



MUNICIPALITY OF
ANCHORAGE

Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska
Parks & Recreation Department

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MEMORANDUM



PARKS & RECREATION

Date: March 1, 2018
To: Parks & Recreation Commission
Cc: Joshua Durand, Parks Superintendent
From: Steve Rafuse, Park Planner
Project: PRC 18-08: NW Quarter Ruth Arcand Park Improvement by PNA

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Ruth Arcand Park is located in south Anchorage within the Abbott Loop Community Council. The park is 602.31 acres and is classified in the 2006 *Anchorage Bowl Park, Natural Resource, and Recreation Facility Plan* as a Special Use Area. More than half of the park remains in its natural forested state with a variety of formal and informal trails. Developed portions of the park include the William C. Chamberlain Equestrian Center, Anchorage Golf Course, four little league and three major league ball fields, parking lots, open lawn areas, shelter, and a small play equipment area. Springhill Elementary School and Hanshew Junior High School are also within the park on its west side adjacent to Lake Otis Parkway.

Named for community activist and local parks advocate, Ruth Arcand in 1983; the park's history goes back to 1785 when Congress provided that one section of land (640 acres) of each townsite be set aside for public benefit. Several studies and plans were developed in the 1980's. The December 1982 Section 16 Equestrian Center and Trail Study was completed by the Mayor's Equestrian Committee; its focus was on equestrian use of the park. Equestrian and Bike Trails Birch Road, by Gordon Sheret and Associates (ca. 1982) included uses for Ruth Arcand Park. The most significant document, Section 16 Park Trails Master Plan (September 1985, Land Design North) guides development of a comprehensive trails system within the park as well as many major facilities. The 1985 plan investigated soils, vegetation, views, waterways and wetlands among other things. The plan made recommendations for improvements and phasing of development. Much of what is within the park today is a reflection of the 1985 plan.

In the coming years, the MOA Parks and Recreation is planning on updating the master plan for Ruth Arcand Park. The proposed effort by PNA and the Anchorage Parks Foundation is limited in scope (primarily the repair of existing trails) and expected to support future uses within the park.

Schools on Trails Program Project Description

Anchorage parks and trails are well-loved and well-used by many of our residents. Yet many people are not aware of the parks, trails, waterways and natural areas in their own neighborhoods. More can be done to incorporate them into daily life, and especially into the lives of our children. With this in mind, the Anchorage Schools on Trails Program formed in 2014 around a vision of "engaging Anchorage schools with their nearby trails, parks, streams and natural habitats so that students and staff in those schools learn about community assets in their neighborhoods, and these neighborhoods are enriched by this increased local awareness."

The Anchorage Schools on Trails Program (Schools on Trails), is currently working with students, school staff, community members, and professionals through a partnership with the Alaska Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) to collaboratively plan, design, and construct different projects with different schools throughout Anchorage.

Schools on Trails projects create opportunities for learning in a natural environment and attract children and families to the park during and after school. Moreover, these projects foster student/expert collaborations and provide career development and mentorship opportunities for professionals in the fields of science, design, education and resource management. In addition to serving as classrooms designed with student and educator input, these outdoor spaces will serve as community assets that improve public health through knowledge and awareness of the natural environment.

A consequential Schools on Trails goal is to encourage and educate students in the processes of government and advocacy. They will participate, collaborate, and present to community councils, stakeholders, park steering committees, design professionals and government officials, and the experience gained will empower them to be positive forces in their community—as contributors, stewards and leaders.

Project Team - Pacific Northern Academy, Spring Hill and ASLA

In the 2016/2017 school year Pacific Northern Academy students worked with volunteers from the Alaska Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (Ak-ASLA) to apply for an Anchorage Parks Foundation Grant to improve the northwest portion of Ruth Arcand Park. PNA was awarded \$20,000 match grant to improve the park. Since the award PNA students, led by 7/8 teacher Sarah Mariner, have worked through a design process to understand the park setting and to develop options for improvements that meet their needs as well as community needs. Fifth grade students from Spring Hill Elementary School entered the process in early 2018 and will be contributing ideas and resources that will benefit the park improvements project.

Pacific Northern Academy (PNA) is a private school located on the southeast corner of the Lake Otis and Abbott Loop intersection. The school, which shares a building with Abbott Loop Community Church, borders Ruth Arcand Park. Students use informal trails and open spaces in the park for recreation, education and athletic pursuit. PNA enrollment is just over 100 students who range in age from 3 years old (pre-kindergarten) to eighth grade. It serves students throughout the Anchorage bowl, from Girdwood to Eagle River. The academic program at Pacific Northern Academy includes an emphasis on diverse programs, with all students taking Spanish, visual arts, performing arts, and physical education, that emphasizes critical thinking and problem-solving as well as community service.

Spring Hill Elementary School is located along Lake Otis Parkway south of a new apartment complex that separates Spring Hill from PNA. The 5th Grade class of Pam Osowski will assist in the project by first providing user information including how Spring Hill students access the site, what events they hold at the park, which classes use the park and what do they do within the park. Initially teachers have indicated students use the park for science, physical education and recreation. The proposed PNA design will be presented to Hanshew Middle School which also borders the west side of the park and is located immediately south of Spring Hill Elementary School.

In addition to ASLA's assistance, the National Park Service, MOA Parks staff and UAF has provided assistance as part of the design process. Professionals have attended student presentations, team members spent time with students walking trails and observing nature. Through Ak-ASLA students did an inventory and analysis of the park including vegetation, soils, history, adjacent land uses and wetlands. Students went through a design exercise where they listed as many potential activities as they could think of and then narrowed the activity list once they explored the spatial needs of each activity. They analyzed potential activities in terms of who would be served, cost, availability of similar activities elsewhere, age groups served, seasonal uses and community value of each potential activity. Students broke into groups and developed designs that they presented to the entire class for review and discussion. The final design took ideas from each of the student designs. Overall the proposed design includes stabilizing and refining existing trails and adding an obstacle course that can be used by all three adjacent schools.

We are requesting that the Parks and Recreation Commission pass a Resolution of Support for the proposed park improvements.

FUNDING

In the spring of 2017 PNA was awarded an Anchorage Parks Foundation Challenge Grant. The grant is \$20,000 with an equal match requirement for a total of \$40,000. The \$20,000 match may be earned through in-kind donations of goods and services or through outright cash donations. PNA students sat through a fundraising workshop led by Paul Clark, National Park Service. Paul worked with students to help them understand what motivates people to give and who are potential donors and how are requests made.

PLANNING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Information was presented to Abbott Loop Community Council on three occasions. Early in the process when the grant was written, midway through the design process and most recently at the February 2018 community council where students presented their ideas to the community. A motion was made and unanimously supported by those in attendance to support the student's proposal. Additional professional assistance was provided by: MOA Parks staff (Steve Rafuse) attended several meetings to review the site and to listen to students present ideas and discuss the park. National Parks Service (Paul Clark) worked with students and the design team on several occasions to discuss the NPS trails efforts, walk the site and review funding considerations. UAF Assistant Professor Kay Shoemaker Howell, Statewide Director, Alaska Master Naturalist Program walked the site with students and attended meetings and provided design and process review. Thede Tobish, MOA Senior Planner, was contacted regarding wetlands. He will help to determine wetlands at the park in May 2018. Brenden Stuart, Schools On Trails, Anchorage Parks Foundation assisted in the design process and has provided ideas and worked with students.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

PNA students developed the following project goal:

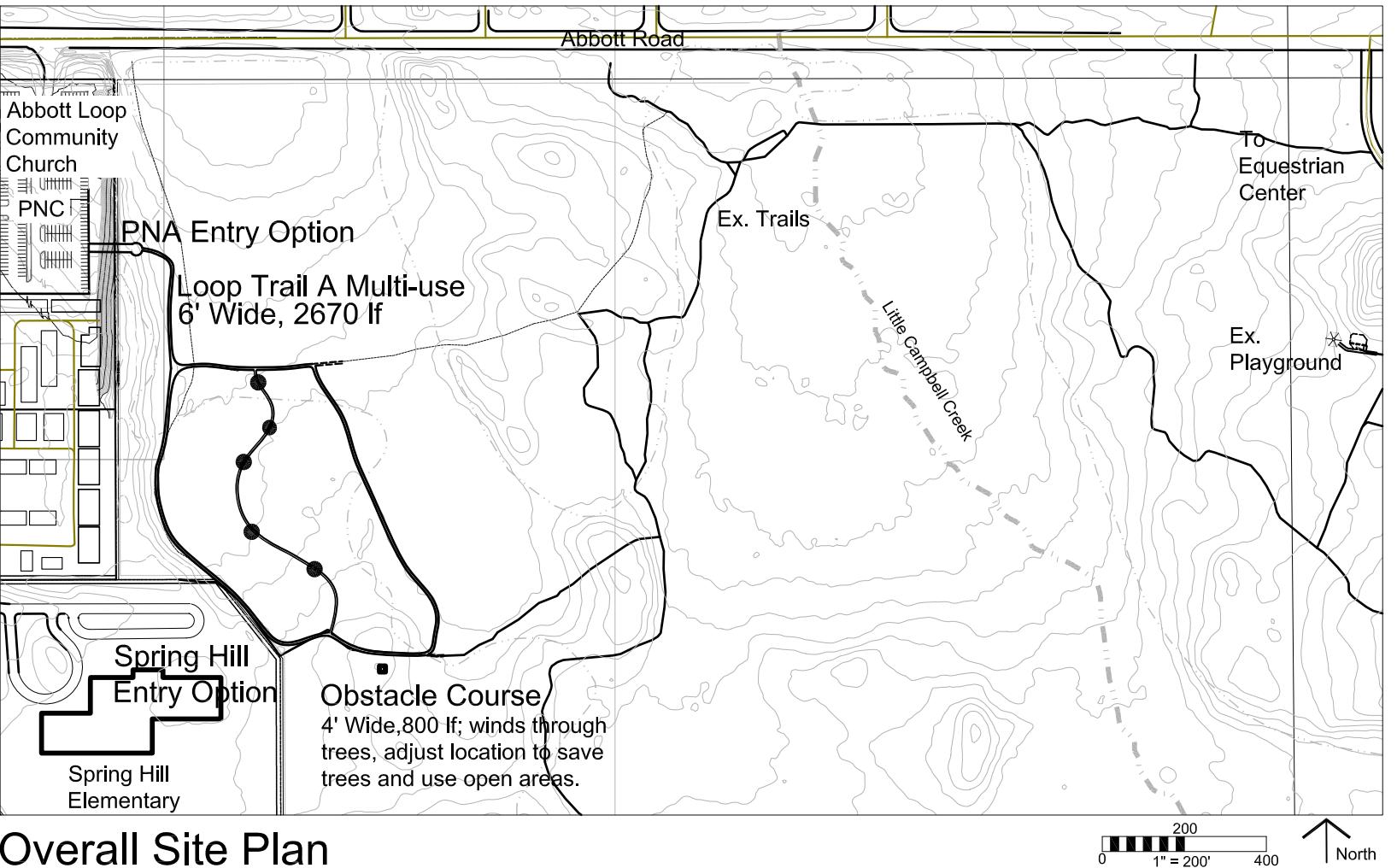
Our goal is to enhance the NW ¼ of Ruth Arcand Park by adding park features that complement the natural environment to improve Anchorage's knowledge and appreciation for the unique features of the park, and that encourage safe use of the park for people of all ages and abilities.

The project team proposes the following improvements:

- Improve existing trails through clearing overhanging branches and brush that is blocking trails and working with MOA parks to add the appropriate surface materials
- Improve access to the park at either PNA or Spring Hill Elementary— details and options are currently being explored
- Install Educational and Wayfinding Signs
- Install an obstacle course with elements that are low maintenance, easy to remove and that blend or are unobtrusive with the character of the area
- Inform MOA parks regarding the outdoor learning lab

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The proposed improvements at Ruth Arcand Park Park are supported by the Abbott Loop Community Council. The Department recommends that the Parks & Recreation Commission pass the proposed resolution in support of this project, but request further submittals to the Department with specifications as developed prior to implementation and installation.



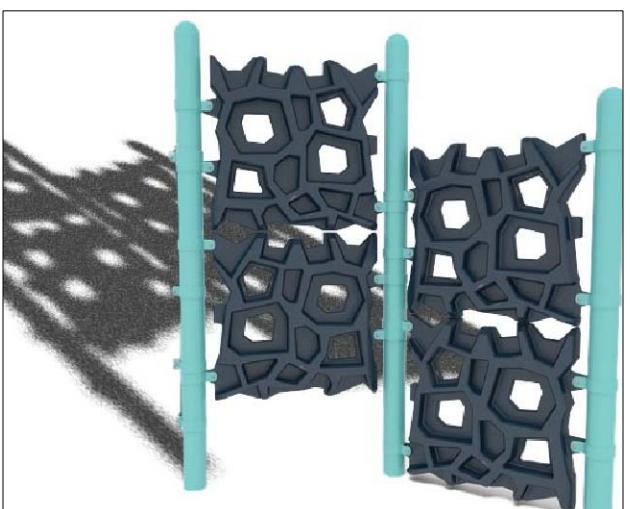
Overall Site Plan



Log Jump



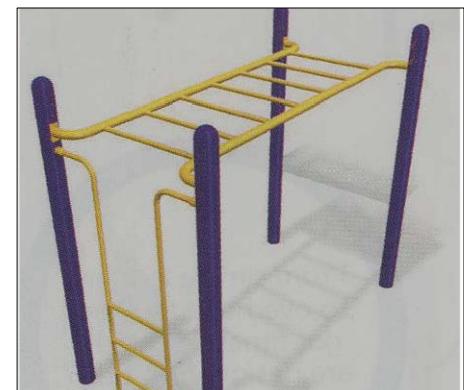
Tire Challenge



Climbing Wall

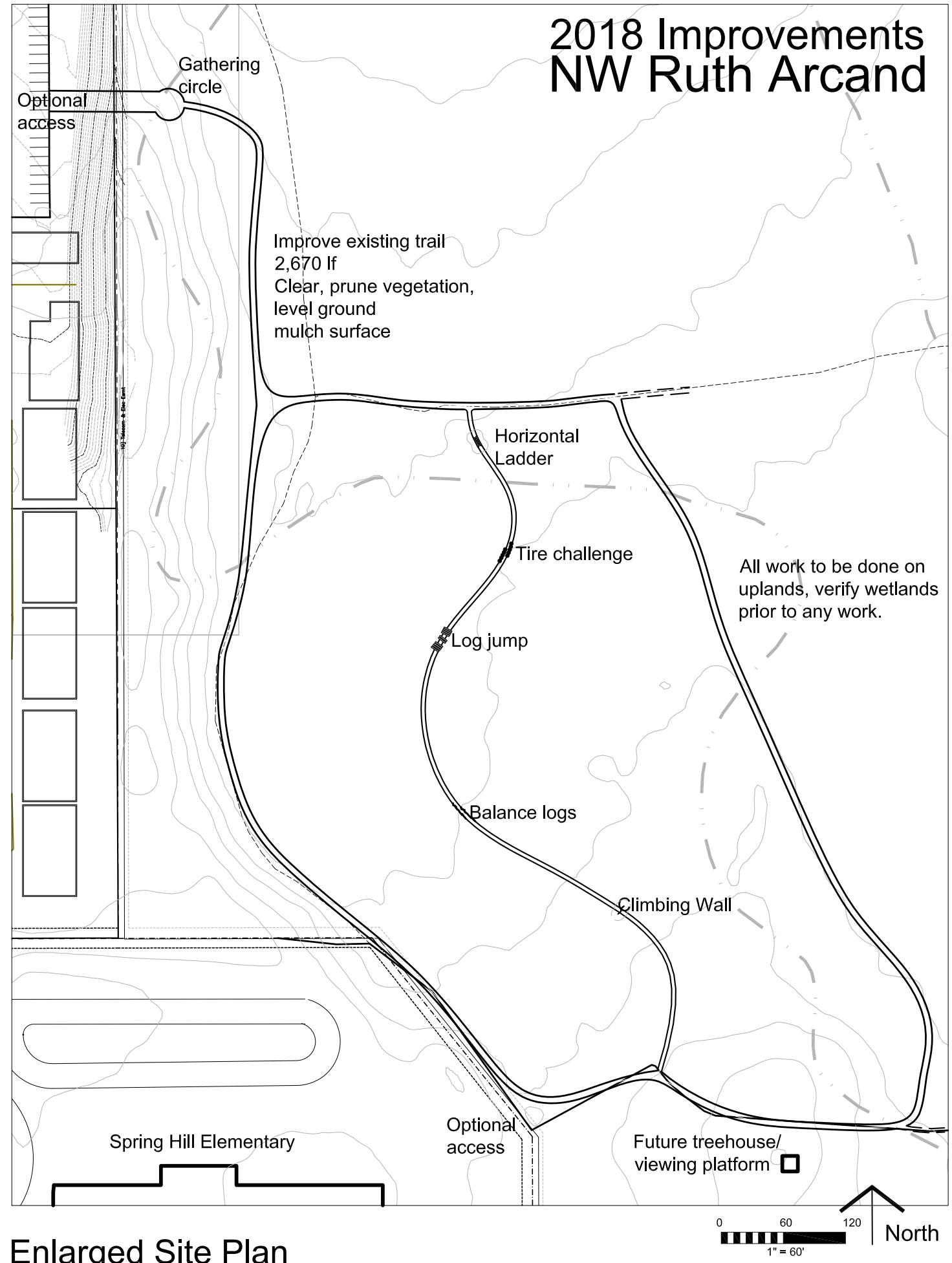


Balance Logs



Horizontal Ladder

Obstacle Course Elements



Enlarged Site Plan

ABBOTT LOOP COMMUNITY COUNCIL

A Resolution supporting trail improvements to Ruth Arcand Park by Pacific Northern Academy

It was moved by Calvin Schrage and seconded by Susan Soule that Abbott Loop Community Council supports Pacific Northern Academy's proposed trail improvements to possibly include a trail head, an obstacle course and a zipline at Ruth Arcand Park, Anchorage, AK.

Passed this 29th day of September, 2016 without opposition as attested to by the following:

DocuSigned by:

Bruce Roberts

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Bruce Roberts
President
Abbott Loop Community Council

2/27/2018 | 11:08 AKST

Date



Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska Parks & Recreation Commission

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PARKS & RECREATION

PRC RES NO. 2018-04 NW QUARTER RUTH ARCAD PARK IMPROVEMENT BY PNA

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, Ruth Arcand Park is a 602.31 acre park located in South Anchorage and is classified as a Special Use Area in the 2006 *Anchorage Bowl Park, Natural Resource, and Recreation Facility Plan*; and

WHEREAS, the Section 16 Trails Master Plan provides the framework for development of Ruth Arcand Park and identifies “skiing and running trails” in the Northwest Quarter of the park; and

WHEREAS, the proposed improvements are the result of a collaboration between the students at Pacific Northern Academy, the Alaska Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Anchorage Schools on Trails Program, the National Park Service, and the Municipality of Anchorage; and

WHEREAS, the improvements proposed would improve existing trails, improve access to the park from nearby schools, include the installation of educational and wayfinding signs, include an obstacle course appropriate in character to the park, and a future outdoor learning lab for educational purposes; and

WHEREAS, the proposed improvements are consistent with the Section 16 Trails Master Plan and are supported by the Abbott Loop Community Council; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission approves the proposed improvements submitted by the Department for the Northwest Quarter of Ruth Arcand Park.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission this 8th day of March, 2018.

Chair
Parks and Recreation Commission

ATTEST:

John Rodda, Director
Parks & Recreation Department