

**BAINBRIDGE ISLAND METROPOLITAN PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT
PUBLIC MEETING-STATE PARKS, JULY 21, 2009
BAINBRIDGE COMMONS**

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm by Chair Swolgaard.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Lee Cross, Kirk Robinson, Dave Shorett, Tom Swolgaard. Absent: Ken DeWitt.

INTRODUCTION

Commissioner Swolgaard introduced this evening's public meeting on the potential transfer of Fay Bainbridge and Fort Ward State Parks to the Park District from Washington State. Commissioner Robinson moderated the discussion, and began by reviewing a hand-out prepared by the Board of Commissioners regarding the possible transfer. The hand-out included a timeline of events related to the issue, financial information, concerns and benefits perceived by the community, and information on the sewage treatment plant being discussed for Fay Bainbridge. He also introduced State Parks Regional Director Don Houk and Fay Bainbridge Ranger Bob Chalfant. He said comments from the public will be received after which questions will be entertained by the Board.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Gayle Rich, island resident, said that at a past board meeting, the Board made a promise that if the State allocated the state parks to Bainbridge Island, the Board would take them. She does not understand the opposition of some Commissioners and is concerned about what will happen to the parks if the State decides to sell them. She referenced an article in the Bainbridge Islander in April 2009 which discussed taking on the two state parks, and she quoted Commissioner Cross as saying: "Funding for acquisition and development of trail easements and new parkland would not be greatly affected." She feels betrayed because she has since heard different things indicating Commissioner Cross may vote against it. She also finds it suspect that in the last issue of the Review there was a letter strongly opposed to taking on the state parks, but no letter representing the other side.

Barry Fetterman, island resident, said several months ago he would have advocated taking on the state parks, but that since then a reprieve has been received from the State. He suggested the Park District position itself with a right of first refusal, see how the State proceeds with its funding, and take on the parks if the State decides to close them.

Mark Cowan, island resident, said he has spoken before to the Board, and that it appears the State can now keep the island's state parks open for at least this year. He said the State Parks is facing a significant revenue shortage over the next two years, and that the funds to be raised through the license tab option are uncertain. Given the State's high debt load and unemployment rate, he thinks it is unlikely that the 13 parks listed by the State as not meeting state park criteria will remain open after next year. He and said neither of the island's state parks is mentioned in the State's 2013 plan for future development, and that the State is currently maintaining Fort Ward and Fay Bainbridge at a minimal level. He said Fay Bainbridge and Fort Ward State Parks consist of 155 acres with 1-1/4 mile of low bank waterfront. He said it is unlikely that property of this nature would ever be donated or purchased with lid lift funds. He suggested transferring the parks one at a time. He said that since the levy lid lift passed, property values have decreased. He thinks no additional land should be purchased for at least two years, and that the lid lift funds should be used to maintain existing parks as well as at least one state park.

Neil Johannsen, island resident, said he has served in a variety of state park positions over the years from park ranger to State Parks Director in Alaska, and has learned that all parks live in an economic, political and legal world. He said most parks cannot be closed due to transfer and grant conditions. He agreed that the island's state parks should not be closed, but thinks it is poor timing to take them on before knowing the results of the license tab option. He said Fort Ward has been a state park for 65 years, and Fay Bainbridge for 50 years, and that numerous budget crises have

been weathered. He said there are many approaches for surviving a budget crunch, and that the District should not be too quick to rescue the State from managing the parks they have maintained for so many years. He said he does not think the lid lift was intended for properties like these which involve law enforcement, camping, recreational boating, and more money than the District may be anticipating. He said the City is in the process of transferring 25 new properties to the Park District, and that 70 property nominations have been received for new park land acquisition. At the same time, the State is offering the island's two state parks to the District. He recommended that the District slow down, learn the results of the license tab option, wait to see how many new parks will be transferred to the District, be first in line to take the state parks if they are closed, and re-visit the issue in one year.

Lynn Pippard, island resident, spoke again to the Board thanking them for their thoughtful consideration. She said that rather than seeing the State as dumping the parks on the District, she sees the State as providing a rare and timely opportunity.

Jim Pippard, island resident, spoke again to the Board saying the state parks are gems and that he is in favor of taking them on. He said the issue is more local ownership than local control, since with ownership comes a sense of commitment and pride.

Laurie Axling, island resident, said she was initially concerned to hear the state parks might close and was happy to hear the license tab option will keep them open. She encouraged the Board to wait and see if the parks receive funding for next year. She is concerned about capital costs and security issues, and would like the State to take care of Fay Bainbridge and Fort Ward for several more years.

Steven Moehring, island resident, said he lives on Lafayette and has been involved with the sewage treatment plant which he felt was becoming too expensive. He said Fay Bainbridge is a beautiful park which the State no longer wants and is looking for interested parties to take on. He said the Park District is the most obvious party, but that it should not be assumed it is the only interested party. He encouraged the Board to proceed with the transfer.

Maradel Gale, island resident, spoke again to the Board, saying there is a huge cost associated with running the state parks, there is no real reason to take them on, and that it is rash and foolish to rush ahead with this. She said the lid lift funds are intended for a specific purpose that cannot be arbitrarily designated for something else.

Bill Knobloch, island resident and City Council Member, said that under normal circumstances he would encourage the transfer of the state parks, since parks create community identity and a destination for recreation. He said the City and Park District work together as partners in many areas. He said, however, that the state parks transfer is more complicated than normal due to the tertiary plant that is in the process of being planned for Fay Bainbridge. He said the City has responsibility for addressing sewage as well as Puget Sound clean-up issues, and that this tertiary plant addresses both these responsibilities while also providing a model for the community. He said this project is being discussed at a legislative level to see whether it can be implemented, and that to transfer Fay Bainbridge while these discussions are underway could result in a lost opportunity or do damage to it. He asked that the state park transfer wait until the sewage project is completed, and that an agreement be worked out with the State giving the Park District the right of first refusal.

Mary Dombrowski said she has lived near Fort Ward State Park since 1975, and thinks the State should keep the park now and in perpetuity due to: 1) Its interesting historic resources including original coastal forts from late 1800s and national recognition received during WWII as secret listening post; 2) Good relations between State Parks and local neighborhood; 3) The draw the park provides for visitors from all over the world.

Rex Bentley, island resident, said everyone agrees Fort Ward and Fay Bainbridge should remain parks, and that the question is who owns them. He thinks the Park District should take them on since the community will hold a bigger voice here on the island than with the State.

Barb Trafton, island resident, said she initially thought the state parks should be under local ownership, but that now since they won't be closing, she sees no reason why the District cannot wait to take them on. She questioned taking them both on at the same time, saying Fort Ward should be transferred first and then Fay Bainbridge. She said the sewage treatment plant at Fay Bainbridge is a huge issue, and she does not want the District put in a position where it cannot respond to environmental concerns due to financial constraints. She said she worked hard to pass the levy lid lift and thinks it is important to hold true to what was promised, saying now is the time to purchase new park land. She likes the idea of a right of first refusal for the state parks.

Richard Potter, island resident, said he thinks it is important that the state parks stay open, but believes that the longer the State keeps them, the easier it will be on the local Park District. He doesn't want the District to take on more than it can maintain.

Eric Fredrichs, island resident, proposed a win/win situation saying the State should keep the parks and BIMPRD should manage them. The Park District could maintain them for less than it costs the State, and manage them better due to local proximity.

Bart Freedman, island resident and member of the Park District's Parkland Acquisition Committee (PAC), urged restraint by the Board in accepting the state parks. He said the levy lid lift has two aims: 1) Expanding land base; and 2) developing existing parks. He said it is clear this mission is being diminished by taking on the additional burden of the island's state parks.

Jette Hammen, island resident, spoke again to the Board, urging them strongly to not take on the State Parks.

Eddie Hartman, island resident, said the District runs the risk of losing credibility with the public if the state parks are taken on since this is not the intent of the lid lift. She said the land of the state parks will not go away, and that lid lift funds should be used to secure land that will no longer be available in future years. She said it is foolish to take on the State Parks if the State can keep them for another two years.

Fay Bainbridge Campground Host, said if the restrooms at Fay Bainbridge are converted to vault toilets, the park's camping clientele will change. She said people today want hook-ups and restrooms with showers.

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION:

Several questions from the public were asked and responses were provided by the Park Commissioners. Board members explained the following: 1) The Park Board will make a decision at an August board meeting on how it will respond to the State's offer to transfer the parks to the Park District; 2) The Park District is a separate jurisdiction from the City of Bainbridge Island, and that even though the geographic boundaries are the same, the two agencies operate as separate entities out of different revenue sources; 3) Even though the City and Park District are separate entities, they do enter into occasional partnerships, such as Pritchard Park and the Strawberry Packing Plant. 4) The intent of the properties purchased through the voter approved open space bond a number of years ago was to provide the public with additional open space and park land. The City ran this bond measure since as an agency it was in the best position to do so. At that time, the Park District was a special district on a two year levy cycle for basic operating costs. Since then the Park District has changed its funding status to that of a metropolitan park district which provides the District with a stable funding base. This has put the Park District in a better position to take on the open space property purchases which the City is now transferring to the Park District as the steward of the island's park land; 5) The lid lift funds are allocated as a 75/25 split, with 75% designated for land acquisition and development of existing park land, and 25% for park operations. Each year funds from the lid lift will be received for these purposes; this is the first year they have been received. If the funds are not used in 2009, they will roll over into next year, and could be used to offset the decrease in revenues anticipated next year as property values decline. If the state parks are taken on, the funds to operate them will come out of the lid lift funds. 6) The sewage treatment

plant for Fay Bainbridge has been set aside at the State level, but is still a possibility for the future. If the Park District took on Fay Bainbridge, it would not be the agency that is the drive behind the sewage treatment plant or its funding source; 7) The \$300,000 the City is putting into the soccer fields at Battle Point Park was a decision made by the City Council in response to a request made by the BI Youth Soccer Club. The Park District was not involved in the City's decision to allocate City funds in this way.

In addition, Commissioner Shorett said the State Parks Commission has made it very clear that they have no intent of releasing their ownership of the state parks unless the properties continue as parks.

State Parks Regional Director Don Houk said the State is looking for willing recipients. The State is not dumping the parks on anyone. He said the state has provided these opportunities before, and a number of other state properties have been transferred to cities successfully, such as Federal Way, Mukilteo, Moses Lake. He said if the community doesn't want the parks, the State will not give the state parks to them. The State is not forcing the state parks on anyone; the State is looking for willing partners that are interested in taking them on.

Chair Swolgaard expressed appreciation for the comments received this evening, and thanked people for coming.

MEETING ADJOURNED at 8:00 pm.

Elizabeth R. Shepherd
Terry M. Lande
BAINBRIDGE ISLAND METROPOLITAN
PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT

BY: _____
John Thomas Swolgaard

BY: _____
Lee Cross

BY: _____
Kirk B. Robinson

BY: _____
Kenneth R. DeWitt

ATTEST: _____
David L. Shorett - Secretary