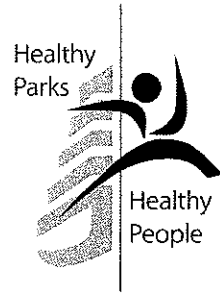




**MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION**

REGULAR MEETING

February 12, 2009 Minutes



I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, February 12, 2009, at the Anchorage School Board conference room.

II. ROLL CALL

Roll call taken by Director Dillon

Commissioners Present:

Chairperson Kathleen Plunkett
Commissioner Allyson Beischer
Commissioner Tim Benintendi
Commissioner Sara Boaria
Commissioner Zareena Clendaniel
Commissioner Peter Crosby
Commissioner Dan Frank
Commissioner Meagan Krupa
Commissioner Eric McCallum
Commissioner Victor Mollozzi
Commissioner David Wigglesworth

Staff Present

Jeff Dillon, Department Director
Beth Nordlund
Monique Anderson
Brad Dunker
Elizabeth Stanley

III. Consent Agenda

The Agenda and the Minutes of the January 2009 meeting were approved.
Motion by Commissioner McCallum
Seconded by Commissioner Benintendi

IV. Director's Comments

Director Jeff Dillon discussed the Municipality's Round 1 budget reduction efforts and how they have affected the Parks & Recreation Department. The reductions will eventually lead to the lost of 6 positions. Youth programs were preserved, impact to programs was minimized, and maintenance was preserved. The programs that were impacted involved the recreational school program. The positions eliminated were positions that had less role in the department as permitting and grant agreements have been distributed to the district offices. Other impacts are yet to be determined. The number 1 budget concern is the rising costs of energy. The department must be as fiscally responsible as possible.

Director Dillon then asked Assembly Member Mike Gutierrez to speak regarding a memorandum issued by Mr. Gutierrez and Assembly Members Sheila Selkregg and Elvi Gray-Jackson. Mr. Gutierrez thanked the Commission for its willingness to serve the citizens of Anchorage. He discussed the memo, the gist of which was to urge the Commission to pay close attention to what the community had to say on the issue of the Russian Jack Springs Park Improvement Plan. He believes the community wants no drastic changes made to the park. The Commission was urged to proceed with caution in making its decision.

V. Appearance Requests

There were no appearance requests.

VI. Information Items

Director Dillon referred the Commissioners to the written reports on the Information Items

- A) PRC 09-06: the FNBP Draft Trail Improvement Plan, and
- B) PRC 09-07: the Ted Stevens International Airport Runway Extension Project—Trail Alternatives;

and stated that Monique Anderson was in attendance to answer any questions.

VII. Staff Reports

- A) PRC 09-07: Superintendent's Report**

Director Dillon referred the Commissioners to the Superintendent's Report, and stated that Monique Anderson was in attendance to answer any questions.

- B) PRC 09-09: Anchorage Park Foundation Report**

Beth Nordlund, Deputy Director of Parks & Recreation, provided the staff report on the Anchorage Park Foundation (PRC 09-09), discussing the annual volunteer report and the 12 projects in the neighborhood parks that the Department will be working on this summer with +the help of Anchorage Park Foundation funds, bond money, donations, and volunteer and community support. A very productive summer is anticipated.

VIII. Action Items

A) PRC 80-72: Russian Jack Springs Park – Park Improvement Plan (public comment continued from December and January meetings)

Director Dillon summarized the 10 items in the staff recommendations submitted to the Commission

The Parks and Recreation Department recommends a compromise between Alternatives 2 and 3 for the Russian Jack Springs Park Improvement plan be approved with the following conditions:

1. The safe sledding hill re-design shall be limited to not more than ½ acre of clearing of existing trees.
2. In addition to the maximum of ½ acre clearing, the sledding area shall be re-graded to ensure that sledding is moved away from the forest areas while minimizing tree clearing.
3. The development of a separate snowboarding area should only take place if minimal tree clearing can be accomplished (not to exceed ¼ acre). This would provide two distinct areas with adequate run out to avoid conflict between existing uses.
4. Remodel the existing golf course as follows:
 - a. Provide 9 holes of par three golf, a chip-and-put area and a practice green without additional tree clearing.
 - b. The course should have a minimum of one natural grass green for practice (the existing 9th hole) and should review current artificial greens that provide improved play while reducing the need for maintenance, fertilize and water. The consultants should look to the existing course now installed at Anchor Point which utilizes a new form of artificial green as a possible alternative to grass
 - c. The layout should allow the first three holes to be configured in such a way as to allow First Tee to use as a learning center in place of a driving range while still allowing the public to access the remaining 6 holes for regular play.

The first 4 items are immediate safety upgrades that should be part of Phase I.

5. Provide for parking lot upgrades to include a fire truck turn area, handicapped parking and accessible walkways as proposed in Alternative 3.

6. Provide public picnic area and family playground.
7. Provide for water for irrigation of turf areas and the practice putting green area through a connection to AWWU water lines.
8. Total tree removal acreage shall not exceed $\frac{3}{4}$ acre for all improvements proposed under this plan.
9. Entry Road Safety Study – A traffic study should be conducted at such time as road improvements are planned for Debar Road to examine the entry and exit patterns from the park onto the travel lanes and the possibility of reducing the grade at the park entrance for safety concerns.
10. Future Development in the northwest corner – prior to future development of a driving range or alternative entry road from Pine Street the department should conduct a site plan study including a site selection study for the recreation center as shown in the existing master plan or driving range and prepare a master plan for the park. This is not considered an immediate need, but rather a requirement for future development within existing undisturbed areas. This should not be construed as blocking the repair and or replacement of any existing recreation facilities within the park.

Based on the further memo from the three assembly members, it is recommended that public involvement for the playground, picnic area, and parking lot changes include more public involvement.

Public comment then continued:

Clinton Hodges: Mr. Hodges, speaking as an individual, expressed dissatisfaction with the public process on this project and state his support for the written comments of David Evans and Jim Galanes. He believes sledding hill safety is already being dealt with adequately.

Dirk Sisson: Mr. Sisson discussed the master plan, the natural beauty of Russian Jack Springs Park, improvements to the current golf course without expansion, and the need to keep Russian Jack Springs Park as a preservation area. He urges the Commission to keep Alternative 4 out of consideration. He supports Alternative 1, and perhaps Alternative 2, which he believe most closely honor the Master Plan.

Trond Jensen: Mr. Jensen spoke as a representative of the Arctic Orienteering Club. The Club is opposed to Alternatives 3 and 4 and the alternative access road. The Club supports Alternative 1: Take No Action.

Billy Bomar: Mr. Bomar, speaking as a representative of the First Tee of Alaska and its executive director, discussed the mission, program and intentions of First Tee. Upon question by the commission, he stated that the First Tee program

could go on without the driving range, and discussed how First Tee envisioned the driving range's revenue would support the First Tee program.

Corinne McVee: Ms. McVee, speaking as an individual, urges the Commission to preserve the natural beauty of Russian Jack Springs Park.

Mike McVee: Mr. McVee spoke as an individual and voiced support for proposal 2, or the new proposal presented this evening. He wants to see the park protected.

Nickel LaFleur: As a representative of the Anchorage Garden Club, she recited the history of Russian Jack Springs Park, then stated the Club's wish to protect the springs and the park, its opposition to the use of natural grass turfs and the use of chemicals, and support of Alternative 1 with some modification

Vivian Mendenhall: Ms. Mendenhall represents the Anchorage Audubon Society which prefers Alternative 1, but will support the new alternative because it is responsive to the safety concerns and the concerns of the public.

Gary Snyder: As an individual, Mr. Snyder believes the general character of the Park should be preserved while making some improvements for sledding and snowboarding. He supports the new alternative.

Jim Galanes: Mr. Galanes believes the preservation and protection of Russian Jack Springs Park is most important, and that there are environmental, ecological, and other needs that need to be analyzed and addressed prior to any further development in the park.

Robert Shipley: Mr. Shipley represents the Anchorage Waterways Council, which is concerned with protection and improvement of our waterways and wetlands. The Council supports Alternative 2, and perhaps Alternative 3 with reservations, but in view of the new alternative presented this evening believes the Council would look at that favorably.

Verna Platt: Ms. Platt spoke as an individual, stating her concern is the northeast side of the golf course and how many trees are going to be removed. She also expressed concern about fertilizer runoff contaminating the springs, and suggested the water be monitored to make sure that doesn't happen.

Marc Grober: Mr. Grober, speaking for the Northeast Community Council, expressed concerns about the process this project has followed, about the community's love of the park and its aesthetic values. He believes the concerns about the sledding and snowboarding hills are unwarranted. The council would like to see a risk management analysis of that issue. The park needs to be preserved. The

Commission doesn't need to act right now; it needs to stop and look and send the project back for a reanalysis of the master plan.

Eva Atchok: Ms. Atchok, an individual, is against making any changes to the Park. She wants to see the Park preserved as it is now.

Mary Hilcoske: Ms. Hilcoske spoke as an individual. She believes the park must be preserved under Alternative 1 or 2. She does not want to see any trees cut.

Susan Klein: Ms. Klein is a vegetation ecologist who believes Parks & Recreation needs to make further study into park needs and exactly what the community wants for Russian Jack Springs Park.

Susanne Comellas: Ms. Comellas, speaking for herself and her husband Ralph, discussed her regret at voting for the ballot measure regarding Russian Jack Springs Park. In light of the new alternative has been presented, she would like to see public testimony revisited. She wants Russian Jack kept as pristine as possible

Cam Rader: Mr. Rader, an individual, expressed satisfaction with the new alternative.

Vladimir: Vladimir, an individual, does not want to see the cutting of any trees and would like to see the park preserved as it is now.

Kimbrough Mauney: Ms. Mauney is a skier and a ski coach. She had questions regarding First Tee's recruitment procedures and First Tee's compatibility with the disc golfers; she suggested putting up signs encouraging people to walk into the Park from Pine Street; stated her belief that the kids won't care which hill is dedicated to sledding or snowboarding, they'll choose to use the one that's most attractive to them, thus making it difficult to separate the user groups; she believes the Park staff should be outside interacting with park users to ensure safety and cooperation; she believes First Tee's program should include teaching the kids respect for the environment; and, finally, that if trees are cut down, equal numbers of trees be planted elsewhere in the park.

Annette Cartier: Speaking on behalf of Friends of Russian Jack, Ms. Cartier presented a PowerPoint presentation showing the timeline of the Russian Jack Springs Park Improvement Plan, First Tee's contacts and interactions with the Commission and Assembly, and the public process. She believes the project is a "moving target," with a lot of changing alternatives and issues. She thinks there needs to be a better plan.

Elsa Billingham: Ms. Billingham supports Alternative 2. She believes Parks & Recreation needs to look more closely at the cost of maintaining parks and golf courses before proceeding with any plan.

Aaron Pascar: Mr. Pascar is a community patrol officer and believes that creating a new access road into the park will cause many safety concerns within the park, making it attractive to undesirable users and the park a dangerous place.

Gunnar Knapp: Mr. Knapp discussed the inadequacy of First Tee's business plan, because of that, does not support Alternative 4.

Mike Mitchell: Mr. Mitchell is President of the Anchorage Trails & Greenways Coalition who's core concerns are safety of the current users, preserving the existing character of the park, and minimizing the cutting of trees. The Coalition opposes the driving range; supports improvement of the existing access road but opposes a new access road. It is believed that more public input is needed to determine the proper amount of clearing, the protection of the springs, and the need to prevent runoff from the golf tees.

Ann Gabler: Ms. Gabler advocates preservation of the Park as it is now

Bill Oakes: Mr. Oakes advises looking at other locations for the driving range and agrees that the present access road needs improvement.

Steve Beardsley: Former Park Commissioner Beardsley requests that people be given a chance to comment on the new alternative

Brian Hickey: Mr. Hickey commended the Commission on its efforts. However, he believes that everyone needs to go back to the beginning and start a new plan emphasizing the preservation of the park. He also believes the plans for the sledding and snowboard hills will not improve the safety of the hill and need to be revamped, and showed pictures and maps illustrating his concerns.

Pete Mjos: Mr. Mjos believes the park must be preserved.

Sheila Selkregg: Assembly Member Sheila Selkregg discussed her memo to the Commission, stating it expresses her concerns. She urges the Commission to be careful in making its decision, because there is a strong sentiment in the community that the natural integrity of the park be preserved. She spoke in favor of improvements to the sledding hill and creation of a snowboarding hill, but believes the design needs careful evaluation.

At 9:00 p.m. public comment was closed by Chair Plunkett.

Commissioner Mollozzi made a motion to accept the Staff Recommendations. Discussion then ensued amongst the Commissioners and Mr. Dillon regarding the concerns expressed by the public, the new alternative (which they agreed to call Alternative 3A), the Urban Design Commission process, and further public comment.

The Commission voted to table the motion. Commissioner McCallum made a motion directing staff to incorporate its recommendation into the existing Alternative 3 and bring it back to the Commission at its meeting in March 2009, which motion was seconded by Commissioner Benintendi. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.