



PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

Monday, April 13, 2026 at 4:00 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Chair Paul Barlow
Vice Chair Ashley Stanley
Commissioner Lori Baker
Commissioner Jerry Belcher
Commissioner Lucas Green
Commissioner Lynne Pettit
Commissioner Howard Blumenthal
Commissioner Jacob Woodruff

STAFF PRESENT

City Administrator, John Walsh
City Councilor, Brandon Sundeen
Admin Billing Specialist, Dawn Richardson
Admin Billing Specialist, Jamie Ford

ABSENT

Commissioner Scott Jacobson

OTHERS

Nancy Reed
Ben Tiscareno

CALL TO ORDER – 4:01 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve Minutes of March 9, 2026

Motion made by Commissioner Pettit to approve the Minutes of March 9, 2026 with an amendment to the language near the end of the minutes regarding the vote on officer elections incorrectly implied Commissioner Jacobson had voted, when in fact the earlier minutes had indicated he had left the meeting prior to that vote. Staff confirmed the correction would be made. No additional amendments were raised.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Blumenthal, Commissioner Baker, Commissioner Belcher, Commissioner Green, Commissioner Pettit, Commissioner Stanley, Commissioner Woodruff

Voting Abstaining: Chair Barlow, Vice Chair Stanley

Secretary's Note Motion incomplete as there was no Second. Minutes of March 9, 2026 have been carried over to approve on the May 11, 2026 agenda.

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

Guest Speaker Ben Tiscareno addressed the Commission regarding a potential RV park development at the City-owned Far Building property. He noted that the matter had been raised at a recent City Council meeting as one of several options to address the City's revenue challenges and encouraged the Commission to consider aligning its goals with that initiative, given the Commission's role as a bridge

between parks stewardship and broader civic interests. Commissioner Blumenthal noted that the Parks Commission had, in fact, recommended a similar use for that property some years prior.

NEW BUSINESS

2. Nancy Reed - Bench Donation to Columbia View Park

Guest Speaker Nancy Reed appeared before the Commission to formally submit an application to donate a bench to Columbia View Park. She described the bench as a commercially available, rust-resistant aluminum bench with a durable black powder-coat finish and pre-drilled mounting holes. She indicated that the accompanying plaque would read "Welcome to the Prayer Bench, Uniting Columbia County in Prayer," and noted that a matching powder-coat material would likely be used for the plaque, or another material if mounted directly to the bench and approved by the Commission.

Guest Speaker Reed referenced guidance from City parks maintenance staff indicating that the bench must be approved by the Parks and Trails Commission, and the plaque approved by the Commission as well, before the concept proceeds to City Council for final approval. Commission members expressed general support for the donation. Reed also inquired about the timeline for City Council consideration and was informed that approval would likely be approximately one month out, given the Council's current meeting schedule.

OLD BUSINESS

3. Milton Creek - Standing Item

Commissioner Green provided an update on conditions at the Milton Creek area, noting that the camas meadows were beginning to bloom and would likely be in full bloom within approximately one week. He also described a recent natural phenomenon at the site involving a fish species spawning in the creek, which had attracted dozens of bald eagles — an event he characterized as remarkable and worth documenting. He indicated he has been preparing a slideshow presentation on the property's species and natural features, intended in part for eventual presentation to City Council to demonstrate the site's ecological significance.

Vice Chair Stanley asked whether a public tour of the camas meadows could be organized in the next two weeks while the bloom was at its peak, and Commissioner Green indicated that was feasible and open to scheduling.

Commissioner Pettit raised a question regarding the ongoing status of Milton Creek as a standing agenda item, noting that little formal action had been taken in some time and asking what had been accomplished since the matter was elevated. Commissioner Green acknowledged that formal improvements — such as signage and benches — had not yet been implemented, as the area's boundaries have not been officially designated, though he has conducted informal cleanup work on the site.

Councilor Sundeen clarified that the primary holdup for designation remains the pending PGE substation siting process. He explained that the Council's general consensus is that the property is worthy of preservation and designation as a nature preserve, but the City is not prepared to define exact boundaries until the substation location is finalized. City Administrator Walsh noted that most of the area in question is in a floodplain or riparian buffer, which significantly limits buildable area, and that a feasibility period is underway. Councilor Sundeen encouraged Commission members to review

the recording of the most recent joint City Council and Planning Commission meeting, at which this matter was discussed at length.

Commissioner Belcher expressed concern that the only area with meaningful development potential — the elevated camas meadow — be formally protected. He noted that while the Council was largely supportive of preservation, at least one council member had preferred to keep that area available for development. Commissioner Baker observed that without formal designation, the matter risks being lost over time, and acknowledged why Commissioner Green continues to keep the item on the agenda.

Regarding the property's current industrial zoning designation, City Administrator Walsh noted that the area is largely undeveloped and the near-term risk of incompatible development is low, though a formal rezoning has been deferred to the upcoming comprehensive plan update process.

Commissioner Pettit suggested that Commissioner Green consult with City Planning staff regarding historical surveys previously conducted on the site.

4. Master Plan - Standing Item

Commissioner Barlow noted that the Commission had reviewed the Master Plan at a recent prior meeting and identified a number of projects that had been completed and required updating in the plan. The discussion at this meeting centered on the process for submitting recommendations and edits to the Master Plan, specifically who should be receiving and compiling those submissions now that previous staff contacts are no longer in that role. It was agreed that Jacob in the Planning Division would be the appropriate point of contact for Commissioners to submit written recommendations and edits, so that a working file could be maintained.

Commissioner Pettit clarified that some Commissioners have held written recommendations for park-specific Master Plan updates for several years, and that the question of where to direct them had been unresolved. Commissioner Baker sought clarification on the distinction between wish-list additions to the Master Plan versus updates to reflect completed projects, and Commissioner Pettit confirmed that both types of submissions are needed. Commissioner Blumenthal emphasized the importance of maintaining a cumulative list so that prior work is not lost or duplicated.

Chair Barlow noted that a recommendation from Commissioner Pettit regarding the Dalton Lake Nature Preserve had been in preparation for several years and would be brought forward at a future meeting for formal discussion and a possible vote.

5. City Leash Regulations - Commissioner Blumenthal

Commissioner Blumenthal reported that a specific ongoing leash law violation at one of the parks had been referred to Code Enforcement, and that the individual involved had been contacted. He noted, however, that leash law violations remain a broader and persistent issue, particularly in the camas meadow restoration areas, where off-leash dogs are disturbing ecologically sensitive zones.

Commissioner Blumenthal informed the Commission that he planned to install temporary restoration area signage — made from inexpensive corrugated plastic rather than metal, which had previously been removed or stolen — at three or four specific locations within the park over the coming days, timed to coincide with the peak bloom period. Commissioner Pettit noted that a prior set of metal signs designating restoration areas had disappeared. Commissioner Blumenthal indicated he intended to mount the new signs at height to deter removal.

STAFF REPORT

No formal staff report was presented.

COUNCILOR'S REPORT

Councilor Sundeen reported on significant budget concerns currently before the City Council, which have prompted discussion about cost-saving measures affecting City commissions. He noted that while there has been no discussion of terminating commissions, the Finance Division may not be able to continue providing full secretarial and administrative support to the Commission at its current level. Potential measures discussed at Council included reducing meeting frequency — either to every other month or once per quarter — as well as different approaches to minute-taking.

Councilor Sundeen noted that City Recorder Payne had researched the question of whether a commission member could serve as secretary and take minutes, and had concluded that, because the City bears legal responsibility for commission minutes, that function must remain with City staff.

Commission members discussed the implications of reduced meeting frequency. Chair Barlow and others noted that a previous period of bimonthly meetings had resulted in declining attendance, and that when combined with holiday cancellations, gaps of three to four months between meetings had occurred. The general consensus among Commission members was that maintaining monthly meetings — potentially shortened to one hour — would be preferable to bimonthly or quarterly meetings.

Commissioner Pettit suggested that meetings could be held via Zoom to reduce staff resource demands, and that structuring meetings to conclude by 5:00 PM would help limit the burden on staff time. She also suggested that some standing agenda items be restructured or removed if they are not generating active business.

Councilor Sundeen also noted that the recently introduced joint meetings between the Council and the Parks and Trails Commission may be discontinued as a cost-saving measure. City Administrator Walsh indicated that this would be discussed at the Council level. Commission members noted that if joint meetings are retained, they could be held in lieu of a regular Parks and Trails Commission meeting for that month, as had been done informally in prior years.

Commissioner Blumenthal suggested that Commissioners notify staff in advance if they do not plan to attend a given meeting, so that quorum issues can be identified early and meetings canceled if necessary, avoiding wasted staff and member time.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Waterfront Park / Public Art: Chair Barlow briefly noted the presence of illustrated artwork on the hill at the Waterfront properties and inquired about its origin. The item was discussed informally and connected to the neighboring art gallery.

Nob Hill Park Work Party: Commissioner Blumenthal reported that a work party held the previous weekend at Nob Hill Park drew 14 volunteers, contributing approximately 30 hours of volunteer labor. He noted two ongoing concerns: the periodic draining of occasional wetlands within the park by an unknown party, and an incident in which an individual was observed hitting golf balls off the bluff in the camas meadow area at dusk.

Agenda Structure: Commissioner Baker raised a suggestion made by Councilor Sundeen at a prior meeting — that discussion items be listed specifically on the agenda with brief descriptors, rather than appearing as a general open category at the end. This would allow the Chair to better manage meeting time and give members and staff advance notice of what will be discussed. Councilor Sundeen affirmed this approach, suggesting that items planned in advance be included on the agenda, while truly spontaneous items could still be raised under a general discussion category. Commissioner Blumenthal supported the idea but noted that if a discussion item was expected to require more than approximately five minutes, it should likely be elevated to a formal agenda item. The Commission agreed to implement this approach going forward.

Campbell Park Pedestrian Access: Chair Barlow described a pedestrian access gap he had observed while visiting Campbell Park with his grandchildren: there is no safe pedestrian path from the direction of Sherlock's grocery store into the park entrance, requiring pedestrians to walk in the roadway alongside vehicle traffic. He noted that existing safe pedestrian access points exist from Columbia Boulevard and from a recently improved sidewalk near the ballfields, but that the Sherlock's approach lacks any such accommodation. He suggested that a simple bark dust path along the edge of the road could address the issue at low cost and noted it could be an appropriate addition to the Master Plan.

Park Assignment / Stewardship Program: Commissioner Pettit distributed a list of City parks and proposed reactivating a formal park assignment system, in which each Commissioner voluntarily takes responsibility for monitoring one or two specific parks and reporting observations back to the Commission. She noted that she has continued volunteer work in three parks independently and argued that familiarity with a specific park allows Commissioners to bring more informed and specific recommendations forward.

Commissioner Baker offered a distinction between this approach and the role of a "friends of" group, noting that while she supports both models, she views the Commission's primary responsibility as maintaining awareness of conditions across all City parks. She acknowledged that Commission members may have parks they are more personally invested in but emphasized a broader oversight role. Commissioner Pettit acknowledged the difficulty of recruiting and retaining volunteers for friends-of groups, noting that sustained commitment is rare despite significant outreach efforts.

Commissioner Blumenthal noted that friends-of groups need not be composed of Commission members, and that the Commission's role with respect to those groups is more advisory. He also noted that the number of active friends-of groups has grown to three or four.

Vice Chair Stanley noted that the process for forming a friends-of group is not clearly communicated to the public — the City website implies there is an application, but it is unclear where that application goes or who manages it. She expressed interest in streamlining and better publicizing that process and suggested that organizations such as the Scappoose Bay Watershed Council and the Columbia Soil and Water District could serve as supportive partners for friends-of groups, helping to sustain volunteer engagement.

The Commission agreed to place the park assignment program on the agenda as a formal discussion item at the next meeting, allowing more time for deliberation.

Liability Waivers for Volunteer Work: It was noted that volunteers performing work in City parks should have a signed liability release on file with the City. Commissioner Blumenthal indicated that his practice is to have volunteers sign a release at each work party, and the Commission discussed the value of ensuring all Commissioners who conduct volunteer work in parks have current releases on file.

Botanical Gardens Assessment: Vice Chair Stanley noted that the Commission had agreed at the prior meeting to conduct an individual assessment of the St. Helens Botanical Gardens. She acknowledged that she had not completed the assessment herself but noted that at least one other commissioner had. The Commission agreed to carry the assignment forward to the next month, with a visit scheduled for the coming weekend. The Botanical Gardens assessment was confirmed as an agenda item for the next meeting.

Jim Davis: Commissioner Pettit suggested reaching out to former Parks Director Jim Davis, who served the City for approximately 25 years beginning in the 1970s, to invite him to a future meeting. Councilor Sundeen noted that the Commission had honored him at a meeting approximately three to four years prior.

ADJOURNMENT – 5:12 PM

Respectfully submitted by, Jamie Ford, Admin Billing Specialist