creek Reserve - Standing Item

Jacobson reported on a meeting he and Belcher had with representatives from the Port of Columbia County regarding the Milton Creek Reserve project. The port officials expressed support for the project and were open to donating some land for the reserve and trail. Jacobson noted that the port was willing to allow trail development further back on their property, considering drainage issues. He mentioned that while there were some developable sites in the area, the port seemed amenable to trail use. Belcher added that Sean Clark, the Port's Executive Director, would be the point of contact for future discussions. Belcher emphasized the need for further planning regarding property ownership, zoning changes, and potential trail routes. The Commission discussed the upcoming joint meeting with the Planning Commission and City Council, where the Milton Creek project would be discussed further.

STAFF REPORT

Tupper provided updates on various park-related activities:

- He addressed Pettit's earlier comments about Civic Pride park maintenance.
- He mentioned ongoing work near the trail to Dalton Lake.
- He reported that St. Helens Little League would be doing drainage work on field number 2, similar to improvements made on field number 1.
- He noted that the adult softball league was planning to purchase specialized dirt to improve field conditions.
- He acknowledged recent volunteer work, including Vice Chair Blumenthal's cleaning of stairs at Knob Hill Park and Pettit's trimming of Japanese maples at the library.
- He thanked the Kiwanis Daybreakers for maintaining Walnut Tree Park for over 20 years.
- He mentioned upcoming concerts in the park and anticipated increased activity in the coming month.

COUNCILOR'S REPORT

Councilor Sundeen, thanked the Commission for their awareness and concern about park issues. He encouraged members to continue voicing their concerns and reminded everyone about the ongoing budget meetings, inviting them to attend or watch the proceedings.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Belcher discussed the St. Helens Urban Trail project, which aims to connect five parks and explore the historic riverfront. He outlined the project's components, including a kiosk, trail markings, and QR codes for information access. Belcher emphasized that the initial setup would not be costly and

suggested ways to implement the trail with minimal expense. The Commission discussed various aspects of the project, including the placement of concrete pads for trail markers, the use of existing paint supplies for markings, and the potential for future improvements. Tupper agreed to review the proposed trail route and work with City departments to ensure proper placement of markers and signs. Pettit reminded the Commission about previously discussed plans for smaller kiosks at various locations, including Civic Pride park. She also announced upcoming work parties for the Japanese Garden and Dalton Lake. Vice Chair Blumenthal raised concerns about the new staircase at the base of Knob Hill, suggesting improvements to the handrail placement and discussing maintenance needs. He also mentioned plans to mow the Fifth Street right-of-way in the coming week.

ADJOURNMENT - 5:49 P.M.

With no further discussion items, Chair Lathrope adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted by Jamie Ford, Administrative Billing Specialist