

**West Anchorage District Plan
Recreation Focus Group Minutes**
Friday, May 29, 2009, 3:30-5:30 pm
MOA Planning Department Room 170

Boundary Discussion

Consider ARRC, use it as a boundary.

Consider Klatt area and its fields as part of West Anchorage

Objectives

- Parks, Trails, and Open Space
 - Connors Bog is a real treasure.
 - The only immediate problem is it needs a fence between Jewel Lake Road and the parking lot. Dogs have a tendency to run out towards the road. There's conflict between ownership and issue with fencing.
 - Rose bush planting is a compromise.
 - It doesn't make sense to load your dog in a car to drive to a park. It'd be nice to have one closer.
 - There's something down at C Street that might be planned.
 - All dog parks are multi-use. Dog park people do their own trash pick-up.
 - Parking at big regional parks is inadequate. Parking spills into neighborhoods
 - We're running into room for organized users (who are partners).
 - We have growing population of immigrants who are unorganized (though family organized) and any nice day take over parks areas and so we need more casual park areas that are dedicated to everyone.
 - Off leash areas are nice but they're on voice control and unfenced.
 - Facilities and responsibilities are being added to every day. But our funding is going down. We have incredible facilities, but our resources to take care of them keep dropping and our utility costs keep going up.
 - Parks partners are huge in the equation. They do incredible things with NGO partners that they could never do by themselves. We need to nurture and take care of those relationships
 - NSAA focus is trails. A survey was done about what people like about the parks and their #1 response is always the trails.
 - Part of ski trails is on airport property. **Runway extension will???**
 - Connectivity of trails. For instance between Chester Creek Trail and Coastal Trail is not well established.
 - There isn't need for new trails. Southern Coastal rail isn't needed until we can maintain what we have.
 - **Taking care of what we have is a bigger problem than growth.**
 - More playgrounds within parks are needed.
 - Vandalism in general. Break-in of cars in parking lots. Jodfur Road parking lot at Kincaid is where break-ins are a big problem. Playgrounds

use closer to the parking lot would have more families close by for safety. Jodfur parking lot is a creepy place.

- There is a lot of casual use of parks.
- Pedestrian access on Jewel Lake Road, there's a lot of high density around there. It's not easy on bike or for pedestrians pushing strollers. Cool commerce would occur if multi-use were available.
- Sports Fields
 - We need our fields consolidated. They're spread out and there's wasted space and maintenance is inefficient.
 - There are people with dogs at Klatt. He's chasing people off his fields.
 - When new development abuts sports fields and the motorcycle park, complaints increase.
 - But some people want completely fenced, defined areas. If this existed, it would keep people off the ball fields.
- Lakes
 - More park benches around lakes would increase use, bring in families which may be less destructive.
 - At Sand Lake there is almost no public access. It is a tower controlled float plane lake.
 - On a sunny day, there are sail boats, swimmers, etc and it's crazy. It gets a lot of varied use. We're trying to make a safe place to keep our boats in the summer and winter behind Sand Lake School.
 - We see a lot of pent up demand for water access.
 - Float plane people are very active. They don't want to land on top of people.
 - Connectivity is important. People would like to bike to the lake since it's an activity that draws from all over town and Sand Lake is hard to get to.
 - Jewel, Sand, Campbell/Taku, Beer Can (Campbell Point Lake) are some of the most used lakes in the Anchorage area.
 - A lot of educational fishing on Jewel Lake as well as in the classroom. Salmon eggs are collected in Campbell Creek.
 - To maintain the healthy lakes, we have to maintain our wetlands. They buffer, keep bad things out of the lakes. They prevent eutrophication (all the fertilizers from lawns filtering in).
 - Taku/Campbell is a low lake that was formerly a pit where decay occurs in the winter while under the ice. Decay takes the oxygen plus the sucker fish. It happens in lakes throughout Alaska, and it is not uncommon.

Strengths and Values

- Parks, Trails and Open Space
 - A lot of greenspace. Sand pits were manmade and a lot of fun for recreation.
 - Views of the Inlet. The bluff areas that are accessible are wonderful. The views make the Coastal Trail special. It's a more wilderness experience than on Chester or Campbell Creek trails.

- Connors Bog has a variety of trails. When you step off the trail, you don't sink. You can get far enough away from traffic without worrying about dogs running in the street.
- We've got great parks. For the facilities that we already have, they need to be looked at for upgrades, not adding new. Maintenance has always been an issue. We tend to take new land for parks which takes land off the tax roll and the maintenance budget hasn't come up. A lot of parks need to be rethought with maintenance in mind
- Add buffer to parks with the neighborhood. Natural buffer of trees.
- We almost have a connected loop with Chester, Campbell, Coastal Trail.
- Mix of park types: Pocket parks which are jewels and Kincaid is massive, the biggest asset just geographically.
- Lighted trails in Kincaid and Chester Creek - makes trails more usable for adults after work.
- The historical value of what went on at Kincaid: Nike and Athabascan cultural there. There's some signage within the bunker and along the trails.
- There could do much more to show off the bowls of the chalet.
- Sports Fields
 - We have a great baseball facility at Jade. Our junior field is shared with Anchorage West at Spenard Rec. Its development was delayed and should be continued. A lot of the different softball leagues are being revitalized. Polar and Abbot or Rabbit are getting new fields/revitalized.
 - Moose Fields are still the defacto kids' field, but they are private, industrial property and not really in the West Dimond league area.
 - They try to keep little leagues similar to school district boundaries.
 - Only a couple competitive fields are not being used.
- Lakes
 - There are wetlands connecting Jewel, Sundi, and Sand Lake.
 - Public access to Campbell Lake does not exist. It's man made lake. There's some section land ROW that people don't know about.
 - Air traffic control is only telling you whether the lake is clear from other aircraft
 - Mostly natural lakes in the area. Taku/Campbell is the only manmade lake
 - The new hatchery in Ship Creek will provide more fish stock for these lakes.
 - The people themselves who like to recreate in this area. They care how the lakes are stocked and maintained.
 - There is less dumping in lakes and creeks. The amount of debris total has gone down. There is a better awareness how important the creeks or streams are.

Issues, Weakness, and Problems

- Parks, Trails and Open Space
 - There is a fence need at Connors Bog.
 - Everyone agrees signage would be helpful, but it is expensive.

- What about defacto parks- when some land was used as park for so long that they forbid development
- Finding funding to take care of what we've got. Our assets in park land have more than tripled in the last 15 years. Our budget is lowered.
- Parks are used more and more yet we can't get park bonds passed.
- Even if you're not a user of the trail system, it has a value to the entire community.
- Parks 20 Year Plan says SW lacks neighborhood parks
- The lowest income kids don't have access to the coolest things within town. A bus might help to make Kincaid more accessible from the east side.
- Coastal Trail near the airport is sloughing away at the peninsula point.
- User conflicts arise. Signage does help.
- Some wildlife conflicts
- Some people see parks very differently. People have their one view about how the parks should be used.
- People don't view them as economic engines. But they are engines. Even non-national events are still engines. Hockey is a whole other scene.
- Parks don't take off the tax roll
- Businesses move to towns where the quality of life – there are property value benefits.
- Vandalism- people came and knives their boots. There's broken glass.
- Homeless population in the neighborhood. Design parks so that they are observable and maintainable.
- The number of rental toilets needs to increase. However, the Taku toilet gets vandalized frequently. As soon as a rental toilet gets tipped, Parks & Rec will take it back.
- Sports Fields
 - Upkeep and maintenance. Example: Landscaping on Raspberry Road into Kincaid Park was nice at first, but since the Special Olympics, they don't do much to upkeep it.
 - Security is needed – There is a lot of vandalism at ballfields and at Kincaid Park.
 - Jewel Lake and West Dimond roads need upgrade to support non-motorized travel.
- Lakes
 - Motorized boats can only be used in the evening.
 - Novice program is limited.
 - Introduction of Northern Pike into Sand Lake. Study showed Anchorage Area stocked-lake program adds \$3 million economic value. When pike is introduced, the additional fish are just food for the pike. Some people do it out of spite or who want to fish for pike.
 - There should be some limits to development around some wetlands.

Trends and Solutions

- General Trends

- Trend: The percent of youth in the total population in Anchorage is not going up. Adult recreation is increasing. Not all, but many of the organized sports are white people.
- Trend: The percentage of kids playing baseball is not rising, but the total number of kids is rising.
- Trend: Many special/individual user-groups with agendas are running their own show. If someone's not watching the big picture, we're going to run amok.
- Trend: Subsistence use of greenery. People are harvesting stuff- but it has an impact. There's talk that people are picking and shipping-out materials.
- Solution: Community Schools program needs to come back.
- Trend: The use of all facilities seems increased.
- Parks, Trails, and Open Space
 - Trend: Maintenance funding is not increasing.
Solution: Eagle River has instituted a mill levee for capital maintenance.
 - Trend: Vandalism going up. Not sure if that's true or true since he's taken over maintenance. It's beyond spray painting and moved towards damage. For example, last year our electrical boxes were destroyed.
 - Ideas: More patrol or community awareness of the problems we're having.
 - Trends: Connors Bog is doing well, with enough parking. Vandalism is everywhere. At Connors there's really nothing to destroy. The dispensers get bashed-in.
 - Trend: Our community is no longer majority Caucasian. We're trying to learn how different cultural groups see parks and how they use parks. There's a big learning opportunity for us all there.
 - Trend: Cooperative efforts are really the future for our park system. Its going to become more and more important for maintain our systems; for developing anything new. Cuddy was federal, private funds, some a little State. We have the highest volunteer hours (90,000 hrs/year) in our parks system per capita than many cities. See Parks Foundation programs.
 - Trend: Junior Nordic growth is maxed out. Tiny skiers are the bubble. We're losing the older skiers because they're going into competitive programs. There's 3 training groups for the junior high and older groups. They owe \$1 mil equipment and they spend \$400,000 in maintenance. Community expectations increase. 170 km groomed trails.
 - Trend: Face of community is changing. Junior Nordic is white. NSAA is taking skiing to Title I schools. In some cultures, it's unthinkable to drop off your kid with strangers. Or it's unthinkable to leave the beautiful house you've struggled to create.
- Sports Fields
 - Trend: Partnerships (private/public or public/public are being tapped into. Parks & Rec with the school district can go further. There are resources at all the schools are underused in the summer. If there was funding (like Community Schools program) to open those fields back up.
 - Softball numbers bottomed out and they're rising again.

- Rugby and lacrosse are growing. They need to grow into groups/organizations like the Nordic Association that can organize volunteers and funding, implement projects.
- Lakes
 - Trend: New immigrant families do not understand bag limits or the reason we have to regulate things. We have some beneficial education programs.
 - Trend: Increased demand for our stocked fisheries. This provides the opportunity for people who can't afford to leave town to still fish.
 - All the lakes have good access except Sand Lake.
 - New hatchery is under construction which will allow us to stock more fish.
 - We don't always have signs (they get vandalized) but most people seem to know.
 - It would be nice to have access to Campbell Lake, but its unclear how that would happen unless MOA bought one of the properties.
 - Solution: Bring back the Community Schools program. It's a good place to do outreach. Elementary Schools are already the place to reach new people. The outreach can occur both directions too- have immigrants educate us.