



MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION



**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING**

April 13, 2023

The April 13, 2023, meeting was held in person at Spenard Community Recreation Center.

CALL TO ORDER

The April 13, 2023, regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order by Chair Grace Johnston at **6:03** p.m.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present:

- Commissioner Edwin Blair
- Commissioner Bruce Graham
- Commissioner Grace Johnston
- Commissioner Andrew Kastning (Online)
- Commissioner Stacey Lange
- Commissioner Brian Looney
- Commissioner Mary Vollendorf (Online)
- Commissioner Scott Wamsganz

A quorum was achieved with six members present.

Staff present:

- Steve Rafuse
- Mike Braniff
- Nicolette Dent
- Tanya Hickok
- Taylor Keegan
- Tom Korosei
- Ellen Devine

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Agenda was amended to include the budget presentation.

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Looney** and seconded by **Commissioner Johnston**, the Agenda for the April 13, 2023, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Blair** and seconded by **Commissioner Looney**, the Minutes of the March 9, 2023, meeting was unanimously approved.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

Mike Braniff--Parks and Recreation Director

1. **Hiring season** – We are finding it challenging to fill all the positions needed for summer which is a similar position many organizations and groups are in.
2. **Construction Season** – We are starting summer construction season.
3. **Spruce Bark Beetle Kill** – We have two contractors working in Hillside Parks on removing spruce bark beetle kill.
4. **Mobility Drawing Hunt in Kincaid** – The Alaska Board of Game passed a proposal to create a mobility-impaired drawing hunt in Kincaid Park. We have not been engaged. Several code provisions prevent this hunt and would need to be changed to allow this hunt.

NOMINATION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

- Commissioner Blair nominated Commissioner Looney as the new Park and Recreation Commission Chair. Commissioner Johnston seconded the nomination.
 - All in favor
- Commissioner Looney nominated Commissioner Johnston the new Park and Recreation Commission Vice chair. Commissioner Blair seconded the nomination.
 - All in favor

APPEARANCE REQUESTS

There were no non-agenda appearance requests.

ANCHORAGE PARK FOUNDATION

There was no staff present from the Anchorage Park Foundation.

ACTION ITEMS

PRC 23-06: Hillside Park/Service High Singletrack Trail

PRC Resolution 2023-03

Presented by Nicolette Dent, Park Planner

Martin Miller, Singletrack Advocates

Nicolette Dent, Park Planner, introduced the Hillside Park/Service High Singletrack Trails which was presented by Martin Miller from Singletrack Advocates. Singletrack Advocates is a non-profit who builds and maintains trails in our community, and they proposed five and a half miles of new beginner to intermediate trails in Far North Bicentennial Park between Service High School and the Hillside Trails. The new trails would be machine-built singletrack and would offer opportunity for a progressive level of difficulty. Singletrack Advocates is going through the public process with the help of the Municipality, with the intent of bringing this to the UDC in May and progressing with construction as early as this summer.

Singletrack Advocates is planning to fund, build, and maintain these trails as part of the existing maintenance agreement that exists between STA and Anchorage Parks and Recreation. If approved, this series of trails would increase connectivity between park points in a location designated as a high-use area in the 2011 Far North Bicentennial Trail Use Plan, remove some high-speed bike traffic off existing trails and reduce user conflicts, and offer skills progression.

To ensure public support, STA has worked with NSAA to coordinate trail planning and has received letters of support from Hilltop Ski Area, Mighty Bikes, Abbott Loop Community Council, Hillside Community Council, and about 70 independent letters of support.

Discussion

- Have there been conversations with ASD concerning parking? – The Municipality has had conversations, but that falls outside of what STA covered. Nicolette did confirm that the Anchorage School District has been contacted but that we have not received word back from the contact at ASD. Mr. Rafuse did reassure that since this is a location that has multiple entrance points that parking is not a major concern at this point.
- Will the trail be adjacent to the Service boulder? – We understand that is a well-used piece of real estate and we will avoid it.

Public testimony was heard by several members of the public including, primarily in support of the trail system.

Resolution

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Looney** and seconded by **Commissioner Wamsganz**, PRC Resolution 2023-03 **Hillside Park/Service High Singletrack Trail** was approved unanimously.

PRC 23-07: Chanshtnu Muldoon Park Phase IV Bridge

PRC Resolution 2023-04

Presented by Tanya Hickok

Tanya Hickok, Civil Engineer, and Park Planner, presented on the Phase IV Chanshtnu Muldoon Park improvements including the addition of a second bridge. In 2016, the Chanshtnu Muldoon Park Master Plan was approved by the local community council, Parks and Rec Commission, and Urban Design Commissioner. It then went into Phase I of construction which developed playground facilities before moving into Phase II the parking lot, dog park, community garden, nature play area, and food forest was constructed. We are hoping to complete Phase III this upcoming summer which includes a new bridge, and today we are seeking approval for the implementation of Phase IV which will include a secondary bridge to connect the park further.

The bridge has a 35 ft span and will be locally constructed by Steel Fab and the ADA trail (under 5% grade) and bridge is funded by a \$500K State Legislative grant. We are working towards an invitation to bid by June, a July bid-opening, notice to proceed in August, and the bridge should be able to go in by June of 2024.

Discussion

- Has the food forest been receiving a lot of use? – Mr. Rafuse explained that it has been open for two years and that our horticulture team has set up an example garden to teach classes. Mr. Braniff reminded folks that the food forest will take a while to develop but is continuing to grow and thrive.

Resolution

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Graham** and seconded by **Commissioner Johnston** PRC Resolution 2023-04 **Chanshtnu Muldoon Park Phase IV Bridge** was approved.

PRC 23-08: Veteran's Memorial: Name Addition for Pvt George Fox

PRC Resolution 2023-05

Presented by Dr. Mike Livingston

Dr. Mike Livingston, Captain with the Alaska State Defense Force and works for the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association a non-profit organization that advocates for the Unaluk people, presented on the addition of a name on the Veteran's Memorial for Private George Fox. As part of a genealogy project, he had heard about Pvt George Fox. George Fox was born in Unga village in 1920 and enlisted as a military police officer during WWII and served in North Africa.

George Fox was part the 179th infantry heading to Rome to take Rome back from the Nazis when a bomb went off near him. Unfortunately, he did not survive and was buried in an American military cemetery in Italy. After the war ended, his family was contacted, and his cremated remains was sent back to Unalaska.

Dr. Livingston continued by saying that they are seeking approval to have Pvt George Fox's name added to the WWII memorial in downtown Anchorage. The main things that are needed to do this is to prove that he served in the US Army, was killed in action, and that he is an Alaskan resident. His enlistment papers clearly show this information.

Discussion

- Is the picture we are seeing the WWII memorial in Anchorage? – Yes, it is, and our goal is to add Pvt George Fox's name to this memorial. There is ample room on this memorial to inscribe his name.
- Would the name just be added or are you suggesting alterations to the sign? – No alterations are needed. We would simply be added another name to this memorial.

Public testimony was heard by several members of the public in support of the name addition.

Resolution

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Johnston** and seconded by **Commissioner Kastning** PRC Resolution 2023-05 **Veteran's Memorial: Name Addition for Pvt George Fox** was unanimously approved.

PRC 23-09: Government Hill Neighborhood Parks and Trails Plan **PRC Resolution 2023-06** Presented by Nicolette Dent

Nicolette Dent, Park Planner, presented on the Government Hill Neighborhood Parks and Trails Plan. In 2013, the Government Hill Neighborhood Plan was approved at the Anchorage Assembly and provided a vision for the neighborhood's development. The Government Hill Parks and Trails Plan expands on this using a Master Plan format to the

whole neighborhood and identifies issues and prioritizes investments in parks and trails over a 20-year outlook.

Government Hill is Anchorage's first neighborhood, and the parks play an important role in this community to provide a buffer between housing and industrial areas. Parks also provide a variety of important activities such as sledding, an orchard, the curling club, and inclusive play equipment. About 2,000 people live in Government Hill, and no matter where you live in the community you are only 10 minutes from a park. To determine what issues and investments the community would like to see, we developed a community advisory group, visited the community council, and provided in-person and online open houses.

The common themes that the community wanted to focus on included that the greenbelt is a resource for recreation and forest health, increasing connectivity, and looking at property to create new parks. The goals include taking care of what we have, increase wayfinding, improve year-round recreation opportunities, improving trails and connectivity, and work with other agencies to develop additional parks.

We have earned a resolution of support from the Government Hill Community Council and have raised bonds to begin working on improvements to this area. This has been a multi-year project, and we are seeking an approval of this plan.

Resolution

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Blair** and seconded by **Commissioner Johnston** PRC Resolution 2023-06 **Government Hill Neighborhood Parks and Trails Plan** was unanimously approved.

PRC 23-10: Fairview Recreation Center Strategic Plan PRC Resolution 2023-07 Presented by Taylor Keegan

Taylor Keegan, Park Planner, presented on the Fairview Recreation Center Strategic Plan. To make this plan possible we had both a community advisory group and staff advisory group to keep priorities moving along. To provide some background, the original facility was built in 1979 and serves as a hub for recreation and is the heart of the Fairview neighborhood. During the COVID pandemic, the facility experienced a series of closures to serve as an emergency homeless shelter. Like many recreation centers nationwide, the pandemic shifted how the Fairview Recreation Center operates and this strategic plan aims to prioritize capital improvements as well as understanding baseline user trends over a five-year span. The final product outlines near-term management, maintenance, and programming.

Unlike a Master Plan, this strategic plan focuses on 2-5 years and is meant to be adaptive and cyclical. We started this plan by understanding baseline trends and then record findings. We established vision and goals as we moved forward with the plan and eventually create action items and timelines. Once this is completed, the plan will continue to be revisited every two years to determine success and fine-tune needs.

What do we know? We know that the Fairview community is diverse, primarily consists of renters, and has a 33% rate of disability. We know that revenue has been decreasing prior to the pandemic, and COVID-19 impacted the facilities ability to bounce back. We know annual events and programs is important to the community such as the free meal program, and the peak user time is between 1-3 pm. We know the playground and the main gym has the most use.

The team use a variety of outreach techniques including digital and in-person surveys, community advisory groups, monthly staff advisory groups, and presented to the Fairview Community Council to determine goals and needs of the community. Part of the outreach included a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). Strengths included staff service whereas weaknesses included community engagement and identity. Opportunities included building external funding and partnership and threats included staff fluctuation and perceived safety in and around the facility.

Goals were formed through the process of organizing feedback and was put into four main themes and created a roadmap for action items. Goals included modern facility, fostering community, partnerships, and programming.

We are currently launching the plan, we are no longer brainstorming but instead implementing action items and we are seeking a resolution of support from the Parks and Recreation Commission to keep moving forward.

Discussion

- When are appropriate times to use a strategic plan versus a master plan? – Master plans are long-term envisioning of how a space will be used while a strategic plan allows us to focus on a course of action. In this case, the Fairview Recreation Center is the first strategic plan that we have put together.

Resolution

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Looney** and seconded by **Commissioner Blair** PRC Resolution 2023-07 **Fairview Recreation Center Strategic Plan** was unanimously approved.

PRC 23-11: University Lake Park Habitat Restoration and Trail Upgrades
PRC Resolution 2023-08
Presented by Taylor Keegan

Taylor Keegan, Park Planner, presented an update on University Lake Park Habitat Restoration and Trail Upgrades. We are proposing a series of improvements including habitat restoration and improving trail circulation at University Lake Park in the UMed district. In 2018, a plan was approved, and a common theme of that plan was that University Lake was being loved to death.

In 2023, we want to do the following work, retain the natural character of the park and address resource management. Part of this includes revegetated a heavily eroded area near sensitive bird-nesting habitat and will be completed by our Youth Employment in Parks team. This work is funded by voter-supported bonds as well as funds that Anchorage Park Foundation has procured.

Natural resource restoration is focused on the area where the trail comes down the south peninsula as it has experience heavy erosion and has high incidents of negative pet and wildlife interactions. We aim to set people up for success, so they don't accidentally have these negative encounters.

Concerning wayfinding we plan to use map kiosks to highlight the on and off leash dog trails and provide awareness of where they are on the trail system. This area is easy to get lost in and we want to show how folks can connect to other trails.

Discussion

- Is it free-ranging dogs that has created the erosion? – Yes, that is part of it. There are two peninsulas that jut out and suffers from erosion because it is a popular ball-throwing area.
- I don't want to fight against nature, but if this is natural erosion why should we focus resources on it? – The erosion is a combination of beavers removing trees, humans trampling vegetations, and dogs playing fetch. Because this was an old gravel pit that was filled in when the Chester Creek trail was diverted through the area it is suffering greater because it is sitting right at water level.
- Would this be on the park bond next year? – No, we already have the funding for this as a combination of voter-supported bonds and funds procured by APF.
- What is the price tag? - \$46K for revegetating this area and \$100K for maintenance and trail improvements.
- Is it legal for people to chuck balls into the water? – There is no code against it, but we are focused on this area because of the proximity to grebes. With that said, there is another area where people can throw balls into the water.

Resolution

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Wamsganz** and seconded by **Commissioner Looney** PRC Resolution 2023-08 **University Lake Park Habitat Restoration and Trail Upgrades** was approved.

INFORMATION ITEMS

The Commissioners requested that the added information item that gave an overview of Anchorage Parks and Recreation budget be pushed to the May meeting. Mr. Braniff did share quickly an overview of the budget, but did not go into depth.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

- Is it possible to better spread out our Action Items? – There is quite a bit on the agenda tonight but many are time-sensitive because of the season, or some items are an administrative priority.

UPCOMING MEETING

The next meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission is scheduled for 6:00 p.m., on Thursday, May 11, 2023, at the Spenard Community Recreation Center.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion made by **Commissioner Vollendorf**, seconded by **Commissioner Wamsganz** and unanimously approved, the meeting adjourned at **8:15 p.m.**

MINUTES APPROVED this 11 day of May, 2023:



Brian Looney, Chair
Parks & Recreation Commission



Mike Braniff, Director
Parks & Recreation