



MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION



**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING**

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

The February 9, 2023, meeting was held in person at Spenard Community Recreation Center.

CALL TO ORDER

The February 9, 2023 regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order by Chair Grace Johnston at **6:04** p.m.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners present:

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

A quorum was achieved with eight members present.

Staff present:

- Steve Rafuse
- Mike Braniff
- Nicolette Dent
- Ellen Devine

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Looney** and seconded by **Commissioner Vollendorf**, the Agenda for the February 9, 2023 meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Kastning** and seconded by **Commissioner Blair**, the Minutes of the November 10, 2022 meeting was unanimously approved.

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Kastning** and seconded by **Commissioner Blair**, the Minutes of the January 22, 2023, special meeting was unanimously approved.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

Mike Braniff, Parks and Recreation director

1. **Special Meeting** – Thank you to everyone that was able to join for the January special meeting to help approve our final bond package. Our original 4million dollar bond had been trimmed down to 2 million dollars and with assembly support we were able to bring it back up to 4 million dollars again.
2. **Welcome to new commissioners** – Welcome Mary and Scott! Thank you for your willingness to serve on our commission.
3. **Annual Assembly Presentation** – Commissioner Johnston joined the Assembly Rules Committee to make a presentation about what the Parks and Rec Commission does. During the pandemic, a requirement had fallen to the wayside. The requirement is to meet with the Assembly once/year, and Grace met that requirement by joining this meeting.
4. **Music festival** – The Showdown Productions summer solstice festival was just permitted to occur at Cuddy Family Midtown Park. They plan on bringing in 40 acts and attracting 10K visitors.
5. **Assembly work session at the Greenhouse** – The Assembly toured our tropical greenhouse. It showed off one of our most valued and one of our most aging facilities that could use some TLC.
6. **Eagle River Deputy Director** – We welcomed a new member of the Parks and Recreation team, who will be taking on many of our projects in Eagle River.
7. **GIS Work Order System** – We are working to have a work order system to manage our workforce in the field. This system will help streamline work orders to individuals out in the field.
8. **Hilltop Capital Investments** – The ski lifts are aging and with the increase in use, Hilltop ski area is looking to improve/upgrade their ski lifts. We support them and look forward to seeing their planning.
9. **Olympic Gold Medalist** – Shani Davis is coming to Alaska to skate at the Cuddy Family Midtown Park.
10. **Staffing** – In the past couple of years, we have been challenged to get enough staff to deliver the services expected and needed. We are working hard to try to promote our upcoming jobs and we hope to fulfill our workforce needs.

APPEARANCE REQUESTS

Marc Grober (NECC) - The NECC has not endorse the Russian Jack Springs Singletrack. The NECC was outraged about the project because there is no way that mineralized trail should be routed through an environmentally sensitive spring. The MOA has not come to any community council with a project plan since the adoption of the Russian Jack Springs Park Master Plan. The Master Plan was also opposed by the NECC.

One concern is project idea versus project reality. While many individuals think it is a good idea, but no one has seen the project. NECC is trying to get the DNR grant application for review so we can better understand the details of the project. DNR did not open up the grant for review.

The staff report does not reflect the individuals who have opposed the project. The project is being rushed.

Marc Grober (Individual) – There was no dialogue with the community council. Instead, a mailer went out to let folks know that there is a community meeting, but there are only four people here.

In 2018, after the grant was approved. We found out that the project would destroy the environment of a protected area. This is in north Russian Jack which is a calving area for moose and bear live there. The NECC has not taken a position against bicycle trails in North Russian Jack, but we want to be involved.

Kristi Wood (Individual) – I am a member of the NECC and used to be the chair of that council. I am not representing the NECC. I was also at the same meetings that Marc attended. He has concerns that should be addressed, but the overwhelming majority of community members feel very positively about the singletrack trail system. As a frequent user, I support this plan.

ANCHORAGE PARK FOUNDATION

Diana Rhodes with the Anchorage Park Foundation shared two items.

1. **Connect Anchorage Map** – This is a vision map that shows all that Anchorage Park Foundation and Anchorage Parks and Recreation has championed. Some are projects looking for funding, and some are projects that have already come to fruition. We want to share what we are excited about and that we hope you will be excited about as well.

2. **Chugach State Park** – Chugach State Park visitation is growing, and the access points are often overwhelmed. The Assembly has asked for a vote of the people to support Chugach State Park and would allow improvements to be made to areas adjacent to the Park.

ACTION ITEM

PRC 23-02: Russian Jack Springs Park Singletrack Trails

Resolution No. 2023-02

Presented by Nicolette Dent, Park Planner

Steve Cleary, Alaska Trails Executive Director

Nicolette Dent, Anchorage Parks and Recreation planner, introduced the project and provided some background information. Singletrack trails are small, narrow, natural-surface trails that are already established at Hillside and Kincaid. About a year ago, we presented the 2022 update to the Russian Jack Master Plan to the commission. In that plan it describes and recommends that singletrack trails should be established in the north section of the park. This was recommended by community input from the Northeast Community Council, the Russian Jack Community Council, and the Community Advisory Group.

The north section of the park is a great fit for this proposal because it would help activate this area of the park and it avoids sensitive natural areas such as the springs and the wetlands. Since bringing the master plan to the commission, non-profit organization Alaska Trails, has gotten grant funding and developed a more detailed layout. They then brought the proposal to four community councils. It has received lots of support from numerous people.

Steve Cleary, executive director of Alaska Trails, then presented the proposed singletrack trails. We are pursuing funding and approval for this trail system in Russian Jack Park. Alaska Trails does use volunteer crews, paid crews, and teams up with the Youth Employment in Park crews. We have receive funding from Anchorage Park Foundation and Mighty Bikes, and would have two weeks of work from YEP if this project is approved.

This isn't our first time trying to build trails in Russian Jack Springs Park, but we worked with park staff on the master plan and feel encouraged to develop an asset that avoids wetlands and the springs. Presently, the proposed area is used by campers, and the hope is by increasing use in the area we can reduce the number of individuals camping. There are also numerous social trails in the area that will ease work as we can follow social trails and reduce cutting trees.

The proposed trail system is in the north section of the park. We have been working with Lee Bolling who happens to be both an engineer and a trail designer. The idea is to have

beginner trails and intermediate trails that take advantage of the downhill as well as a skills loop. These would stay out of the wetland areas that buffer Cartee fields.

We are trying to incorporate what has worked well in other projects including extensive wayfinding and information about the trails that folks are riding. We are also applying for a Recreational Trails grant through the State of Alaska and look forward to finding out about that in the future.

Discussion

Commissioner Kastning – Are the trails planned to be one-directional? No. They will be multi-directional. The plan is to have folks ride up the green and then down the blue.

Commissioner Kastning – There is an intersection, and coming from a skier perspective is there a concern for collision between users? I haven't heard of collisions in other areas that are similar. While there is a possibility, we are endeavoring to have crossings where users are going uphill and would be moving more slowly.

Commissioner Looney – It looks like you have done quite a bit of public outreach. While not everyone will be supportive of this project, I am supportive.

Commissioner Johnston – One concern I heard was about the wetlands and springs. Could you highlight that on the map? Yes, the springs are on the southside of the park and are not visible in this map. The area to the left of the trails is the wetlands.

Commissioner Blair – Does Alaska Trails and Anchorage Parks and Recreation already have a partnership? What are the costs, will the grants cover all the costs? Yes. The grants would cover everything (35K from APF, 8K from Mighty Bikes, 175K from Recreational Trail grant)

Mr. Rafuse – While we are bonding for projects in this park, the bond dollars are not being used for this project.

Commissioner Lange – Is this a revised map from what was originally given to the community councils? Some members of the community councils seemed to be worried about the impact on wetlands. The gentleman was referring to a previous project, this adjusted map does address his concerns. The trails will not go through wetlands.

Resolution

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Looney** and seconded by **Commissioner Kastning**, PRC Resolution No. 2023-02 **Russian Jack Springs Park Singletrack Trails** was approved.

Voting record for PRC Resolution 2023-02:

- **In favor:** Commissioners Blair, Graham, Johnston, Kastning, Lange, Looney, Vollendorf, and Wamsganz
- **Opposed:** None
- **Abstained:** None
- **Absent:** Commissioner Rinner

INFORMATION ITEMS

PRC 23-03: Kincaid Bluff Erosion Update

Presented by Steve Rafuse, Parks Superintendent

Steve Rafuse, Parks Superintendent, presented an update on erosion on the Kincaid Bluff. The area we are focusing on includes the pond, the motocross area, and the sand dunes. This area was used as a dump after the 1964 earthquake, then the area was backfilled. In 1980, the slope was reshaped, but had not been revegetated. In 1990, you can see that the area had become revegetated. In 2018, we had an earthquake that created lateral cracks along the bluff. We applied for FEMA relief and are still working through that process to restore the area. However, due to the record precipitation this past year the pond doubled its size and was only five feet away from the edge of the bluff. We had monitored this over the summer, and contracted a crew to pump the water out of the pond.

Unfortunately, as the pond expanded it blew out the bluff. Luckily, we are still working with FEMA and are reworking the project to revise the scope of work. As of now, we would fill in the cracks and regrade the steeper side of the slope and then identify plants to restabilize the bluff.

For the general public it has little to no impact, and we have met with the motocross community to address how it will affect parking.

PRC 23-04: Overview of Parks and Recreation Operations 2023

Presented by Steve Rafuse, Parks Superintendent

Steve Rafuse, Parks Superintendent, gave an overview of Parks and Recreation operations for new and existing commissioners. We manage 11K acres of land, 225 parks, 250 miles of trails, 2 indoor recreation centers, 2 outdoor recreation centers, and 5 pools. The department has two main sections—the park division and the recreation division. The recreation division has indoor and outdoor recreation and manages our events such as ski class, solstice events, etc. The parks division includes planning, maintenance, horticulture, healthy spaces, tree crew, and admin.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Handbook – Ellen is working on a new commissioner handbook and should have it read within a week.

Budget Review Committee – A member of the commission would like to form a committee that would include 3-4 volunteers. We would also need to establish a scope and goal of the committee. Commissioner Graham will speak on the suggested committee at the March meeting.

Roberts Rules of Order – This is recommended but not required reading. We are a more informal commission, but these are the general standards for commissions and boards.

New Chair and Vice Chair – We are looking to elect a new chair and vice chair in the March meeting.

UPCOMING MEETING

The next meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission is scheduled for 6:00 p.m., on Thursday, March 9, 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 ____ day of _____, 2023:

Grace Johnston, Chair
Parks & Recreation Commission

Mike Braniff, Director
Parks & Recreation

