

Parks, Recreation and Fair Board Minutes

Thursday, January 15, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm with the following Park Board members in attendance:

Board Members Present: Gery Cardenas, Elizabeth Detillion, Jose Riefkohl, John Semrau, Kevin Loy, Angela Amundson, Barry Brower, Tim Manns, and Greg Francioch

Staff Members and Representatives: Brian Adams and Aric Gaither

Members from the Public: Noelle Higgins

A motion was made to approve the September minutes with Tim's corrections were approved and passed unanimously.

Board Discussion:

Rexville Park Development Plan

The Board discussed a potential park site overlooking blueberry fields and Mount Baker, which was historically close to being developed but is now being pursued as a priority project for simple parking/trailhead and a viewing platform. Susan Willhoft of Pacific Landscape Architecture presented a site plan showing an existing driveway that could be expanded for ADA parking, though its location relative to the road right-of-way remains unclear. The group explored the possibility of exchanging property with the drainage district, as there may be county-owned land that could be used for a pump station in exchange for allowing the drainage district to park on Skagit County property.

The Board discussed accessibility and viewing options for a scenic area. Brian suggested adding a lower deck for wheelchair access adjacent to an existing structure, noting that a ramp up to the higher deck would be difficult. Susan mentioned a potential overlook area off the existing driveway with a beautiful view. Barry inquired about current accessibility, and Susan described a rough path through the woods, suggesting they could explore the area further. Brian and Barry expressed interest in visiting the site to assess the situation firsthand. Maybe WTA could take a look as well.

The Board discussed a potential park site with a concrete building and cistern, which Brian mentioned was covered with pressure-treated lumber in 2003 due to liability concerns. Susan described the location's features, including views of Mount Baker, native plants, and several species of birds, as well as a beautiful rock face with moss and licorice ferns. Barry suggested adding bike racks for cyclists who stop at the site, and the group agreed it would be a manageable project with minimal critical area concerns. Brian noted that the main challenge would likely be addressing concerns from neighboring farmers, but emphasized the public's right to access the area responsibly.

Skagit County Budget and Projects

The Board discussed several topics related to park projects and property management. Brian provided an update on the Big Rock trail project, which is now complete and will be officially opened on March 17th with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The group also discussed a landlocked property (P4165) that has been transferred to their jurisdiction, with Brian planning to conduct a title search and gather a proposal from Mid-Valley Resources regarding its potential use. Barry inquired about the trail design for the Hilt Creek area, particularly regarding access to a waterfall, which Brian confirmed would likely end before the scramble section.

The Board discussed funding for trail development for the Centennial Trail, with Brian explaining that funds would come from real estate excise tax and special paths money derived from a non-motorized gas tax. They reviewed progress, which is approaching 30% design completion, with an RCO grant application pending and a \$500,000 funding request. The group confirmed upcoming events including a March 17th commemoration ceremony where the Upper Skagit tribe and WTA will speak, and discussed the implementation of a new campground reservation system at Steelhead Park.

Skagit Playfields

All fencing that required replacement has now been completed. We also extended the backstops to help reduce foul balls landing in common areas, improving safety and the overall park experience. Two new scoreboards, generously funded by our sponsors, have been secured and will be installed during the dry summer months. We have finalized a contract to complete the abatement work on the old Rodgers' house, allowing us to move forward with demolition along College Way. The soccer fields are gaining strong interest, with two leagues preparing to begin play this summer. The baseball fields officially open on March 1, and we already have a full schedule of team practices and tournament reservations lined up for the season.

NSRA

We are very excited to see Olmsted Park opening to the public soon. The additional parking will be a significant benefit, as we've experienced a tremendous increase in park use. Distributing parking between the Port, Skagit County, and the Helmick Road lot will help ease congestion and improve overall access.

Our focus for 2026 will be the development of updated maps and interpretive signage to enhance the visitor experience. In addition, two kiosks featuring maps and park information are part of the forthcoming plan. We also continue ongoing conversations with the Upper Skagit Tribe regarding a cultural display and sculpture that would recognize and honor their history and heritage at the site.