

Park & Rec

Continued from A1

Borja sees the biggest challenge facing the district to be its response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. He also sees the rapid pace of growth in Bend to be a challenge for the district as it handles more people, which creates stress on its infrastructure.

Borja says he is the most qualified candidate for the position because of his lived experience and professional background in outdoor education and community outreach — he has worked with the park district, the Boys and Girls Club of Bend and Bend-La Pine School District.

“Most importantly I am qualified because I care and am invested in making sure this district’s patrons have access to green spaces and can fully access BPRD’s opportunities,” said Borja.

Robin Vora

Vora, 67, emigrated to the United States at the age of 13 from Bombay (Mumbai), India. He spent his career in resource management, working with the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Vora has been a forester, ecologist, wildlife biologist and manager, working in seven states. Among family members, however, he is known as the “Energetic Bunny” for his tenacity and drive, he said.

Vora moved to Oregon in 2002 to take a deputy district ranger position in Bend. Since arriving in Bend he has served on the board of a soil and water conservation district and the Orchard Neighborhood Association board. He has volunteered with a number of local organizations including Tower Theatre, Deschutes Land Trust, East Cascades Audubon Society and others.

Vora says his priority for the park district is to expand the network of trails, create new parks in underserved neighborhoods, increase native vegetation in city parks and install a fish passage through Mirror Pond dam.

Vora also said COVID-19 has presented challenges due to lost revenues from canceled programs. He also thinks the district is challenged in providing fair access to parks and recreation for all socio-economic groups and minorities, and wants more programs and staff to serve minorities.

The lack of a fish passage over the Mirror Pond dam presents another challenge, said Vora. He wants a fish passage put in place if the dam is to be retained. He is, however, against dredging the pond.

“The public should not pay for dredging Mirror Pond,” said Vora. “The pond appears to be stabilizing, if dredged it will only fill in again.”

Vora says his work experience in natural resource science management and active involvement in parks, trails, and recreation programs qualify him for the job.

“I believe in the broad mission of the Bend Park & Recreation District, serving all peoples with a wide range of priorities,” said Vora. “I hope to make a significant contribution to the District and my community.”

Position 3

Position 3 is a race between the incumbent Nathan Hovekamp and newcomer Lauren Nowierski-Stadnick.

Nathan Hovekamp

Hovekamp, 55, is the current board chair. He describes himself as a “die-hard bird nerd” and has lived in Bend since



Hovekamp

1997. He has a busy professional life, employed by Central Oregon Land-Watch as wildlife program director, and by Central Oregon Community College as a biology professor.

His goal for the park district is to maintain its current high standards of excellence, he said. The biggest challenge for the district, Hovekamp said, is keeping up with Bend’s rapidly growing population.

“It is particularly difficult and expensive to secure land for new parks and easements for new trails and trail connections as residential development continues its torrid pace in Bend,” said Hovekamp.

He will also continue to push the park district “to give careful thought” to ensuring affordable and equitable access to programs and equal distribution of amenities across the entire district.

Looking forward, Hovekamp is excited about Alpenglow Park, still under construction in southeast Bend. This and other future parks need to retain big trees and protect as much naturalized open space as possible, he said.

Hovekamp is also pushing the District to complete the Deschutes River Trail through the city by filling in the remaining gaps.

“The District manages almost half of those riverbank miles and bears responsibility for their careful stewardship,” said Hovekamp.

Lauren Nowierski-Stadnick Nowierski-Stadnick, 36, is a graduate of MIT where she earned a degree in chemical engineering in 2006. Three



Nowierski-Stadnick

years later she graduated from Cardozo School of Law and is currently a civil law attorney in Bend. Nowierski-Stadnick, who grew up in Yonkers, New York, is also a competitive powerlifter and plans to return to competition in 2022. At MIT she played ice hockey, lacrosse and field hockey. She believes her background in sports, science and law makes her uniquely qualified to become a park board member.

“I love creative problem solving and advocacy and I would be honored to use my skills to benefit the community,” she said.

Nowierski-Stadnick says she wants to improve transparency over how the park district spends public funds.

“Continuing to improve accessibility to the financial information and decision-making process should be easy and cheap, and it should improve community confidence,” she said.

Nowierski-Stadnick also wants to grow the district in a way that reflects the growth of Bend, namely the expansion of biking and walking trails to connect parks and neighborhoods. This includes increasing access for underrepresented populations to park and recreation facilities.

Nowierski-Stadnick likewise wants to see trail improve-

ments through town, especially around Mirror Pond. She believes that the park district needs to quickly obtain easements between Drake Park and Pacific Park to complete that section of the trail.

She also advocates for better technology to help people find and use trails. She wants to make the park district’s website more user-friendly, with better trail maps and improvements to recreation information.

“We have a tremendous park and trail system, and technology that does not do it justice,” said Nowierski-Stadnick. “It would be great to implement a more user-friendly website or app to allow residents and visitors alike to fully appreciate the tremendous recreational opportunities we have here in Bend.”

Position 5

Position 5 is a race between two candidates with lengthy experience in the environment and parks: incumbent Deb Schoen and challenger Elizabeth Hughes Weide.

Elizabeth Hughes Weide

Hughes Weide, 63, is a retired environmental consultant and project manager who spent much of her 32-year career in Northern California, assessing the environmental impacts of various projects, including the expansion of parks and the construction of bike paths.

“As an environmental consultant and entrepreneur, I am uniquely qualified to assist the (park district) with future park expansion requiring river access and impacts to riparian habitats and threatened and endangered species,” said Hughes Weide.

In addition to her environmental background, she is also a Master Gardener with the Oregon State University Extension Program and spends summers at the Hollinshead Community Garden as a mentor for the community gardeners. She is also a dog lover and spends part of her time with her four Australian shepherd dogs, which she shows at agility and obedience competitions.

Hughes Weide advocates for equitable access to parks. She said she wants to ensure Americans with Disabilities Act compliance and coordination with special needs groups.

“I will encourage outreach to diverse populations within the district,” she said.

Hughes Weide said funding will be a challenge for the district going forward, especially after the park board approved system development charge (SDC) waivers for several affordable housing projects in Bend.

“Reducing funds for park expansion does not make sense,” said Hughes Weide. “Everyone in Bend deserves access to quality parks, and as Bend grows, the parks must continue to expand to meet the needs of our citizens.”

Hughes Weide said she intends to work with the park board and district staff to evaluate other options to support affordable housing goals in Bend without adversely impacting park expansion.

Hughes Weide said the focus over the next few years needs to be on the expansion of multi-use trails and bridges on the Deschutes River Trail System and the interconnection of with other trails throughout the area, including U.S. Forest Service trails and the Bend Urban Trail System.

“Ultimately, the expanded multi-use trail system could



The Bulletin file

The Bend Park & Recreation District’s headquarters is next to the Deschutes River.

allow bikes, pedestrians, runners, and other users to access miles of uninterrupted access along the Deschutes River and throughout Bend and surrounding communities,” said Hughes Weide.

Deb Schoen

Schoen, 63, has lived in Bend since 2013 and has 40 years of experience in the parks and recreation industry after a career with the Tualatin Hill Park and Recreation District.

“My passion and concern are accessibility, affordability, and equity regarding public resources and offerings,” said Schoen, who is sometimes seen around town driving a 1963 Volkswagen dune buggy with

her husband.

Schoen, who has been on the board since January 2020, said she wants to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion as the board makes decisions related to policy and programs.

“Our continued focus should be on building community, minimizing or eliminating barriers to participation and increasing opportunities for people to be in and enjoy nature,” said Schoen. “Community members deserve

Schoen

close-to-home access to parks, trails and natural spaces.”

As for challenges faced by the park district, Schoen said the district will need to focus on rebuilding after the pandemic lockdowns, including hiring staff, adapting to state rules and building back programs. She also identified land acquisition in underserved areas as a challenge.

Looking ahead, Schoen said the district must continue to work with community partners to address affordable housing, childcare and transportation connectivity through trails and parks.

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