



**MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE**  
**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION**



**MINUTES OF THE  
REGULAR MEETING**

**December 12, 2024**

The December 12, 2024, meeting was held in person at the Spenard Community Recreation Center

**CALL TO ORDER**

The December 12, 2024, regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order by Chair Brian Looney at **6:04 p.m.**

**ROLL CALL**

Commissioners present:

- Commissioner Edwin Blair
- Commissioner Brian Looney
- Commissioner Mary Vollendorf
- Commissioner GeorgeAnne Sprinkle
- Commissioner Rob Earl

A quorum was achieved with **five** members present.

Staff present:

- Taylor Keegan
- Shanna Gamble
- Nicolette Dent
- Emily Kokotan
- Ellen Devine

**APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Upon a motion duly made by **Commissioner Looney** and seconded by **Commissioner Blair**, the Agenda for the December 12, 2024, meeting was amended to include Action Item PRC 24-14: Dedication of Helen Louise McDowell Sanctuary for Park and

Recreational Purposes and to move the Non-Agenda Appearance Requests section to follow the action items.

Upon a motion duly made by **Commissioner Looney** and seconded by **Commissioner Blair**, the amended Agenda for the December 12, 2024, meeting was unanimously approved.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Upon motion duly made by **Commissioner Vollendorf** and seconded by **Commissioner Blair** the Minutes of the October 10 and October 23, 2024, meetings were unanimously approved.

### **DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS**

Director's Comments section was provided by Taylor Keegan, Parks Superintendent

1. **Welcoming of New Commissioners:** We would like to welcome our two newest commissioners to their first regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission – GeorgeAnne Sprinkle and Rob Earl.
2. **Indigenous Place Names StoryMap:** A new StoryMap develop by our partners at the Anchorage Parks Foundation has recently been released. It highlights the Indigenous Place Names and the stories behind them in Anchorage.
3. **Upcoming PRC Items:** Coming up in January, we plan on presenting two action items – The Taku Lake Playground Improvements and the Eastchester Master Plan.
4. **Trail Grooming Break:** Due to reduced snow, we are taking a break from grooming our trails. However, we are continuing to hot mop the ice, so get out there to enjoy skating.
5. **Healthy Spaces Team Receive an Award:** The Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness gave our Healthy Spaces team an award for partner of the year.
6. **Anchorage Hockey Association:** Hosting their annual Winterfest event, which includes over 70 youth hockey games.
7. **Ski Outreach:** Our ski outreach program has received 10 applications, 8 of which are from Title I Schools. This program brings school groups to Russian Jack Springs Park and provides a free skiing opportunity including all equipment and transportation.
8. **Skate Pop-up:** We are starting new ice-skating pop-up events this winter. The first four will take place at Chanshtnu Muldoon Park and will include skate-assist seals, ice skate for kids, and hot chocolate.
9. **Adult and Toddler Ski Classes:** We are still running our Adult and Youth ski classes even with reduced amounts of snow.
10. **Spenard and Fairview After School Programs:** The Fairview and Spenard Recreation Centers are introducing new after school programming that will provide a safe space for kids looking for a place to go after school.

11. **Ceramics Classes:** The Fairview Recreation Center has new pottery wheels and is hosting ceramics classes.
12. **Fee Increases:** There will be a slight fee increase in the upcoming year. The fee increase will be minimal and will provide increase funding for our recreation opportunities.
13. **Winter Solstice Festival:** On Saturday, December 21 from 5-8 PM, our recreation team will be hosting our annual Winter Solstice celebration at Cuddy Family Midtown Park. There will be sleigh rides, ice skating, opportunities to visit Santa and his reindeer, and food trucks.

## **ANCHORAGE PARK FOUNDATION**

There was no report from the Anchorage Parks Foundation

## **ACTION ITEMS**

**PRC 24-14: PRC 24-14 Dedication of the Helen Louise McDowell Sanctuary  
PRC Resolution 2024-14**  
Presented by Nicolette Dent

Nicolette Dent, Anchorage Parks and Recreation Park Planner, presented the proposed dedication of the Helen Louise McDowell Sanctuary for parks and recreational purposes by Assembly Ordinance. On December 17, the Assembly will have hearing on the same topic.

Helen Louise McDowell Sanctuary is located south of Tudor Rd. along the Seward Highway. This 14-acre group of parcels became a park in the early 2000s when a group of neighbors worked with the Great Land Trust to fundraise and procure the parcels for long-term park use. There is currently a 1-mile boardwalk loop through the park and has 3 pedestrian access points.

Currently, Anchorage Parks and Recreation manages and owns the property. We acquired it from the Great Land Trust in 2006. The Great Land Trust does maintain a conservation easement in the park for additional protections. We are proposing a resolution of support to dedicate this park.

## **Commissioner Questions/Comments**

Commissioner Looney: This already acts as a park and is managed as a park, correct?

Yes. It functions as a park but is not currently dedicated for long-term use. A park dedication gives it additional long-term protections by ordinance.

Commissioner Blair: Does this create additional maintenance needs from Anchorage Parks and Recreation?

No. There would be no additional maintenance needs. It would simply dedicate the park by ordinance.

**Public Testimony:**

Meg Zalatel – Midtown Assembly Member, sponsor of the ordinance

- There is an impotence in Midtown to ensure that we can protect our green spaces along the highway. It is an important community priority to maintain a buffer between the highway and neighborhoods.
- These green spaces also provide access to the outdoors for those living in the middle of town.
- It also provides some level of protection from DOT clearcutting these areas. It won't stop it necessarily but adds an additional level of protection.

Upon motion made by **Commissioner Sprinkle**, seconded by **Commissioner Blair** and unanimously approved by commissioners the resolution was passed.

**NON-AGENDA APPEARANCE REQUESTS**

**Kara Norby and Natalie Snyder – Arctic Diving Club**

- Here to address the two new diving boards at West High School. Until about a month ago, we had been able to use both boards, but recently it has been placed in an up position and is designated as closed. We are here to ask why that board is currently closed and to get a commitment to reopen the board.
- The Arctic Diving Club was not able to regain the access to use the 1-meter and 3-meter boards at Bartlett and have compromised to use the West Pool.
- We have been told that either the boards are unsafe, or we can gain access to the board if our Club pays a \$50/hr. fee to use the board.

**Commissioner Comments:**

Commissioner Looney: Is the board that is not able to be used a 1-meter or 3-meter board?

Kara Norby: It is a 1-meter board. Both boards at West High School are 1-meter boards.

Commissioner Vollendorf: As a commission, we would not know the reasons why the board is off-limits, correct? That would be within the Department's purview.

Taylor Keegan: Correct. At this point we are information gathering.

**Cherie Curry – Self**

- I am the co-owner of Winfluence Strategies and am coming tonight to address this week’s headlines. Not all facts are in the newspapers, and I am here to give a different perspective.
- I represent John Haxby, and just want to say that Marathon, DOT, Railroad, and the Governor are not the bad guys.
- The problem is the lack of communication and the misrepresentation. We don’t have a trail problem we have a communication problem.
- I encourage the Parks and Recreation Department as well as the commission to not become so passionate about something that your ears close.

**Commissioner Comments:**

Commissioner Earl: It seems like your clients are against the trail? Correct?

Cherie Curry: My client is not against the trail. There are certain areas of the trail that would be an imminent domain situation. We need to look at the properties, meet with the railroad and DOT, and not just say ‘this is how it is.’ There are some legalities to consider.

Commissioner Earl: Does your client prefer a route that goes through the Fish Creek Estuary?

Cherie Curry: My clients prefer that their fences and trees aren’t torn down when there are alternative routes.

Commissioner Earl: The alternative routes are much more expensive. Correct?

Cherie Curry: They are. There are ways to get that money.

Commissioner Looney: For commissioners that do not know about this project, this trail project has been in the planning process for over two years, and we have had a presentation about this at a previous meeting.

**Bryan Baldwin – Self**

- I am a high school swim official and father of several swimmers. We addressed the issue of the Bartlett Diving Boards back in October. At that time, the Councilman Hunsaker report was given to us at the last minute. Since that time, we have reviewed the report and tried to engage with Councilman Hunsaker to get some clarifying data and address the area we believe to be lacking.

- The report was commissioned by the Municipality. The report did do a deep dive on all the diving-specific code, but one thing that wasn't thoroughly addressed was the placement of the starting blocks regarding the boards. No USA Swim officials were consulted, and the report did find that it was unorthodox (not offset between the blocks) and atypical to industry standards. Meaning it did not follow the Model Aquatic Health Code.
- The Model Aquatic Health is a national standard as well as the code that the State of Alaska uses to assess pools. The Municipality of Anchorage is not inspected by the state.
- The report says that the 'the code provides good recommendations but is not strictly enforced in Alaska currently.' It is the code used by the state, but the Municipality does not follow those rules.

**Commissioner Comments:**

No Commissioner comments/questions.

**Joey Caterinichio – Central Area Swimming**

- I'm here to address the Bartlett Pool diving boards. I missed the October meeting but sent a packet of materials I'd like to discuss.
- The October special meeting was put together in a way that I don't believe you had all the information necessary to decide.
- As a swimming official I was asked to make a technical report concerning safety regarding hosting swim meet.
- At this point, we cannot operate. There are 28 sanctioned swim meets scheduled this year between high school and USA swimming. USA Swimming insurance has already told us that our sanction is in jeopardy.
- We cannot officiate swim meets because the monitor (scoreboard) is blocked by the high dive. We can no longer have relay takeoff swimming unless we installed high dives over each starting block, because right now it is unequitable.
- We were told it was a replacement but instead there was a significant change that impacted our community.

**Commissioner Comments:**

Commissioner Earl: The report gave the options to either leave as is or to remove a single board. Correct?

Joey Caterinichio: Yes. As of right now, leaving as is would mean we cannot operate. We could go down to the original footprint, a low-profile high dive.

Commissioner Looney: Another commissioner and I attended a site visit prior to the meeting, but is there a meet that we could attend?

Joey Caterinichio: Yes. We are hosting two meets in January and would love to have all of you. To have you see the limitations would be beneficial.

Commissioner Blair: In the report, a recommendation was made to remove one and stagger the other between the blocks. With the new diving board would it still obstruct the way you run meets?

Joey Caterinichio: You are right that the new one is quite large, and I believe the preference is to keep them in pairs. But if it was staggered, we should not be obstructed.

## INFORMATION ITEMS

### **PRC 24-15: PRC 24-15 Youth Employment in Parks Overview**

Presented by Emily Kokotan, Youth Employment in Parks Coordinator

Emily Kokotan, the Youth Employment in Parks Coordinator, presented an overview of projects that were completed by the YEP crew in 2024. Youth Employment in Parks is a 10-week paid job for teens in Anchorage to complete park improvements projects and is a fantastic first job for 16–19-year-olds.

- **Wesleyan Connector Trail:** Training project for the teens to improve the tread of a muddy trail.
- **KFQD Bike Path:** The community was looking for a small bike loop in KFQD, and the YEP teens worked with a contractor to build a small bike path.
- **Cuddy Rain Garden:** Installed and planted a rain garden to improve drainage, built a gabion wall, revegetated a slope as well as restored a streambank.
- **Hillstrand Pond:** The teens worked on bank restoration and the installation of an elevated light-penetrating platform. Lots of positive feedback to the platform.
- **Tree planting:** Planted OVER 8,000 trees and plants throughout the city.
- **Government Hill Connector Trail:** Connecting Sunset Park to Alderwood Park, it was originally a footpath, but the teens were able to build 1,200 feet of trail.
- **Hanshew to Springhill path:** Built a path using donated gravel.

YEP is also super fun! Monday to Thursday, the crews are working hard, but on Friday we do recreation education days to learn more about recreating on public lands and being stewards.

## COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Blair: I would like to address that the October special meeting regarding the Bartlett Diving Boards was mishandled. I do not believe we were prepared correctly and were asked to do something unheard of for our commission – to make a resolution on the spot in a heated room. Is there a process to rescind or modify the resolution, or could we consider revisiting this matter on our next agenda?

Taylor Keegan: The director and the chair make the agenda, and at this point we are aware of your feelings on this topic.

Commissioner Vollendorf: Dimond Alumni got the money for these boards. Did the State of Alaska just write a check to Dimond Alumni?

Shanna Gamble: In this case, yes. Dimond Alumni applied for a legislative grant and received the money. Typically, groups like Anchorage Park Foundation may apply for a legislative grant and then works with Anchorage Parks and Recreation to manage the money and the project.

Commissioner Vollendorf: Is this an isolated instance or has this happened before?

Shanna Gamble: During my time here, this is an isolated instance.

Upon motion made by **Commissioner Blair**, seconded by **Commissioner Earl** and approved by a two thirds majority of present commissioners a motion to rescind resolution PRC 24-13: Bartlett Pool Diving Boards was passed.

## **UPCOMING MEETING**

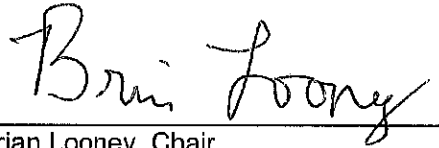
The next meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission is scheduled for 6:00 p.m., on Thursday, January 9, 2024, at the Spenard Community Recreation Center.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

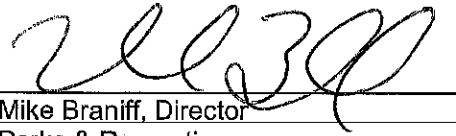
Upon motion made by **Commissioner Vollendorf** seconded by **Commissioner Looney** and unanimously approved, the meeting adjourned at **7:54 p.m.**



MINUTES APPROVED this <sup>9<sup>th</sup></sup> day of January, 2024:2025:



Brian Looney, Chair  
Parks & Recreation Commission



Mike Braniff, Director  
Parks & Recreation