

WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED

PRIOR TO THE

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' SESSION

ON

THURSDAY, March 30, 2023

AT

10:00 A.M.

Questions, concerns or comments about these items can be directed  
to staff or the Commissioners by contacting the Commissioners' office at

(503) 434-7501

OR

[BOCINFO@co.yamhill.or.us](mailto:BOCINFO@co.yamhill.or.us)

**From:** [Val Blaha](#)  
**To:** [BOC Info](#)  
**Subject:** public comment for 3/30 meeting regarding action taken at 3/23 meeting  
**Date:** Sunday, March 26, 2023 4:53:24 PM

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**Caution:** This email originated outside of the Yamhill County email system

**Dear Yamhill County Board of Commissioners,**

Yet again, I'm dismayed with the actions of our Board of Commissioners (BOC), in regard to their 3/23/23 meeting decision regarding new appointments to our county's Parks Advisory Board.

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board is composed of volunteers who care deeply about maintaining and improving our county's parks system. From what I can tell from the Jan and Feb minutes, and from a News Register article (<https://newsregister.com/article?articleTitle=commissioners-engineer-takeover-of-parks-board-two-resign-in-protest>), they followed the established process of interviewing new applicants, and chose to recommend three new members based on their knowledge, experience, and ability to commit to meetings.

The BOC threw that process (including many hours of volunteer time and energy) out the window when, rather than approving the three recommended new applicants, the BOC chose to appoint seven new applicants, only one of whom was recommended by the Parks Board. The BOC could have approved the Board recommendations, and then asked the Board to reconsider the other applicants in order to fill out the remaining four seats. Or they could have re-opened the application process, and asked the Board to consider new applicants.

But the BOC did none of those things, and in fact completely ignored two of the three recommended applicants without even discussing why they thought Commissioner Johnston's proposed candidates were better suited than the ones recommended by the Parks Board. Just like with the ARPA grant process last year, the BOC deliberately chose to ignore the work done by volunteers and others, and instead decided to micromanage and radically alter processes.

At the 3/23/23 meeting, Commissioners Johnston and Berschauer expressed their desire to fill all thirteen seats on the Parks Board. To justify packing the Board, Johnston expressed concerns about the Board not having a quorum at meetings, and having to cancel meetings. Berschauer mentioned the need to move ahead on the Parks Master Plan.

I've reviewed the Parks Board minutes for the past 13 months, and every single meeting had a quorum. And since Feb 2022, three meetings were canceled, but two (March/April 2022) were due to plans to wait for the new Parks director to be hired, and one (Dec 2022) was after a discussion apparently initiated by the Parks Director regarding the Board not needing to meet as regularly. Clearly the concerns about a quorum and canceled meetings were trumped-up. Any valid concerns should have been addressed directly to the Parks Board and the Parks Director, instead of disregarding the current process for recommending new members.

Finally, while focusing on the Parks Master Plan is important, I'd argue (from personal

board experience) that a goal of simply filling every seat with a warm body is not the path to a functioning board. If the BOC had simply followed the process, the Parks Board would have increased from 6 to 9 members, which seems a reasonable expansion. Now seven of the eleven members (since two members left in protest of the BOC's actions) are largely inexperienced, plus the Board will have to deal with a loss of morale and future built-in issues regarding cohesiveness and trust.

This is exactly why there are processes in place that should be followed, especially by elected officials. Willy nilly, haphazard appointments do not build trust and cooperation but doubt, disorder, and chaos. Not only does this undermine the BOC and the Parks Board, it reduces the likelihood of qualified volunteers applying for future county positions.

To make all of this worse, the BOC's appointees included the spouse of one of the Commissioners, as well as a large donor. Several other of the appointees have political, personal, and/or work connections to the BOC, calling into question the fairness of the appointments, and making it seem a coordinated effort to reward BOC loyalists and provide Parks Board seats as stepping stones for future BOC contenders. Given Berschauer and Starrett's notable lack of support for county parks projects, it also raises the specter of ulterior motives behind packing this particular Board in this way.

To summarize, the BOC has:

1. Disregarded the process for selecting new Board members in favor of micromanagement
2. Ignored two of three recommendations for new board members
3. Installed six of seven new board members without the recommendation of the current Board, including a BOC spouse, and a large campaign donor, among others with work, personal or political connections to the current BOC
4. Disrespected the current Board members
5. Devalued the current Board's work and process
6. Abused the current Board's trust
7. Prioritized chaos over cooperation, and cronies over competency

This will unfortunately lead to reduced confidence in the newly appointed Parks Board and possibly in future recommendations by them. It will also reduce expectations in the BOC's ability to follow processes fairly and without taint of undue influence, partisanship, cronyism or nepotism. Although to be fair, confidence in the BOC has been pretty low among many county residents for a while, particularly following their ARPA grant debacle from last year, but also given the tax payer money they've wasted due to not supporting the Yamhelas Westsider Trail, and fighting the state regarding illegal county ordinances.

If the BOC's prime internal directive is to reduce trust in government, they've been amazingly successful this week. I hesitate to imagine what disturbing and equally dystopian choices they will make in the future. It's a sad reflection of our county that we have public servants who clearly don't serve the public.

Valerie Blaha  
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