

Save the Waterton Field Public Forum

10:00 AM

21 May 2016

Waterton Lakes Lodge

Minutes

Dr. Nolen Olsen - Forum Moderator

- Welcome and Introduction
- review of invitation sent to Superintendent Thomas and his reply declining to attend
- noted that Mr. John Barlow (M.P. for Waterton) was also invited and was unable to attend

Remarks - Bonnie Fromm - Save the Waterton Field Initiative Coordinator

- re-airing of CTV Lethbridge media clip from May 12, 2016
- brief mention of previous day's meeting with Mr. Barlow and his role as the initiative moves forward - taking petition to Ottawa with 1400 signatures
- notice that the meeting would be recorded/notes would be taken and compiled information posted publicly as well as sent to Parks Canada
- Mr. Thomas declined forum invitation - what is he doing today that is more important than hearing the public's concerns about the proposed project?
- concerned there has been no public consultation related to this decision
- the Park believe the consultation done for the 2000 Community plan constitutes consultation for the townsite location
- since that time, the Park also consulted the public in the development of the 2010 Park Management Plan
- The Waterton Management Plan Key Actions Section 5.1.4 Bullet #3 reads, "Investigate the feasibility of locating a new visitor centre at a site along the entrance road across from the Lake Linnet/Middle Waterton Lake day use area. This site will improve access for visitors, provide a positive welcome and sense of arrival, and mitigate impacts on the wildlife corridor in the area of the current visitor centre."
- This current 2010 Management Plan explicitly states that it replaces the old 2000 Management & Community Plans.
- concern is that Parks Canada has not fully investigated the feasibility of this site above middle Waterton Lake, and has defaulted to the townsite location without giving due diligence to the legally-binding 2010 Management Plan
- March 7, 2016 - Parks Canada Press Release stated the new Visitor Reception Centre would be built in the townsite

- Parks Canada's own website from Section 8 of their Guiding Principles says that Public Involvement is a cornerstone of policy and management practices.
- it also states there must be adequate notice and time for public review
- Parks Canada made the decision on this project in the winter months, which did not allow time for public review on the location during the busy summer season
- emailed the superintendent on April 10 asking for the following information:
 1. date of the supposed public consultations
 2. how it was advertised
 3. minutes of the meeting
 4. those who were in attendance
- received a vague response 17 days later that did not address any specific questions
- another email sent to superintendent April 29 after receiving email from Parks Canada informing of a public engagement process to take place sometime in June but without details of any specifics of the meeting
- inaccurate facts put forward by Parks Canada regarding increased visitation over the last 15 years (actually a 14.6% increase (official State of the Park Report) vs 50% increase as stated in the March 7 Press Release)
- something substantive has been missed in this process - namely, the actual facts that prove this is the only location the VRC can be built
- Parks Canada has not done due diligence
- our demand all along has been for specific facts, supported by scientific unbiased data
- the scoring matrix from the site study conducted by Jenkins Architecture weighted public safety at only 3.9%
- weighting of public safety should be the highest priority
- Waterton has experienced major public safety events that need to be weighted heavily in the location and design of the VRC
- Safety should not be trivialized
- Several years ago, Parks Canada management in Waterton spent hundreds of thousands of dollars studying the safety of the long toed salamander and built special underground tunnels for them to cross the road safely
- How much time and money have they spent ensuring the safety of our children if the new Visitor Centre is built in the field next to the playground in the townsite?
- site study scoring guide ranks 'ability of site to accommodate future needs' last out of 13 possible criteria
- Was this not the main reason Parks Canada said we needed a new VRC to begin with? The existing site could not accommodate current needs.
- the site Parks Canada has chosen has zero room for expansion
- will they demolish the basketball courts, tennis courts, spray park etc in the name of development?
- great loss for the community if the Falls theatre is demolished
- consider the implications that a visitor centre in the green space would have on the Waterton we all know and love

- Parks Canada has not followed due process and we will hold continue to hold them accountable
- The safety of everyone's children is and must remain our top priority

Remarks - Lesley Little - President - Waterton Lakes Leaseholders Association (WLLA)

- Account of the efforts of the WLLA and working committee in regards to the issue
- Survey done in August 2015 of leaseholders - 94% of leaseholders were not in favour of Block 39 site for new visitor reception centre
- this information was relayed to Mr. Thomas
- Mr. Thomas gave recommendation for formation of a working committee
- working committee consisted of :
 - 1 representative WPCA
 - 1 leaseholder
 - 1 member chamber of commerce
 - 3 members at large
 - Superintendent (Lesley Little noted that it was originally supposed to be 4 Parks Canada representatives)
- after the initial meeting, committee met with Jenkins Architecture in Calgary
- working committee urged Parks to include broader public consultation and left meeting with the impression this would be considered
- in the opinion of the WLLA, their recommendations were ignored
- WLLA cannot support location of new visitor centre on Block 39

Remarks - Garry Ursenbach

- presentation on alternate locations
- existing VRC served us well for 58 years
- reviewed site diagrams of proposed location
- pictures of Glacier National Park VRC's and associated parking lots
- options for the new VRC
 - Driftwood beach/old stables location (noted that this is not pristine land - has been developed before)
 - potential issues with compound location considered in site study
- noted that the 2000 Community Plan directed a townsite VRC would be built on institutional land
- noted that administrative offices would be moved to new VRC

Remarks - Gray Greenway

- concern over how we arrived at proposed location
- several letters sent to Parks Canada administration in the nature of fact-finding

- as citizens and taxpayers this information is our right
- individuals he requested information from are stewards of the public - we should not have to fight for information
- Parks Canada has not done due diligence
- read excerpts from his 29 March 2016 letter to Parks Canada, detailing the type of information that was requested
 - needs assessment - if the government allocated funding would have been based on facts
 - requirements and proper adherences to governmental internal governance processes
 - list of considered sites and how they were dismissed
 - dates, locations, participants and minutes of meetings discussing this information
 - information on public safety assurances
 - traffic flow patterns, simulations, etc to validate the 'no negative impact' claims
 - surrounding pedestrian safety
 - environmental study
 - early architectural renderings - compliance with National Parks act
 - study from architectural firm
 - explanation of priority, rankings, ratings, etc from firm
- to date has received 2 responses from Parks Canada to his requests for information
- both general email responses thanking him for writing a letter, second one informed of public consultation session to be held sometime in June
- review of some of the priority ratings assigned in the site study
 - ranking public safety at #10/13 is unacceptable
 - ranking ability to accommodate future needs the lowest of the criteria is problematic
- details of April 29 letter in response to Jenkins study:

Key Points

- public safety**
- concern with the wording of Jenkins study that the townsite location "could" create safety concerns - Parks Canada states fencing around the playground already addresses the issue
- reason for the current fence and 4-way stop at adjacent intersection - pedestrian fatality near playground site in the past
- need for safety assessment immediately**
- noted that campground traffic all parks along Windflower Avenue
- not a matter of "if" but "when" another accident will happen

- need for relentless requests for this information

- traffic flow simulations** are desperately required

- lack of infrastructure on side streets is an issue

- environmental study next priority**

- need disclosure of public forums that should have been conducted to ensure this process has been transparent and fair

- ensuring fiscal responsibility important

- noted that Parks Canada is fortunate to have received this funding-lets ensure the right decisions are made

- if we use the appropriate tools and due diligence we can ensure the best possible outcome

- we are entitled to information - consider the question "How do they know?"

Open Forum Portion of Meeting

Ron Komm

- leaseholder familiar with Waterton

- noted that children behave unpredictably and the related safety concerns of locating the visitor centre adjacent to the playground

- history of child killed in a pedestrian traffic accident near site

- the more traffic the more likely this is to occur

Cathy Redfern

- past president WLLA

- member of working committee

- noted that Superintendent likely has a certain criteria to meet - Return on Investment for # of visitors to VRC

- what about criteria for walk-in public?

- no place to expand playground if this building goes in

Ken Kotkas

- asked for a show of hands to 2 questions:

1. how many are in favour of the townsite location for the visitor centre?

- noted that no hands in the room were raised

2. How many would like to see the new visitor centre located elsewhere?

- overwhelming majority of hands in the room raised

Michele Pollock

- part of the playground committee and aware that funds for such were privately raised

- posed the question whether these financial contributors would be compensated if structures they raised money for such as the basketball courts are removed?
- retired from Parks Canada April 2016
- has worked with 1000's of visitors in experience as an interpreter and at VRC
- from the point of view of the visitor townsite location not a good location
- Parks Canada staff with extensive long term knowledge of visitor experience - mentioned Locke Marshall and Janice Smith - should be able to have a voice and not be "muzzled"
- this speaks to the superintendent that others can't voice opinions - very disappointing

Frank Johansen

- 80 year history in Waterton
- consistent problem with "having outside superintendents come in and screw up our park and leave and never come back."
- Parks Canada has a habit of destroying and not rebuilding items in the park
- related the effect a demonstration can have with reversing decision to close Marquis Hole ~15 years ago
- maybe we need a demonstration

Brent Nielson

- need to be careful as we let architectural plans come into play - poor representation
- cabins around the proposed townsite locations are in jeopardy
- e.g. of Waterton Lakes Lodge plans vs what the final construction was

Paula Marshall

- supports mandate of Parks Canada to protect ecosystems
- wants to know from Superintendent his staff's standing in regard to the issue
- children's safety is our biggest concern
- must have been a reason for alternate location at the compound to be considered

John Verhagen

- Pincher Creek resident
- visitors don't always want to go to downtown core
- proposal of two visitor centres

Paul Hinman

- bureaucracy has gone to "muck"
- lack of common sense
- secrecy around the issue appalling

Lorin Low

- leaseholder
- pointed out what he feels are the 2 main issues people are bringing forth:
 1. Proper process has not been done
 - we want things to be answered right now - they may not have the information yet - if we get the information by the June meeting he would be okay with that
 2. Safety for all - not just children
 - no matter what we do, cannot ensure no child will ever be killed
 - advised caution about becoming emotional rather than finding out facts
- posed the question - if they provided information about the process and the reasoning for choosing that site and if they do address the safety issues, would we still oppose that location?
- need to be careful to not become like the Park in our reasoning and say regardless of what the Park does we are opposed to that site

Bonnie Fromm

- acknowledged that yes, risk always exists but the increased congestion near the playground would increase the possibility of an incident occurring
- we need new unbiased data from someone whose hands aren't tied
- Jenkins did not get to choose weighting and criteria for the site study
- new site study should be done by someone familiar with the park

Jack Snedden

- long history in the Park
- past president - Rotary - Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park Association
- worked closely with several Glacier Superintendents
- we need a good sense of anticipation - working on 40-50 year time frame
- we need to anticipate visitor increases and plan for that - especially for new visitors not familiar with national parks
- idea of shuttle bus service combined with visitor centre
- new visitor centre needs a large parking lot, mentioned Apgar parking lot

Max Low

- business owner
- agrees with the Save the Waterton Field group in many ways
- in December would have said put the visitor centre outside the townsite
- sits on chamber of commerce - consensus there is put it outside the townsite
- pointed out he felt the "ball was dropped" by some of the leaders of the group that were part of the committee
- voices should have been raised back in December
- where was this group in December? Why weren't we organized then?

- we are to a point where the decision has been announced - it would be a great loss if the new visitor centre didn't happen
- are we "too little, too late"?
- we can hope for positive change but are we willing to make concessions?

Rick Oland

- proposal to WLLA - explore injunction against Parks Canada concerning the location, using WLLA funds

Rocky Pollock

- former Park employee
- Parks Canada has a mandate - part of this is ensuring the cultural heritage and education of the public is protected
- there is a culture in this town - this culture is at risk if we put the visitor centre in the middle of town
- Parks Canada has made exceptions to rules in certain areas - e.g. certain Parks allow hunting or logging at times due to the cultural heritage there
- the culture here is what attracts people here - it is quiet and quaint
- putting a massive parking lot in the middle of town will destroy that
- need to push the Park on the political level but also using their mandate
- safety is important and a good avenue but let's explore the cultural aspect as well

Dave Steed

- 30 years ago there were cabins on the field and Parks Canada said they needed it for green space
- now they say they need it for a parking lot
- safety and security of property rights is an issue here for people in community

Katherine Tingle

- what else can we do?
- we need to be unified in going forward and dealing with the Park
- work with the Park in the way they need to be worked with

Nolen Olsen

- going forward, need to be a part of the engagement process if Parks has one
- need to continue to press for information, writing letters to officials
- if we stop because we haven't gotten a response, we are giving in to a lack of response
- keep a record of every correspondence effort made
- use Social media to spread the word
- we want purpose and facts to drive this movement
- it's okay to be passionate but we need to be orderly and respectful so our voice is heard

Ken Black

- active in playground development
- does not support visitor centre by the playground
- there are valid counter-points
- consolidation of townsite services - administration, washrooms, etc. - 12 month basis
- need to look at plusses and minuses
- if we were looking at a normal development scenario - there would be a development application in choosing a site - would include plans, parking, landscaping, etc.
- Parks does not operate with a normal developmental model
- need to engage with architects if something is to be built in this space
- legal action always an option

Nolen Olsen

- hopes we don't feel like the process is at the end - if we give up we are missing a great opportunity
- future comments can be directed to the panel

Bonnie Fromm

- we are not giving up
- June community session -they have not given a date- we are not about to pick paint colour, we will make it about location

Christina Steed

- social media is a powerful tool
- the younger generation especially needs to do this to generate a buzz
- politicians respond to social media