

RUSSIAN JACK SPRINGS PARK MASTER PLAN UPDATE

PUBLIC WORKSHOP #1 SUMMARY

Wednesday, February 27, 2019
Williwaw Elementary School
6:00 PM to 8:00 PM

Project Team & Attendance

MOA Parks & Recreation Department

Steve Rafuse, Project Manager
Josh Durand, Parks Superintendent

R&M Consultants, Inc.

Van Le, AICP, Planner & PI Lead
Taryn Oleson, Planner & PI

Bettisworth North

Mark Kimerer, ASLA

Advisory Group Members in Attendance

Kristi Wood, NECC
Kristin Myers, Park Neighbor
Mick Brogan, First Tee President
Erin Kirkland, PRC/East ANC Resident
Eric Milliken, PRC/East ANC Resident
Carla McConnell, NECC/ANC Sports Association
Lisa McGuire, RJCC/Park Neighbor
Dante Petri, Arctic Cyclocross
Gary Snyder, East High Cross Country Coach

Elected Representatives in Attendance

Pete Peterson, Anchorage Assemblymen

Total Attendance: 53 people signed into the meeting

Meeting Materials:

1. PowerPoint Presentation
2. Station Graphics
3. Sign In
4. Comment Forms

Workshop Outreach

- (2) Workshop Invite Postcards mailed to 1208 addresses within 550 ft. of park and to all Community Councils
- Flyers posted at access points and trail junctions in RJSP
- Flyers posted at area businesses
- Flyers shared with area churches/congregations
- Federation of Community Councils email notification
- KSKA Alaska Public Media news brief
- Event shared on Nextdoor reaching 45,984 accounts
- Direct email outreach to Community Councils within one mile of the park
- Direct email outreach to Anchorage Assembly and State Representatives
- Facebook Event
- E-Newsletter Emails
- Project Website updates
- Russian Jack Community Council Attendance 01/09/19
- NECC Attendance 1/17/19 & 2/21/19
- NECC Parks Committee 1/17/19 & 2/21/19
- Advisory Group Meeting 1/31/19

Workshop Summary

The first workshop for the Russian Jack Springs Park (RJSP) Master Plan Update was held in the Multi-purpose room at Williwaw Elementary School, on February 27th, 2019. As attendees arrived, they were greeted by members of the planning team who explained the format of the meeting and helped them sign in. Display boards with maps, photos, graphics, and information about the planning process were available for viewing as workshop participants arrived.

At 6:15PM, Steve Rafuse from Anchorage Parks and Recreation welcomed workshop participants and introduced the planning team. Steve then provided a brief overview of the workshop agenda and how participants could provide comments throughout the event. The workshop continued with a formal presentation.



The presentation outlined the goals of the master planning process, described the history of planning and development at RJSP, highlighted important natural resources, and included a photo tour of the park. The presentation also illustrated parks and recreation facilities in and around Russian Jack Springs Park to provide areawide context. The presentation concluded with the question asking participants “What does your ideal Russian Jack Springs Park look like?”

Following the presentation, Van Le led a large group visioning exercise. She asked attendees to imagine what the park might look like in ten years, encouraging them to dream big. Many workshop participants shared what they value about RJSP and what they envision for their future Russian Jack Springs Park. Comments from this exercise are summarized on the follow page.

Following the large group visioning exercise, workshop participants went to breakout stations. Seven stations featuring a range of topics were arranged around the room.

Workshop Stations:

1. About RJSP & Master Plan
2. North RJSP Facilities
3. South RJSP Facilities
4. Natural Resources
5. Winter Recreation
6. Access and Connections
7. Trails

Each station included maps, photos, aerial imagery, and other graphics and was facilitated by a member of the RJSP Master Plan advisory group. Workshop participants were encouraged to share comments directly on the posters using post-it notes as well as to fill out comment forms. After an hour, the facilitator from each station provided a report back to the large group and shared the common themes.

The workshop concluded with a ‘thank you’ from the planning team and brief description of next steps and how members of the community can continue to participate in the master planning process. The meeting ended at the scheduled time of 8:00 PM.

Visioning Exercise Summary

The following is a summary of workshop participant comments from the visioning exercise.

- Great Park with so many great features, but even more potential.
 - Park is under-utilized
- Railroad club building is outdated – update it and make it more public friendly and accessible as it's currently underused facility with potential.
- Water Quality should be a high priority – outflow near Reka Drive is especially concerning.
- There is no recreation center in this area and we need one – Russian Jack could provide the opportunity to serve as a rec center by expanding the Chalet to include a gym, better gathering places.
- Increase the active users in the park to bring positive change and legitimate uses to areas currently being used for illegitimate or illegal activities
 - More users = More safety
- Increase the connection between the North and South sides of the park. They are physically separated and there is no opportunity to make a loop between the two sides on trails.
 - Current tunnel under Debarr is not welcoming ("scary") and needs an upgrade.
 - Add another trail grade-crossing tunnel to connect north and south ends of the park to make it a loop
- Reforestation – restore the areas where trees have been downed and keep the wild areas wild
- Singletrack trails should be incorporated into the park – trails would support beginner to intermediate level riders/users, and would be intended to serve the local area and immediate neighborhoods (not like Kincaid where they serve the whole Anchorage Bowl)
 - BMX track and pump track facility for kids to learn to ride
 - Cyclocross races are growing in popularity – it would be great to have a trail designed to accommodate a use like that at least once a year
 - Singletrack would be a positive use
- Clear signage of use-specific v multi-use trails (where are the ski only trails?)
- Available restrooms
- Possible relocation of the greenhouses could leave an opportunity to redevelop that sight
 - Add community gardens if the greenhouses relocate
- Expanded opportunities for kids in East Anchorage to learn to ski and skate – don't need a lake or pond but potentially a skate ribbon like the one at Muldoon Chanshtnu Park, and would love to see snow making for skiing
- Develop a positive plan for the old campground area
- Address the littering in the summer especially – add more trashcans and dog-poop stations and signage
- Love the wild, quiet environment of the park
 - Vision is to keep it as wild as possible



Comment Form Summary

The following comments were submitted on comment forms and are organized by topic and/or area:

- RJSP is unique to Anchorage and full of potential
- "I value absolutely everything about Russian Jack Springs Park; from the trails to playgrounds, from the skate park to the ball parks, from wild beautiful areas to the chalet and greenhouses. The park is a gem in our city that out to be preserved and used respectively by all, and property maintained." – Lisa McGuire
- Keep it as wild as possible
 - Having a wild, quiet natural space to walk, ski and bike is a huge bonus or the mental health of people living in any city
 - I like that the park has non-developed areas that give one the sense of nature isolation while being within a large urban area.
 - Keep the woods- it's the only wooded park in Midtown/East Anchorage
 - No new development requiring tree clearing of any kind.
- School/Community Engagement
 - More school involvement in the park
 - Encourage year-round forest, wetland exploration by area elementary schools- it's a fabulous lab
 - More outreach to get more people to use the park
 - Expand learning partnerships with schools and nature-oriented groups like at Campbell Creek Science Center – get kids outside
 - Encourage Mighty Bikes organization to start mountain bike summer classes for kids using the existing trails
- Love what the community did with Whisper Faith Park, it's a great set up and could easily fit into RJSP
- The north side seems to be more youth oriented; is there a way to get more adults using that half?

Safety

- Better lighting and more of it, especially the neighborhood connectors from Nunaka Valley and the multi-use trail from Pine Street to Boniface Pkwy.
- Demolish old structures, I have many female friends that don't venture into RJSP due to safety concerns and the old structures are sketchy
- Concerns about the possibilities that there may be some hidden camps in the park and it can feel a little uncomfortable if that is happening. That is my main concern of the area- I've come across camps in the areas I am walking the trails, especially the north side, there have been camp fires I fear getting out of control and parties happening in the summertime.
- Homeless camps off social trails leaving trash
- There were several comments tonight that increasing park usage would drive out the homeless camps – the Chester Creek trail has had an increasing problem with large homeless campsites and in an effort to stop those camps many areas of the trail have been expanded so now there is basically a super-highway along the river and through the woods. Increasing usage is a double edge sword, possibly decreasing the experience of those seeking a more natural experience, away from the hustle and bustle of Anchorage life.

Activities

- Skiing
 - more regular filling of the tunnel connecting the north and south sections of the park, perimeter trail should be multi-use
 - widen the Nordic ski trail on the north side slightly
 - continue to maintain the unpaved Nordic ski trail on the south side, north west of the chalet
 - skiers are a minority on the north side trails – are used as multi-use trails and MOA maps say the “Nordic ski trail” on the north side is multi-use
- Biking
 - Fat Bikes – prefer singletrack, cross-country ski interactions are not a big deal as proven by other places in town.
 - The topography lends itself to adding a few amazing beginning (kid friendly) bike trails – these would be a huge boom to the amount of traffic the polar bear park sees
 - Singletrack mountain bike trails would be good addition
 - Use YEP summer employees to create and maintain RJSP singletrack bike trails, using the many *existing* trails in the north and south sections
 - Upgrade existing single tracks for biking and seriously consider adding singletrack trails
 - No BMX or Cycle Cross in FJSP – it is being developed in Muldoon currently
 - Really bummed the single track trails funding had to be returned – a small community-sized system like Mirror Lake would be a huge benefit to the East and U-Med district residents.
 - Add bike Pump Track (dirt) to skate park
- Sledding
 - Mow down trees at the dangerous part of the sledding hill!
 - Remove the one light pole in the sledding impact zone
- Running
 - Enjoy the non-paved trail for trail running in the summer and use the multi-use paved trails in winter
 - Love the trail lighting for winter running – should expand to include a more clear loop or connection to the north side that feels safe in the winter/dark
- Trail use
 - having exclusive-use trails will cause more conflicts than it solves; no real need
 - Choose a pair of ski loops to maintain as ski-only groomed trails – revive some of the old ski trails – sign the ski only trails
 - I appreciate the ski grooming on the trails in the winter and although I am a skier, I like the multi-use aspect of most of the trails so that more people can enjoy the outdoors
 - Love the lighted trails in winter!

Access & Connections

- Park is key for connectivity from Chester Creek to Glenn Hwy Trails
- Reestablish trails in the area south of Debarr road, west of the greenhouses and north of the of the unpaved Nordic ski trail north of the Chalet and parking lot (northwest corner of south half of park)
 - This area is not activated and has a lot of potential
 - Rebuild the old wooden ski classic trails in this area and clear downed trees

- This area needs to be thinned/managed – there are semi-permanent camps there too as a result of the thicket and people avoid it as a result
- Put a new tunnel on west side under Debarr to connect the north and south ends better.
- Existing tunnel between north and south sides is dangerous – must have clear paving and sufficient lighting
 - Widen the existing tunnel – it's narrow and dangerous
 - Higher clearance is needed in the tunnel
 - Better lighting
 - More snow in winter, less gravel
- Something should be done about one of the entrances to the park at E 20th and Glacier St – the spot is currently infamous for discarding appliances, cars, etc. Solution could be eliminating this spot by planting trees there
- Maintain and improve neighborhood access
 - Better neighborhood interpretation and walkway access
 - Pedestrian crossings on Pine Street at E 8th Ave to Polar Bear Park – sidewalks in the neighborhoods are needed as well
 - Better signage and/or structures on the sidewalk/road to make a better visible connection to Mountain View and Ship Creek Trail
- Lighting
 - Light the trail connection to Nunaka Valley
 - Finish lighting the multi-use trail on the north side from the tunnel through Pine St.
- Install a short median and signage to prevent east-bound drivers on Debarr from driving on the turning lane to avoid traffic during rush hour – they are dangerous to park users trying to turn left into the park entrance
- Parking Lots
 - No expanding parking at expense of natural areas
 - Parking lot off Boniface
 - Remove it -only ever see drivers just loitering here and it's uncomfortable for kids on the trail to pass right by strangers sitting in cars in a hidden parking lot
 - A lot of drug deals and other illegitimate use happens here – put a gate up
 - Remove odd small parking lots or enlarge them to a size where they feel a lot safer for park users

Facilities

- Chalet
 - An additional chalet for a recreation center
 - Community center (RJSP facilities could serve this purpose)
 - Make the chalet more 'usable' to be the public – maybe opening up the space more
 - No expansion of the chalet
 - What happens in the public park chalet? Can non-profit groups meet there for free?
 - More programming at the chalet
 - Entry level/beginner programming – a lot of different income levels are around the park
 - Gardening, permaculture, foraging, food preservation, skiing, roller-skiing, biking, golfing with areas in park for hands-on learning
 - Reinstate rope tow at chalet

- Gear rental out of the Chalet – skis, bikes, etc. to encourage new/novice, occasionally tourist users – or even a library type model to borrow gear so money is not a barrier to recreation
- Would like to see continued support of the Northern Lights Model Railroad Club in the former caretaker cabin. The trail club has supported itself with no \$ assistance from the Muni – 4 generations of my family have used this facility and would like to keep this location available
- Bring back the Girl Scout Day Camp or find another non-profit to use it?
- Remove all old pavilions and unused buildings
 - Former hilltop picnic area should be restored and be a covered picnic area
 - Girl Scout Camp – either upgrade and improve with functional and clean outhouses or demolish
 - Former girls scout pavilion is in a low topographic spot and feels very out of place – coming across it as a lone trail runner/skier feels unsafe
 - Former Campground – either upgrade, open and maintain or demolish
 - Could be used for parking in North East section of the park
 - Remove old shelters and concrete pads to discourage illegal camps and loitering
- Dog Park
 - Fence dog park, signage at the dog park and add signs in south section of the park or dog owners to use dog park on north side
 - Would be great to have a usable dog park – one currently is place in inadequate/pointless; there is one dinky trail in swampy land, poor signage, no fence and is dangerous next to the busy road and bike trail.
 - Fenced in dog park would be used year round
 - Maybe fence the soccer field – people are using the area as a dog park now since there is not a usable dog park in Russian Jack and it would be used more than the soccer field use that only sees activity a few months in the summer
- Greenhouse
 - Love the greenhouses, families have traditions of coming here for holidays
 - Community garden space near greenhouses
 - The public greenhouse is great and would be nice if it had more hours and programming
 - Allow someone to run a healthy café near chalet or greenhouses!
 - Public restrooms that isn't a port-a-potty
- Public restroom on the Pine Street side
- Do NOT create a bunch of new paved trails – keep it soft and wild

Maintenance

- Improvements to paved trails
 - Rehab existing multi-use paved trails
- Maintain and keep ski trails
 - More frequent snow grooming of RJSP trails – classic, no skating, both north and south
- More trash cans, especially by the bridges along the trail
 - More trash cans and maintenance near the ballfields/soccer fields and polar bear park/skate park
- Ideally RJSP needs a full time caretaker
- Maintain natural areas

- Avoid removing trees and damaging “improving” woodlands, wetlands – work with these great resources
- Maintain forest canopy as is – reforestation project could be tied to nearby schools
- Keep it an area of wild in the middle of the city
- Clean up downed trees and brush
 - Harvested timber from downed wood and live wood could be a resource for building amenities in the park
 - Thin vegetation next to the trails in order to reduce surprise wildlife encounters
- Upgrade bridges to accommodate a heavier groomer from NSAA during the really bad icy/bulletproof spells that happen

Signage

- Additional Wayfinding signage/emergency locators in north portion of the park
- Better signage – the trails are very confusing
- New wayfinding signs need to point to destinations kids are actually looking for (ex. Polar bear park)
- Drastically increase/improve signage and ability for people to pick up after their dogs and dispose of poop
 - Enforce poop laws
- Add signage for “Do not feed the Ducks” by the small pond on E 20th Street between the Wesleyan and Glacier Streets – sign needs to have an explanation as to why the public shouldn’t engage in feeding the ducks; the absence of the sign attracts a constant flow of people as well as ducks that create congestion on this arrow road.
- Create beautiful signage honoring the history of RJSP land starting with before homesteading/moonshine Russian Jack
- Sign multi-use and exclusive-use trails – there is a lot of user confusion on the trails and where they can and cannot be
- Better signage to let trail uses know about the connectivity possibility to other parklands in the area (Cheney Lak, S Fork Chester Creek Greenbelt, Glenn Hwy, etc.)
- Consider boardwalk with interpretive signs at the springs and in the Class A wetlands in the southwest corner of the park.

Map Board Notes

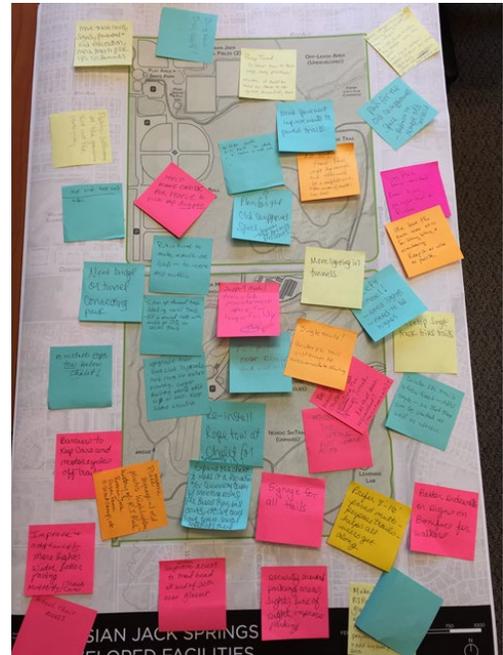
The following comments were submitted on map boards and are organized by topic and/or area:

General

- We love the north area as-is for hiking, biking + orienteering, keep it as wild as possible
- plan for the old campground space - summer use for only girl scouts
- plan for the old campgrounds space - reforest it, remove old shelters
- More school involvement in the park

Winter Recreation

- Re-install rope tow below chalet!
- re-install rope tow at Chalet for beginners/kids
- cut trees – bottom of sledding hill
- snowboard 1/2 pipe on hill
- firepit near chalet and sled hill
- Snow making
- designate a set of trails as ski-only w/ signage, not all - but a pair of main loops, keep the rest groomed multi-use
- make ski trails a few (very few) feet wider - to very much improve the skiing + grooming
- make classic trails - so you can skate
- make ski trails 3-4 feet wider for both skate and classic - like APU
- keep up the grooming on all smaller ski trails
- Widen ski trails a few feet – APU style – so that they can be skated as well as classic
- Widen ski trail just enough to accommodate skating
- Widen north side trails to skate, 2 extra on each side
- connect or let volunteers do this - woodchips and make dry connect Cartee Complex to Classic Ski Trail
- Better grooming (more snow/less gravel) in this tunnel please



Signage and Wayfinding

- Wayfinding signs with map and directions to chalet
- Want additional wayfinding signs in north park + emergency locators
- signage for all trails
- wayfinding signs with maps and directions back to Chalet
- Signage for access
- historic place - signage w/ old photos highlighting history of RJ Park - Russian Jack, Prison Farm, G Scout Camp, etc.

Access

- This park is very accessible to multiple neighborhoods including all income levels. This is so important! Particularly to Mt. View + Russian Jack
- barriers to keep cars and motorcycles off-trails
- widen improve access to trailhead at end of 20th near Glacier
- Make 2 entrances to RJ Park off 20th + Glacier more safe - add light at each to reduce drug dealing + people dumping trash + add big bear proof trash bins

- wheelchair access
- NE – no access
- User-friendly ped/bike crossing of Debarr at Pine
- better sidewalks or signs on Boniface for walkers

Trails

- Like the wild multi-purpose trails – all users get along at the same time
- Prefer 8-10 paved multi-purpose trails – helps all users get along
- Need pavement improvements to paved
- Fill in around roots with mulch or D1 on social trails
- More lighting in tunnels
- tunnel
- need bridge or tunnel connecting park
- Tunnel to circle loop! (see 1997 proposal)
- Put in tunnel to make a multi-use loop- to increase multi-use traffic
- More single track trails (mtbs)
- More single track trails...
- Develop single track bike trails
- Single tracks!
- No single track – park not big enough and there will be a conflict with other users of multi-use trail
- trails
- improve + add tunnels; more lights; wider, better paving; mutt mitts/trash cans
- Old campground roads can become trails
- Would be nice if the (classic ski trail) looped back south
- Creekside Trail
- safe connection in summer, so biking not on golf course (from greenhouse area to tunnel)
- Trails that contour the various ridgelines

Natural Resources

- If any new development or enhancements are made, use the existing developed footprint + keep the rest of the park wild!
- Removal of downed/leaning trees
- Plant trees (lost in the windstorms), do not limb trees
- Clean up downed trees blocking social trails
- Keep park natural – just maintain current trails – no single track trail
- Keep Russian Jack Park as WILD and undeveloped as possible
- Downed trees need to be cleared out
- Reforest where downed trees exist, plant trees around polar Bear – very barren!
- preserve the spring but improve access
- Spring area and upper stream should be left alone
- Creek needs to be cleared of litter + trash
- Creek water quality near Reka goes down – need to resolve
- Be sure that any maintain golf course is not polluting the springs/creek - has that been researched (toxic chemicals?)

New Activities

- bring back disc golf
- Pump track: to learn how to turn, stop, body position! winter: it could be used for learning to ski uphill, downhill, turn

- Bike Park Ideas – 1) BMX Track, 2) Pump Track, 3) Start/Finish Area

Amenities

- more trash cans, signs, parental/kids' education; more trash pick-up in the summer
- help make easier for people to pick up dog poo

Dog Park

- Dog park fence – enclosed, better signs, not right next to Boniface
- Dog park fencing and mutt mitts
- Maybe fence in soccer fields for dog park?
- Dog Park fencing
- Dog park stairs disrepair
- Who removes dog poop?

Ball Fields

- Rehab ball field outfields, sprinkler system for ballfields

Play Area

- Bathrooms in playground area (winter)
- Playground needs trees

Chalet, Greenhouse, Model RR

- Expand the chalet to make it a recreation and/or community center w/ meeting rooms, fee based gym, ball courts, etc. We could have community council meetings there
- more programming (?) at the chalet, cafe/food trucks for people using the park, hot tub in winter, great location for school aged kids, chalet has potential for more art/passive rec
- public bathrooms at the greenhouse that isn't the port-a-potty
- support model train club provide more space for larger facility
- support model train club provide more space for larger facility
- Update model train club, to provide more room for visitors viewing. Larger building would will help all user. Keep same location

Safety

- security around parking areas, lights, line of sight, improve parking
- Creepy tunnel! need lights, need to be higher
- Better lighting (more!) – multi-use trail from Pine Street to Boniface Pkwy
- Camps – what can we do?