



Lewis County Facilities

571 NW Prindle St
Chehalis WA 98532

Read Ahead – Board of County Commissioners

Date: Tuesday, June 23, 2025

Topic: Increased Criminal Activity and Safety Concerns at Schaffer County Park

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Background

Since the departure of the Schaffer Park Host in mid-April 2025, the park has experienced a significant increase in criminal and suspicious activities. The absence of a consistent on-site presence has resulted in a noticeable degradation of safety, increased misuse of the park, and growing concern from the public.

Recent Dispatch Calls (Since May 15, 2025)

A sample of law enforcement dispatches illustrates the severity and frequency of issues:

- **May 15** – Reports of gunshots and suspicious vehicle behavior.
- **May 25** – Witness report of a woman physically assaulting a child.
- **June 3** – Individuals soliciting fentanyl to park users, including juveniles.
- **June 5** – Reports of illegal camping, drug use, and unresponsive individual (ALS response).
- **June 6** – Dirt bike activity throughout the park, including over the footbridge.
- **June 15** – Loud explosions and public disturbances.
- **June 16** – Verbal domestic dispute escalating into reckless driving behavior.

Facilities Observations

In addition to dispatched law enforcement activity, Facilities staff have observed the following:

- **Homemade Cardboard Shooting Targets** – Found set up within the park grounds.
- **Significant Increase in Household Trash** – Large volumes of domestic waste being deposited in the park dumpster, suggesting misuse by non-park users.

Caretaker Role Status

- The previous caretaker vacated in **mid-April**.
- **Two applicants** have been reviewed but were disqualified:
 - One was unhoused, and their trailer was not up to standards.
 - One intended to house seven individuals on-site, which is not appropriate for the caretaker role.
- Staff continue the search for a qualified candidate who aligns with County standards and can serve as an effective deterrent and presence.

Current County Response

- **Sheriffs Office:** Notified, increasing presence at the park as staffing allows.
- **Staff Surveillance:** Facilities staff have been instructed to increase presence when nearby.
- **Director Monitoring:** The Facilities Director conducts periodic drive-throughs after work hours.

Proposed Temporary Mitigation Measures

To immediately address growing safety concerns, the following actions are proposed:

1. **Deploy Video Surveillance Trailer**
 - Estimated cost: **\$1,300/month**
 - Provides deterrence and records high-activity areas.
2. **Contracted Security Company Drive-By Checks**
 - Duties: Open and close park gates, visual inspections, after-hours deterrence.
 - Pending vendor confirmation and scheduling.
3. **Exterior Lighting Upgrades** *(In Process)*
 - Targeted illumination of the **picnic shelter** and **restroom areas**.
 - Conducted by Facilities Electrician to reduce concealment areas.
4. **Signage Installation**
 - "Smile, You're on Camera" signs added at the park entrance.
5. **Repair of Existing Restroom Camera**
 - One security camera located above restrooms is nonfunctional.
 - Facilities will assess and restore functionality.
6. **Locking the Park Dumpster** *(To follow trailer installation)*
 - Once the video surveillance trailer is installed, the large dumpster will be **locked** to prevent illegal dumping.
 - **Past Attempt Result:** When previously trialed without surveillance, household trash was dumped on the ground next to the locked dumpster.
 - **New Strategy:** With the deterrent of visible surveillance, the County anticipates fewer individuals will be emboldened to leave trash outside the bin.

Conclusion & Next Steps

The Facilities Department is actively working to stabilize the situation and increase safety through deterrence, visibility, and temporary monitoring. However, a permanent on-site caretaker remains the most sustainable and cost-effective long-term solution.

Commissioner Input Requested:

- Endorsement of temporary mitigation measures.
- Guidance or support for longer-term caretaker recruitment strategy.