



Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska  
**Parks & Recreation Department**

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## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** December 10th, 2015

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**To:** Parks & Recreation Commission

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**Cc:** Josh Durand, Parks Superintendent

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**From:** Steve Rafuse, Park Planner

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**Project:** **PRC 15-22: Elderberry Park Master Plan**

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### INTRODUCTION

Elderberry Park is a 1.46 acre neighborhood use park located in the Bootlegger Cove neighborhood in downtown Anchorage. The park serves both the local neighborhood as well as the larger community and is a popular tourist destination and access point to the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail. Elderberry Park features a 2-5 and 5-12 play area, a small parking lot, walkways and a central plaza. Elderberry Park is also the home of the historic Oscar Anderson house.

In 2012, the Anchorage Park Foundation was awarded \$95,000 in state legislative grant funds for improvements to Elderberry Park. Anchorage Parks and Recreation worked with a committee comprised of local park users to identify and prioritize improvements at the park. Through this process, the committee identified several potential improvements to existing facilities. However, several issues such as poor circulation and signage, aging facilities, and conflicts between park and trail users remained unresolved. A key take-away from this process was that the park would benefit from additional planning, community engagement, and investment.

In 2015, Anchorage Parks and Recreation partnered with Earthscape, a local planning and landscape architecture firm, to begin a master planning and public involvement process. The result is a Master Plan that addresses issues and concerns and establishes a framework for future development.

### PURPOSE

The Elderberry Park Master Plan is intended to guide development of Elderberry Park over the next 20 years. More specifically, the purpose of the Master Plan is to:

- Improve circulation within the park to minimize conflicts between park and trail users
- Facilitate safe access to the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail
- Improve the visibility and historic context of the Oscar Anderson House
- Provide a park that encourages positive uses and discourages undesirable activity
- Improve interpretive and wayfinding signage
- Provide amenities that meet the needs of a wide range of park users
- Create a tool for future fundraising

### PLANNING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement is an important component of any planning process. To ensure that the Elderberry Park Master Plan aligns with the desires of the community, a public involvement process was led by Anchorage Parks and Recreation and Earthscape.

**Outreach:** In January 2015, the planning team began outreach with a presentation at the South Addition Community Council. The planning team also reached out to the Downtown Community Council as well and local businesses. Social media, such as NextDoor, Facebook, and the P&R website was also utilized to reach a broader audience.

**Advisory Group:** The planning team hosted three meetings with an advisory group. The primary role of the advisory group was to assist the planning team in reviewing public input and to develop recommendations to be included in the Master Plan. The advisory group consists of a wide range of interest including park neighbors, condo association board members, local business owners, Municipal Planning staff, historic preservation interest, as well as a representative from the Anchorage Downtown Partnership.

**Public Workshops:** The planning team hosted two public workshops. The workshops were held in February and March with approximately 20 members of the community participating in each workshop. The workshops provided members of the public an opportunity to provide input and feedback that was used to inform the development of the Master Plan.

## **THE MASTER PLAN**

The planning team worked with stakeholders to identify key issues and prioritize desired improvements. The following section provides a summary of the issues and concerns, and the proposed recommendations for future development at Elderberry Park.

### ***Issues and Concerns:***

Although Elderberry Park is relatively small, it remains one of Anchorage's most popular parks. The presence of the Oscar Anderson House and the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail creates a significant amount of visitor and local traffic. While high park use is generally considered to be a positive, the mix of casual neighborhood park use and high speed through traffic has created significant conflicts within the park. This issue is furthered magnified by a lack of clear signage and wayfinding.

In addition to the issues of circulation, Elderberry Park has lacked investment in recent years. The plaza and playground equipment is worn and the walkways do not meet current ADA standards. Below is a summary of issues and concerns addressed in this Master Plan.

#### *Summary of issues and concerns:*

- Trail users traveling through the park at high speeds create a safety hazard
- Open space is underutilized and divided by the walkway accessing the Coastal Trail
- Walkways do not meet ADA requirements
- The plaza is worn down and does not serve its intended function
- The playground is at the end of its lifecycle and in need of upgrades
- Wayfinding and interpretive signage is limited
- The Oscar Anderson House is hidden from view
- The restroom building has been closed for years with no future action plan
- Amenities and facilities are in need of upgrades
- The parking lot is used by downtown employees and other non-park users

### ***Recommendations:***

The recommendations identified in the Elderberry Park Master Plan provide for active, accessible and healthy year-round recreation. The preferred alternative recommends a new alignment for the access point to the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail at the end of M Street. By removing high speed through-traffic from the park, conflicts will be eliminated and the park will serve its intended function as a neighborhood park and open space. Recognizing that Elderberry Park is also a popular tourist destination, the preferred alternative provides improved viewpoints and interpretive information as well as improves the visibility of the Oscar Anderson House.

# ELDERBERRY PARK

ANCHORAGE, AK



**Recommendations (continued):**

**Playground:** The playground should be upgraded and expanded slightly to provide added play value, improved ADA accessibility, and updated “fall” surfacing materials. The playground should remain intimate, providing primarily for neighborhood needs.

**Viewing Areas - Terraced Seating Area & Overlook:** A terraced seating area utilizes the steep western slope to create a series of grassy seating areas and excellent viewing opportunities. The terraces would be easily visible from above and from 5th Avenue as well as the Coastal Trail which should limit the occurrence of undesirable behavior.

A dedicated overlook located in the central portion of the park provides a focal point for park visitors. The overlook should include amenities that enrich park users experience such as interpretive panels, seating, art displays, and telescopes. The overlook should be located such that it offers unimpeded views of the inlet and mountains beyond. It should have information that identifies landmarks in the view as well as the key features of the park. It should also provide orientation to the Oscar Anderson House so that visitors are aware of the nearby location of the museum. The overlook also provides a good location for a temporary or permanent art display. Any permanent art displayed within the park should be appropriate, context sensitive and reflect the identity of the park.

**Open Space:** The large open grassy area between the overlook and the Oscar Anderson House Museum should remain open for passive recreation and picnicking. The open space should maintain the existing shape, grade and vegetation; and should be free of plants, other than lawn and existing trees. Additional amenities such as picnic tables and park benches should be thoughtfully placed as not to obstruct movement.

**Coastal Trail Access at M Street:** Access to the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail is removed from the park and re-located to the north end of M Street. To accommodate trail users, the sidewalk along the west side of M Street should be widened to approximately 10 feet. This may require the removal of approximately 4-5 curbside parking spaces at the eastern end of the park boundary. “Sharrows” can also be added along M Street to further accommodate bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

*M Street access is preferable for the following reasons:*

- It completely eliminates conflicts associated with trail access and internal park use.
- It provides better sight distance of oncoming traffic for trail users.
- The reduction in conflicts and improvement of sight distance should increase safety for both park and trail users.
- It preserves more of the park for park use instead of circulation use.
- The trail would bring more people by the Oscar Anderson House Museum, improving its visibility to the public and possibly increasing visitation to the museum.

**Oscar Anderson House Museum:** The Oscar Anderson House Museum is a key feature of Elderberry Park and provides an important glimpse into Anchorage's past. Efforts should be made to improve the house's visibility, provide more historical context, and give the house a more prominent place within the park. The plan proposes the following improvements:

- Safe, maintained summer/winter access to the front of the house.
- Safe ADA access to the basement at the back of the house
- Reconfigured gardens that are indicative of the time period of habitation
- Improve signage and wayfinding to direct visitors to the Museum House
- Update interpretive information and kiosks
- Continue to monitor and address any issues of drainage in the area to ensure the long-term sustainability of the house

- A gathering area near or at the house as a possible location where small events and fundraisers could be held. Anything appended directly to the house could compromise the historical status of the building and should be avoided.

**Walkways:** Walkways should be re-configured to facilitate ease of movement and minimize bicycle/pedestrian conflicts. The 5th Avenue/M Street intersection will remain as the primary entry point for pedestrians traveling from downtown. From this entrance, a 6-8 feet wide pathway should connect directly to the main plaza and overlook. This main walkway will likely require a short series of steps to accommodate existing grades.

ADA access should be provided from the 5th Avenue/ M Street entrance to the park via a meandering trail connecting to the playground plaza with all slopes less than 5%. The meandering trail could travel through a small botanical garden, featuring indigenous plant materials and providing additional points of interest to visitors. A second 6-10 foot walkway will connect the parking lot on 5th Avenue to the overlook, plaza and playground. Additional pathways should be developed to connect the main plaza and overlook to the terraced seating area.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

The Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department recommends approval of the Elderberry Park Master Plan. The Master Plan is the product of a public involvement process which included outreach and presentations at the South Addition community council, two public workshops and three advisory group meetings.

The Master Plan has received broad support by the South Addition Community Council. The Department recommends that the Parks and Recreation Commission pass the proposed resolution in support of the Elderberry Park Master Plan.



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**PRC RES NO. 2015-13**  
**Elderberry Park Master Plan**

WHEREAS, the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission serves in an advisory capacity to both the Mayor and the Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission has the responsibility and duty to provide for the long term vision of our park system by ensuring that a balance of parks, natural resources, and recreation facilities provides for the health, welfare, and safety of all residents of the Anchorage Bowl; and

WHEREAS, the Elderberry Park master plan provides a 20 year vision that will address issues and guide future development at the park; and

WHEREAS, the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department hosted two public workshops and worked with an advisory group to assist the Department in identifying and prioritizing desired improvements for Elderberry Park; and

WHEREAS, the improvements proposed in the master plan are based on community and stakeholder input and have been vetted by the advisory group through deliberation and consensus; and

WHEREAS, the improvements proposed in the master plan have received support and approval from the South Addition Community Council;

WHEREAS, the improvements identified in the master plan include upgraded play equipment, ADA compliant walkways, a plaza and overlook, a terraced seating area, improved visibility of the Oscar Anderson House, and a re-routing of the Coastal Trail access to M Street;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission approves the master plan submitted by the Department and the advisory group for Elderberry Park.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission this 10th day of December, 2015.

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Chair  
Parks and Recreation Commission

ATTEST:

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John Rodda, Director  
Parks & Recreation Department