



SEHOME HILL ARBORETUM BOARD OF GOVERNORS

April 18, 2024 Meeting Minutes

PRESENT: John Tuxill, Kendra Bradford, Jenna Kelling, Joan Drinkwin, Steve Hollenhorst, Nick Leader, Wayne Galloway III, Travis Tennesen, Steve Janiszewski, Kate Bemis, Caryn Regimbal

ABSENT:

VISITORS: Jason Martin, Executive Director of the American Alpine Institute; Mackenna Varela, WWU Environmental Science student

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by chair, John Tuxill.

- I. **AGENDA REVIEW:** John T. presented the agenda. Two items were added: a comment on the House of Healing project by Kendra B., and a student project on invasive plant removal in the Arboretum, by John T.
- II. **ANNOUNCEMENTS:** No announcements were made.
- III. **PUBLIC COMMENTS:** No public comments were offered.
- IV. **MEETING MINUTES:** John T. presented the minutes from the March 2024 Board meeting. Approved without objection on a motion by Steve H., seconded by Steve J.
- V. **OLD BUSINESS:**
 1. **Kiosks:** No information was available on current plans for when new trailhead kiosks might be installed at the Arboretum. Steve H. will follow up to gather that information. John T. pointed out that existing kiosks have received more graffiti tagging in recent months, and that if new kiosks are not installed, then cleanup of the existing ones would be a priority.
 2. **House of Healing update:** Kendra B. informed the Board that a very well attended ground-turning and blessing ceremony was held at the Longhouse project site, with several Board members present. Additionally, the Bellingham City Council in their April 8th meeting approved the Lease and the revisions to the Arboretum Interlocal Agreement (including those necessary for the Longhouse) that the Board had previously endorsed.
 3. **Biology/Environmental Science class:** Kendra B. relayed that approximately a year from now an interdisciplinary field science class will be held in the Arboretum, taught by Marion Brodhagen of the Biology Department and Rebecca Bunn of Environmental Science. The class will provide students with direct

experience in field and laboratory science methods including soil sampling and genetic analysis, and will focus on understanding the ecology of laminate root rot in the Arboretum.

4. **Land acknowledgement revision:** Steve H. and John T. mentioned how the Board's land acknowledgement refers to unceded traditional territory in a way that is not quite accurate in a US context, and whether that needs revision. Travis T. pointed out that an acknowledgement could instead address the importance of fishing, hunting, and other resource access rights that were not ceded by Native tribes. Board members agreed to continue working to fine-tune the land acknowledgement wording in this area.
5. With the Board's consent, John Tuxill tabled additional items of Old Business until the following meeting.

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

1. **Climbing Proposal:** Jason Martin provided a presentation to the Board on the history of rock climbing in the Arboretum and a proposal for the American Alpine Institute (AAI) to use the primary climbing area in the Arboretum (the rocks accessed above the main Arboretum entrance) for rescue training and guide exercises, approximately 15 days per year. AAI is a member of the Washington Climbing Coalition, which has a mission of providing environmental stewardship and public education at climbing sites, such as at Mt. Erie in Anacortes and Larrabee State Park. They would be interested in sponsoring a yearly clean-up of climbing areas (including graffiti removal) in the Arboretum. Climbing at Sehome Hill goes back to the 1950s and the first guidebook that covered climbing sites in the Arboretum was published in 1971. The training proposed by AAI would use existing anchors already on the rocks, and would not add any new ones. AAI would report to the Arboretum on all activities on at least an annual basis.

Travis T. asked about the season and time of day the training would take place, and how many people and equipment would be involved. Jason replied that it would depend on the specific program, and could be as small as one guide and one student, but would not likely exceed 10 people total at any given time, and generally using a single cliff. Timing would generally be between 9 AM and 5 PM from May to September, and they would work around other recreational climbers using the areas.

Kendra B. asked what the general policy on climbing is for City Parks and the Arboretum. John T. pointed out that the Arboretum does not have a policy on climbing (neither permitted nor prohibited) and it is not identified as an activity in the Master Plan or other guiding documents. Steve J. added that climbing is not a sanctioned activity in City Parks, and whether or not to approve climbing in the Arboretum would be a Board decision. If approved, the City would want to have

a special request form and insurance coverage from AAI. Steve J. also expressed concern over the off-trail foot traffic generated by climbing, and the damage to vegetation and erosion that can result. Jason M. replied that it is not uncommon for city parks and other land managers to not have plans for managing climbing or bouldering, and that organizations like AAI can reduce the inherent risk factors involved through education and outreach with the climbing community.

John T. asked whether AAI would primarily want to use the climbing rocks above the main entrance for their training. Jason confirmed that would likely be the case. He also emphasized that the cleanup work AAI would do as community service to the Arboretum would focus on the issues that the Board felt were highest priority, such as graffiti removal at climbing sites and other aspects of environmental management. John T. voiced that dealing with the impacts of ongoing climbing was an issue the Board would have to tackle at some point and in some form. Jason M. added that one approach that has worked at Mt. Erie and other climbing sites to manage the growth of impacts is to publish a management plan and specify no new climbing routes or other development by climbers or climbing organizations without formal review and approval by land managers.

Steve H. mentioned the importance of visiting the climbing sites in the Arboretum to get a better sense of the impacts involved. Kendra B. pointed out that there has been climber rescue training permitted in the Arboretum on at least one occasion previously. John T. added that the climber training proposed by AAI could possibly fit under the educational mission of the Arboretum. Travis T. raised the importance of any climber training not conflicting with other important activities such as ceremonial events at the Longhouse once that facility is operational. Board members agreed to revisit the proposal at the May meeting for additional discussion.

2. **Invasive plant work party:** WWU student Mckenna Varela presented a proposal, as part of her senior project, for hosting a work party in the Arboretum focused on removal of invasive plants, specifically a patch of Yellow archangel along the main road just below the summit area. Board members endorsed the project and discussed possible methods and strategies for removing Yellow archangel to insure it would not simply return to the site, as well as the advantages for Mckenna to collaborate with the campus group LEAD and City Parks staff that have experience with invasive removal and could provide tools and other resources for the work party.

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

There was no executive session.

- VIII. ADJOURNMENT:** The April 18th, 2024, Sehome Hill Arboretum Board of Governors adjourned by consent at 5:19 p.m.