

# York Neighborhood Association General Membership Meeting

Norway Hall—1419 North Forest Street

## February 22, 2023 Minutes - DRAFT

Approved: Motion \_\_\_\_\_

Present: YNA Board members Chris Donaldson (Vice President), Rebecca Hobbs, Opie Knechtel, Élan Engel, Jeremy Ferrera, Mark Ellis Walker, and seven or so community members (including City Council members Lisa Anderson and Edwin “Skip” Williams, Carolyn Mulder, and Eric Baumgarten), plus Parks Department guest speakers Nicole Oliver (Director) and Laine Potter (Parks Development Manager).

Excused: Colin Beazley (President), Anne Mackie.

**Called to order** at 6:30pm by Chris with general introductions of community members.

### 1. 2023 Parks Planning & Budget; Rock Hill Update / Planning Process; Open Discussion on Next Steps

**Nicole Oliver** first spoke, followed by **Laine Potter**, with questions from the audience posed throughout.

After a brief recap of her history as a City employee since 1999, Nicole spoke about the Parks Department’s **Pro Plan** (2020) and how they use that in the planning of specific park projects and staffing, including noting year-round use of parks rather than just a need for seasonal support. This has led to expansion of their volunteer program for park maintenance, including AmeriCorps interns and more stewardship, with an emphasis on restoring open space to its natural state and the removal of invasive plants.

A key Parks goal is that all Bellinghamsters live within a half a mile of a park; the Cordata park developments coming this summer are a big push in that direction. Their **Park Enhancement Prioritization (PEP)** tool and continued **Community Recreation Needs Assessments** are ongoing ways they have determined which sites and projects to tackle and in what order, and it was the PEP tool that got our Rock Hill Park up to the top of the list for park improvements in 2023–24. Public input has also gotten them to reassess the sports complex on the other side of I-5, in the Puget neighborhood, as there is demand for expansion of their aquatic programs, and changes in Bellingham’s sports scene have in turn given new importance to that complex’s ability to meet public usage desires.

But Parks doesn’t have the resources to do it all, so she said we should anticipate another parks levy soon, as those are critical to success...as has been revenue from the parking tax fee. A question was asked as to the levy’s basis, and Nicole said that it would be not rate-based but rather having a goal of a certain amount at the end. These levy goals are adjusted each year to meet those, and Bellingham’s expansion has meant that cost is shared across a larger populace and thus less per person. Another question was presented regarding why a levy would be needed when there was a budget surplus thanks to the Greenways monies, and she explained that it was a matter of not a

surplus but rather funds not yet spent because they didn't complete some projects as scheduled; the money is still committed.

In response to a question about the sources, timelines, and methods of public input in the planning process for parks, she cited examples to show that it's really all over the place. One tool, the website **Engage Bellingham** ([engagebellingham.org](http://engagebellingham.org)), was developed just before the COVID-19 pandemic and has been very useful in continuing to gather public input.

A question about opportunities for parks and trails to have a dedicated funding source such as from the roadways tax led to a discussion around the challenges of meeting criteria of potential funders such as various governmental-level bodies that require, for instance, that a trail be multimodal for transportation as part of an arterial network and not merely a walking trail. It was noted that the increase in electric-bike usage alone could make that easier to obtain.

Lisa asked if there was any department awareness of a suggestion that had been posed many years ago regarding building an overpass over I-5 to link the York and Puget neighborhoods and relieve some of the strain on the Lakeway underpass to do it all. Nicole had not heard of that one!

Asked about when the Rock Hill improvements project might begin, Nicole deferred to Laine for that and a more itemized overview of that and other park-improvements projects throughout the city as well as budgeting details. These include Cordata's south side, which is going out to bid this month; the current planning of Bakerview Neighborhood Park as a partnership with an affordable-housing project; the completion of the master plan for Storybrook Park (formerly Maplewood McLeod open space); the gift of the 1,200-foot pier extending over water, at no cost to the city, to become part of Little Squalicum Park; developments at Waypoint Park; completion of planning of Hundred Acre Woods and the start of restorations as part of Phase I; repair and restoration of bridges at Arroyo Park on the south edge of town; and, still a ways off but in the works, development of the newly named Salish Landing Park (formerly referred to as Cornwall Beach Park) at the bay end of Cornwall Avenue.

York's Rock Hill Park is slated as the next *playground replacement* coming up, but Parks is looking at it as not just replacing what's in the existing playground's footprint but indeed an opportunity to reimagine the park's better public utilization. Laine noted that the planning of improvements to Lorraine Ellis Park (in the Columbia neighborhood) initially included the expansion of the playground-equipment area, but then feedback from the neighborhood reversed this because they valued the park's open spaces more.

As to when the planning process would begin, and then public input, she estimated that community engagement would probably not be happening until late summer this year, due to a backlog of unfinished projects. An early step would be the creation of a small committee to discuss the project, and the YNA Board will stay alert to this so as to be ready to have representation there; Chris via social media and Mark via the website will promote participation when we have something more date-specific or definite to engage the public with.

Questions regarding funding (which was increased from the initial planned estimate and may also see funding from other City departments such as Public Works where theirs overlap with this) and whether there would be improvements to existing basic infrastructure included in the project were

briefly aired and satisfactorily answered. It was also generally acknowledged that there would be interweaving of the recent bike/pedestrian planning as Rock Hill's was happening.

Lisa and Carolyn raised the matter of ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) related funding opportunities and needs particular to Rock Hill Park, as well as other accessibility aspects such as access for children and not just those with physical disabilities.

## 2. Committee Updates

In lieu of formal committee reports, general status updates were offered on a few of their projects.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & SOCIAL**: Board nominations will be held at the next Board meeting (March 22); all present were asked to consider stepping up and/or to recommend a York neighbor they know who would be a good possibility.

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION**: There was brief discussion about the interactive walking-tour map idea which has been proposed previously, with Chris noting that Katie Franks, Development Specialist at the City of Bellingham, would like to use York as one pilot program of such a thing if it could be determined that York neighbors were actually OK with one being created (concerns about unwanted tourist-destination status were acknowledged as possible to be raised). He will bring up the issue more formally at the March board meeting to discuss ways to find out public feeling on the matter.

Lisa Anderson suggested that it would be best to speak specifically with owners where properties might have markers as part of the tour map. She also recalled that, as part of a rezoning of the neighborhood many years ago, the YNA sent a survey to all property owners and that doing such an outreach in this case might make more public funding available for the project. Another attendee who's involved in public planning said that surveys via Zoom on such things get good turnout.

## 3. Miscellaneous

Rebecca asked of *Yorker* delivery volunteers that they please let her and Mark know if they're unable to distribute copies to their block, so that those can be covered.

Chris conveyed an invitation from Anne for all to attend the memorial for Jon Ostby, to be held on March 19 at the Bellingham Cruise Terminal (355 Harris Avenue, Fairhaven).

**Meeting Adjourned** at 7:55pm.

Respectfully submitted by Mark Ellis Walker, on behalf of Secretary Tom Scott.