

TIKISHLA PARK

MASTER PLAN

October 19, 2016 (5:30-7:30pm)
Advisory Group Meeting #1
Anchorage Unitarian Universalist Fellowship



ADVISORY GROUP MEETING #1 MINUTES

Overview

Anchorage Parks and Recreation is developing a master plan for Tikishla Park. The master plan will provide a framework for development of facilities, playing fields and other park assets over the next 20 years. To ensure that the master plan aligns with the desires of the community, Parks and Recreation is working with a stakeholder advisory group.

The Tikishla Park master plan advisory group was formed to provide input and recommendations that will help guide Parks and Recreation in the development of the master plan. Advisory group members represent a variety of interests including neighbors, user groups, natural resource managers, community councils, non-profit organizations, and community leaders. These key stakeholders provide a range of perspectives and first-hand knowledge that will inform the process and ensure that future upgrades meet the needs and expectations of the community.

The first advisory group meeting for the Tikishla Park master plan took place on October 19th, 2016 at the Anchorage Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Airport Heights.

Attendees

- Ed Brewer, Trail Watch & Park Neighbor
- Kyle Cunningham, MOA Watershed Mgmt & Park Neighbor
- Carlos Gomez, Scotty Gomez Foundation
- Sharron Harris, Airport Heights Community Council
- Jonny Hayes, Park Neighbor
- Heather Ireland, Rogers Park Community Council
- Zach Keer, ARC of Anchorage
- Edith McKee, Park Neighbor
- Steve Rafuse, MOA Parks and Recreation
- Kalen Saxton, Airport Heights Community Council
- Amy Solberg, City View Little League
- Representative Geran Tarr, Alaska Legislature

Meeting Synopsis

The meeting began with a welcome from MOA Parks and Recreation planner Steve Rafuse. During this time, Steve highlighted the meeting agenda and provided an overview of the master planning process. This included a discussion of the role of the advisory group and why Parks and Recreation is developing a master plan for Tikishla Park at this time.

Steve explained that this master planning effort was initiated in response to a request by the Airport Heights and Rogers Park Community Councils to formalize the community's position on a major tennis facility proposed for the area of Tikishla Park near the intersection of Northern Lights Blvd and UAA Drive. Steve also explained that the most recent master plan for Tikishla Park was done in 1998 and that the park is due for a master plan update.

Steve described that the purpose of a park master plan is to provide a 20 year vision for the park that illustrates community priorities. The master plan is intended to identify current and future needs, address issues and concerns, and establish a framework for future management, maintenance, and development consistent with a 20-year vision for the park. The master plan also serves as an effective tool in fundraising and grant writing for future park improvements.

Steve stated that the primary goal of the meeting was to listen and gather input from members of the advisory group. This input would allow Parks and Recreation to identify general themes that can be used to inform future public outreach and engagement.

Introductions followed with members of the group introducing themselves, the interest they represent and sharing what they find special about Tikishla Park.

The meeting continued with a round table discussion. This discussion focused on identifying issues to be addressed through the master planning effort and what types of improvements would best serve community needs and enhance park users experiences. To focus the discussion, Steve shared a poster which illustrated four identified Use Areas: 1) Tikishla Park (E 20th Ave), 2) Davenport Fields, 3) Trails, and 4) Natural Areas. Steve asked members of the advisory group to confirm if the identified areas accurately reflected use patterns. Members of the advisory group were then asked to share their thoughts, perspectives, knowledge, and experiences about each area.

The meeting concluded with a few questions about topics discussed, next steps, and future meeting dates.

Introductions and Comments

Advisory Group members went around the table and introduced themselves and the organization or group that they represent. Individuals were asked to share what issues they would like to address through this planning effort and what improvements they would like to see in the park. This was followed by discussion.

Sharron Harris, Airport Heights Community Council

- “Greater access for all” husband is disabled, wants to improve ADA access in the park and on the trails
- Improving the trail surface and safety
 - Tree roots are causing paved trails to heave, uneven pavement
- Ball fields at E 20th are underused and wouldn't mind seeing the space used for other park activities
- What can be done to improve security? i.e. crime, homelessness, drug deals in the parking lot of Tikishla (E 20th)
- Reach out to Mental Health Trust about adjoining property potentially being incorporated into the park
- Make social trails official (i.e. Mushroom Trail)
- Would like to see more use on trails to improve safety

Carlos Gomez, Scotty Gomez Foundation

- Would like to see more open space for recreation at E 20th instead of unused ballfields – “would like to see something else done to it”
 - Self-described “dog lover”, but not advocating specifically for an off-leash area at Tikishla Park (prefers the “dog park” at University Lake Park)

Jonny Hayes, Park Neighbor

- Would like to explore if there are opportunities for better creek/habitat/flood control
 - History of creek channelization in the area
- How do we activate the spaces?
 - Potential for mountain bike loops?
- More family oriented activities
- Would like to see less homeless activity in the area

Heather Ireland, Rogers Park Community Council

- People need to follow rules/laws (i.e. illegal camping on parkland)
- Need to add bollards and a gate at Davenport Fields to limit late night activity and driving on trails and through the park
- “loves to hear people using the park”
- “protect it so people can continue to use it”
- Parking needs to be considered with any future improvements

Zach Keer, ARC of Anchorage

- ARC of Anchorage uses Tikishla Park (E 20th) a lot for their after school program

Ed Brewer, Trail Watch & Park Neighbor

- What are the funding priorities?

- Check zoning – secure as dedicated park
- Moved to neighborhood in 1980's, has good history of the park and past planning
- Involved in 1998 master plan process
- The current playground is the fourth he has seen at the park, the first three were burned down resulting in the current equipment which some feel is less oriented towards kids play (but more resistant to arson)
- "I'm here for the wetlands"
 - Raised kids recreating (skiing, biking, hiking) on the trails in the natural areas of Tikishla
- Fat tire biking has gained popularity in recent years and Tikishla is a popular biking spot
- The wetland/natural area is a popular winter recreation area for skiing, hiking and fat tire biking
- Wildlife habitat needs to be considered

Kalen Saxton, Airport Heights Community Council

- "Hillstrand Pond is my favorite place to go when I'm having a bad day"
- Concerned about safety (uneven pavement, falling, lighting)
- Recently joined Trail Watch
- Would love to see future development of the park include more natural features and materials instead of plastic stuff

Edith McKee, Park Neighbor

- "would like to see some shared use ballfields and dogs"
- Self-described "super dog lover"
- Feels that there are too many ball fields in the city already
- Looking for an off-leash area
- "divide the two fields at Tikishla (E 20th) into three dog runs"

Representative Geran Tarr, Alaska Legislature

- Should be a park where you see a lot of kids
 - Better play equipment and "more stuff for kids"
- "Safety" more trail lighting... possibly at a more pedestrian level to minimize light pollution (trail north of playground specifically identified)
- Would like to see better upkeep of trails and equipment
 - Cottonwoods roots damage trail surface and cottonwood seed makes for a slipper trail surface
- Would like to see more benches for the hockey rink

Amy Solberg, City View Little League

- Playground isn't the greatest, "boring, could be improved"
- Would like to discuss the possibility of an American Legion sized ball fields at Davenport that can be used for the East High School team

Kyle Cunningham, MOA Watershed Mgmt & Park Neighbor

- Has used the park since he was a kid growing up in the neighborhood
- The hockey rink is often booked and it is hard to find open ice time

Discussion

Following introductions and discussion, the conversation shifted to a more focused discussion of the specific use areas of the park. Parks and Recreation planner Steve Rafuse shared a poster which illustrated four (4) identified Use Areas: 1) Tikishla Park (E 20th Ave), 2) Davenport Fields, 3) Trails, and 4) Natural Areas. The discussions were relatively open with members of the group sharing their knowledge of specific areas. Comments were recorded and grouped into categories. These categories and general themes are listed below.



Tikishla Park (East 20th Ave)

General Themes:

- The group generally agrees that Tikishla Park (E 20th Ave) is more of a neighborhood park than a city-wide destination
 - Phrases used to describe Tikishla Park (E 20th) include: "neighborhood hub", "neighborhood destination", "a place to meet friends"
- The group generally feels that the park would be better served with open space that can be used for a variety of activities than the currently unused fenced ball fields
- Three (3) main uses at Tikishla (E 20th) today: playground, hockey rink, trails

Safety:

- Security cameras to improve safety? Who would monitor?
- Crime, drug use/deals, and homelessness are safety concerns this area

- Areas of the parking lot are hidden from view

Hockey Rink:

- Scotty Gomez Rink is extremely popular and often booked for Gomez Foundation youth practice
- More groups would like to use the rink
- Consider adding a bulletin board at the rink showing when the rink is booked and when it is free for pick-up games and open skate
- Consider adding second ice rink or “family” leisure ice space

Ball fields:

- The ball fields at Tikishla (E 20th) have not been used in years
 - Occasional pick-up games, maybe once a week? Primarily, the north ball field.
- City View Little League does not use the fields and does not have plans to use the them
 - City View LL prefers having all fields in one location (Davenport Fields) as family's with more than one child playing baseball only have to travel to one location
- Ball fields at little Tikishla are being used for dog play areas

Playground:

- Play structures are dated
- More swings are desirable
- Forest is scary next to playground

Parking:

- Parking is limited during events and when the hockey rink is in use
- The question was raised: “What is the appropriate number of parking spaces?” Depends on what improvements and facilities are identified for the future.
- Concern about negative/illegal/unsafe activities happening in the parking lot
 - Visibility into the parking lot is limited creating hiding spaces

Other:

- Consider adding community gardens
- Covered picnic shelter

Trails

General Themes:

- Trails system is a great asset and makes Tikishla Park special – many people from the neighborhood regularly use the trails
- Wayfinding and safety are two of the most common themes
- AG members feel that signage/wayfinding could be improved and that many people using the trail system (who don't live in the area) are often confused by all the different trail spurs around Tikishla Park
- The group feels that trail lighting and thoughtful vegetation clearing along trails would improve safety
- Trails should be ADA accessible to meet the needs of all park and trail users

- Soft surface trails in natural areas should be improved but should not be paved and should remain soft-surface

Wayfinding:

- Need improved signage to make park more cohesive
 - Tikishla Park encompasses several different use areas, trails connect the many areas of the park and signage would make more the park more cohesive
- Wayfinding is important to help folks navigate the trail system – folks often get confused as to where the spur trails take them
- Wayfinding improves perception of safety
- We should engage the fat tire biking community to learn more about how they use the park, what are their needs, and vision
- Naming of natural areas and Class 2 Trails (moderately developed – soft surface)

Trail Safety:

- Lighting and vegetation management is needed along the trail between the playground and Nichols Park
 - Vegetation clearing could be accomplished with volunteers
 - Remove invasive species – bird cherry trees
- Address areas where trail isn't ADA compliant (example given of the steep slope leading to the bridge on the southeast side of the ballfields in Tikishla E 20th)

Trail Surfacing:

- Keep trails in natural areas natural, no paved, keep soft-surface
- Paved trails: Remove cottonwoods in areas where roots are causing the trail to heave
- Not all spur trails were re-surfaced during 2014-15 re-paving of the Chester Creek Trail

Davenport Fields

General Themes:

- City View Little League is the main use at Davenport Fields and generally feels that their needs are being met at that location
- Davenport Fields are centrally located and used intensively for a short season of the year for youth baseball. What opportunities exist for more year-round recreation?
- Conflicts exist between the little league who maintain the fields through a "Cooperative Use Agreement" and dogs/owners who use the fields as an unofficial off-leash area.

Safety:

- Snack Shack has been broken into in the past
- Concern about negative/illegal activities taking place in the parking lot
 - Examples: dumping, drug deals, vandalism
- Easy hiding spaces for undesirable activity

- More bollards are needed to limit access to areas where people should not be driving

Parking Lot:

- Consider paving the parking lot
- Overall large size and orientation of parking lot creates hiding places for undesirable activity
- Is it possible to install a gate to close the area at night?

Dogs:

- People using the ball fields as an off-leash area for dogs
 - Location off of Lake Otis Blvd is easily accessible to the larger community
- People not cleaning up after their dogs – creates hours of maintenance for little league volunteers
 - Worst during spring break up/early season
- Dog waste left on the field creates a health and safety hazard for kids playing on the field
 - Not just poop, dog pee kills the grass and leads to brown spots on the field
- Is a separate fenced area for dogs possible? Would a separate fenced area for dogs prevent dogs/owners from using the ball fields?
- The question was posed to the group “Would people still use Davenport Fields as an unofficial off-leash area if there was a designated fenced dog park at Tikishla Park (E 20th)?”
 - The general consensus among the group is “no” as it is viewed primarily as a matter of location and convenience. Tikishla Park (E 20th) is less convenient to drive to when compared to Davenport Fields which is located right off of Lake Otis Blvd, a Class III Major Arterial road (20,000+ Average Daily Traffic).
- Dogs need a place to exercise and there are not enough dog parks in the city

Ball fields/Stadium

- City View Little League generally feels that their needs are currently being met at Davenport Fields
- City View LL brought up the idea of an American Legion sized field with stadium seating that can be used for the East High School team
 - Few details provided – the group feels that more information is necessary before further discussion
 - The “need” needs to be defined?
 - A stadium would require a reconfiguration of the existing fields – what does that look like?
 - Space is physically confined at Davenport Fields due to the proximity of Class A wetlands

Other

- Possibility of winter based recreation in the ball fields – like a bike park using straw bales

Natural Areas

General Themes:

- Natural areas are loved and used year-round for recreation
- "Keep natural" - keep trails in natural areas natural, no paved trails, maintain trails as soft-surface, wayfinding probably okay
- Old Fur Rony Trail – would like to see an official designation of the trail
- Lots of geocaches in the natural areas
- Identified activities: hiking, fat tire biking, skiing, geocaching, outdoor science and education, wildlife viewing, wildlife habitat

Other

Land Use:

- Zoning - Will Tikishla Park be updated to the new Title 21 "PR" zoning designation?
- Is the park currently dedicated?
- What is the possibility of incorporating Mental Health Trust lands into the park?

Indoor Tennis Facility:

- The advisory group expressed little interest for a tennis facility at Tikishla Park
 - Members cited a lack of support and overall strong community opposition to the proposed facility
 - Members were concerned about the impact of such as facility on natural areas within the park and the value those natural areas provide for both active and passive recreation