

Anchorage Disc Golf Site Selection & Management Study

1st Advisory Group Meeting

August 21, 2012

Location:

USKH Main Office - 2515 A Street, Anchorage, AK 99503

Time: 5:30 to 7:30 PM

Attendees:

Tim Kosednar, Disc Golfer

Mark McCaffery, Anchorage Parks & Recreation

Jim Winchester, Parks & Rec Commission

Josh Durand, Anchorage Parks & Recreation

Darrin Haycke, Volunteer

Mackenze Donegan, Volunteer & Disc Golfer

David Wigglesworth, Volunteer

Ken Hinchey, Neighbor

Mike Hvelsman, Neighbor

Geoff Wright, Disc Golfer

Members of USKH Inc., consultant (Terry Schoenthal, Kim Graham)

Background:

The Parks and Recreation Department closed Westchester Disc Golf course for the summer of 2012 to rehabilitate areas damaged from heavy course use. The seasonal closure prompted a public forum by the disc golf community that demonstrated an interest in additional courses throughout Anchorage to accommodate the demand for this popular recreational activity. The topic was discussed at the May 10th Parks & Recreation Commission meeting where concerns regarding disc golf activity and how it conflicts with other park uses were brought up by neighbors of Westchester Lagoon and the disc golf community. Parks & Recreation decided to establish an advisory group to seek a resolution to Westchester disc golf course concerns and to find suitable locations for additional disc golf courses.

The advisory group is tasked with (2) goals:

1. To define management expectations for disc golf in Municipal parks.
2. Meet the demand for Disc Golf by identifying locations for new courses in Municipal Parks

The advisory group is comprised of Parks & Recreation Commissioners, the Parks & Recreation Department, neighbors of Westchester Lagoon, and local disc golf players. Parks & Recreation has contracted with USKH to facilitate the advisory group meetings

and to develop the documentation necessary to reach the group's goals. Four to six meetings are planned to create a design and management guide that will identify key criteria for the location of disc golf facilities and recommend management strategies for how these facilities can be operated on Municipal land.

Meeting Summary:

Purpose and Goals:

The first advisory group meeting was held on Tuesday, August 21st at USKH. The meeting began with a discussion about the purpose and goals of the advisory group. Group members generally agreed that the purpose of the group is to advise Parks & Recreation by:

- Identifying issues associated with disc golf facilities in Municipal parks
- Developing criteria to inform the site selection of new disc golf courses
- Recommending management expectations to ensure disc golf activity is a sustainable part of the Municipal park system

Issues:

With this introduction, the group identified and discussed current issues associated with disc golf, (both positive and negative), based on experience at Westchester Lagoon. Issues included:

- *Parking:* As a result of popularity, parking lots supporting disc golf at Westchester Lagoon were inadequate for the number of users. Other park users contributed to parking issues, but as a result of the lack of parking, spill-over parking occurred into the surrounding neighborhood. A lesson from this experience is that provision of adequate parking is an important consideration.
- *Trash:* Due to heavy use, it was difficult to stay ahead of trash removal needs for the disc golf course. Additionally, general littering was common on the course. This impacted the aesthetic quality of the course, the adjacent trail, and the neighborhood and the rest of the park.
- *Overuse:* Environmental degradation has occurred as a result of overuse, and includes loss of grass cover, damage to trees, and overall property damage. This issue has been exacerbated by the "stacking" of users, where groups of players are waiting to play.
- *Trail Conflicts and Safety:* The current course is adjacent, or sometimes overlapping the Chester Creek Trail, and as a result, there is a high level of traffic and congestion. This overcrowding has resulted in trail conflicts and also

has added to queuing of players. Road crossing and culverts were also included as items that have contributed to trail conflicts.

- *Loss of Recreational Opportunities:* With the temporary shutdown of the West Chester course, it was observed that not having disc golf was a loss of recreational opportunities in the community. Several advisory board members noted that there are a limited number of activities for young people to enjoy in Anchorage parks, and disc golf is one of them. It was noted that there is a growing demand to play, and a low supply of courses, which has contributed to the overcrowding at West Chester.
- *Access:* The West Chester course has a high level of access. It is located on a high-use trail system, with convenient parking areas, and is located in a moderately dense part of Anchorage. This location it affords it access by foot, bike, and car. This convenience in location has contributed to its' popularity and has resulted in it being a "happening place". The proximity of restaurants, shopping, and mixed housing also adds to its attractiveness.
- *Natural Features:* The course and surrounding area includes the lagoon, forested areas, an active salmon stream, nice views, sunny open areas, protection from wind and a generally pleasant climate. It was expressed that these natural qualities have also added to the popularity of the course.
- *Course Rotation and Seasonal Use:* Closure of the Westchester Lagoon course has promoted the regrowth of grass in the eroded areas and has also greatly reduced trash accumulation along the course. Several members of the group noted that rotation of holes within a course or identification of alternate courses for rotation can reverse environmental impacts associated with overuse.
- *Users:* Disc golf users are a diverse group, ranging from Boy Scouts to retirees. Advisory board members noted that it is dominated by a younger demographic, but does appeal to people of differing ages and skill ranges. In terms of management, this group does not have the constituency that other user groups in the Anchorage area have, for example, the Nordic Ski Club. Representation, outreach, input, and social networking for the purposes of disc golf management will be discussed in future meetings. Additionally, disc golf is a free sport and consequently appeals to low income or younger users.
- *Alcohol:* Underage drinking and drunk driving has been observed in the West Chester course area in conjunction with disc golf. This safety hazard will merit further consideration in subsequent meetings. Conversely, it has also been observed that disc golf players have displaced inebriates within the course area. This was noted as a positive outcome for Westchester Lagoon. Additionally, restrooms were suggested as an appropriate amenity to be paired with a disc golf course as restrooms or portable toilets were not readily accessible at Westchester Lagoon.
- *Course Characteristics:* Disc golf players noted positive attributes of a course include changing topography, variable distance and openings, and a smaller

scale of course. These characteristics appeal to the diversity in skillsets of local players, and appeals to a range of developing abilities. Overall, a broad spectrum of course characteristics would best serve the varying group of disc golfers.

Defining management expectations for disc golf activity in Municipal parks was brought up by several group members throughout the discussion. The topic will be addressed in detail at a later meeting following the establishment of site selection criteria.

Next Steps

The meeting closed with a discussion about schedule, next steps and community outreach. The dates of the next three meetings were established and will be held at USKH on September 4th, September 18th and October 2nd. At the next meeting, the advisory group will be tasked with defining site selection criteria. While the advisory group will generate the criteria list, Parks & Recreation and USKH will help drive the discussion by providing examples of how other municipalities have determined site selection.

Outreach

The Anchorage Disc Golf Site Selection and Management Study Advisory Group schedule, meeting minutes, and other relevant documents will be posted on the Parks & Recreation project website. Parks & Recreation will notify the public of the project website via Facebook and a distribution list from the recent public process concerning the Westchester Disc Golf course seasonal closure.