

EASTCHESTER PARK

MASTER PLAN



MEETING SUMMARY

Overview:

To establish a foundation for future planning and public involvement. The Community Advisory Group will help Anchorage Parks and Recreation identify park issues, community needs, and management and development priorities that should be considered in the Master Plan.

PARTICIPANTS:

COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP

Bob Butera, Rogers Park neighbor
Maria Crawford, Fairview neighbor
David Evans, Rogers Park neighbor
Karen Gonne'-Harrell, Fairview Community Council
Lindsey Hajduk, NeighborWorks Alaska
Allen Kemplen, Fairview Community Council
Mel Langdon, Rogers Park neighbor
Dan Smith, Airport Heights neighbor

PARKS AND RECREATION PROJECT TEAM

Taylor Keegan, Landscape Architect
Nicolette Dent, Park Planner

ABOUT THE MASTER PLAN:

- In 2022, voters supported a \$300,000 bond to improve Eastchester Park.
- The Master Plan will establish a 20-year vision for improvement, maintenance, and management.
- Bond funds will be used for planning, survey, geotechnical report, and public outreach. Leftover funds will allow us to start working on priorities established through the Master Plan process.

TIMELINE:

- Project team introduced the effort to Fairview, Airport Heights, and Rogers Park Community Councils over the winter.
- In addition to working with the Advisory Group throughout plan development, Parks and Recreation will host a public open house, pop-up meetings in the park, and an online survey in 2023.
- Plan drafting will begin in early 2024. Advisory Group will meet and review drafts.
- Community Council review and approvals will happen 2024 - 2025.



EASTCHESTER PARK

MASTER PLAN

ABOUT THE PARK:

- **Park Features:**
 - Eastchester Park includes play areas and fields at Hillstrand Pond Park and Woodside Park. It does not include Sitka Street Park.
 - Chester Creek Trail is a main feature, plus short soft-surface connector to the Senior Center and to Eastridge residential area.
- **Natural Resources:**
 - Much of this park is Class A wetlands and heavily forested with spruce, birch, cottonwood, and invasive bird cherry. In recent years, funding has been available for spruce bark beetle removal in this area.
 - Chanshtnu (Chester Creek) was used for centuries by Dena'ina people for fish camps.
 - Previous studies include a Hillstrand Pond Study, which provided cost estimates for dredging the pond (\$440,000 in 1990).
- **History:**
 - Eastchester Flats was Anchorage's early black community, north of the creek. Largely dismantled by urban renewal projects in 1970s.
 - Shiloh Baptist Church is one of Alaska's oldest black churches and has a parking agreement to share the Woodside parking area for overflow.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

PARK ISSUES

Woodside Section

- Highway noise in Woodside fields area
- High speed traffic along 20th Ave
- Current curb cuts don't match the actual use patterns along 20th Ave
- Presence of utility in fields
- Tunnel under highway is narrow and dark
- Play area is not sufficiently large for density of housing and lacks school age opportunity
- No equipment features for adults (i.e. fitness, gardens, etc.)
- Some camping issues in the drier wooded areas
- Open fields seem to be underused
- Lacking wayfinding into neighborhoods
- Newcomers to Alaska don't always feel comfortable on Chester Creek Trail

Wetland Section

- Any development here would change ephemeral winter uses
- Prunus padus and vetch (invasive species)
- Sitka Street Park is airport-owned land and prevents the two parks from being considered together
- Lack of trail connection north of creek from the Maplewood St spur

Hillstrand Pond Section

- Improve condition of the bridge at Hillstrand
- Erosion at pond edge from people feeding ducks
- Road noise from Lake Otis
- Aging play equipment



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MASTER PLAN

BEST THINGS ABOUT THE PARK:

Woodside Section

- Serves a multi-lingual community
- Lots of gardens in the neighborhood
- The open field is nice for playing with pets
- Woodside area is popular for picnics and birthday parties

Wetland Section

- Chester Creek is in its natural condition here
- You can see animals here! Bears, eagles, etc.
- Wetland areas become used in the winter
- There are natural winter connector trails north of the creek toward Sitka Street Park
- This is a great place to forage for edible plants
- Chester Creek Trail is a bike “highway” and crucial transportation infrastructure
- The park supports large events like Trailgate (Iditarod spectating) and Bike to Work Day
- Neighborhood spur trails provide nice opportunity for walking loops

Hillstrand Pond Section

- Ducks!
- Hillstrand Pond is a nice destination for walking
- Provides feeling of solitude

OPPORTUNITIES AT EASTCHESTER PARK:

Woodside Section

- Integration with the Fairview Greenway plan
- Integration with Fairview Community Council gardens plan
- Dechannelize Chester Creek in Woodside area
- Coordinate tunnel and culvert replacements under Seward Highway?
- Singletrack in the wooded uplands toward Rogers Park to reduce camping
- Create a “pit stop” in the open fields, for example, a sledding hill combo amphitheater
- Outreach to RAIS newcomers (refugee resettlement program)
- Public gathering space to support pop-up events
- Infrastructure to support markets and vendors
- Flooded ice rink to activate winter space
- Landscaping intervention along 20th Ave

Wetland Section

- Keep Chester Creek in its natural condition
- Are there additional opportunities for walking loops in the middle section across to Senior Center?
- Identify water crossings with the Dena’ina name
- Boardwalk for birding, something viable for winter activity
- More education (signage) of wetland ecosystem and the north fork of Chester Creek
- “Everything is there to restore the North Fork”



EASTCHESTER PARK

MASTER PLAN

Hillstrand Pond section

- Keep ducks and people separate
- Provide a hard edge at the pond bank
- Soft surface pond loop (consider the former trail footprint that is now overgrown)
- Connect Sitka Street Park with Chester Creek Trail, via the Maplewood St. spur. At a minimum, can we connect to 20th Ave at Eastridge?
- Coordinate with existing plans to replace Lake Otis culverts

RAPID-FIRE ROUND:

What do you want Eastchester Park to be known for in 20 years?

- A safe, intergenerational, and accessible space!
- A new feature combination sledding hill, pavilion, game area, and Seward Highway sound barrier!
- A wild, grown-in, safe, beautiful trail corridor!
- An environmentally holistic place!
- A place with iconic art!
- An incredible piece of wilderness next to high density urban housing!
- Enhancing the quality of life for neighbors!

NEXT STEPS:

- Online Survey and Bike to Work Day Pop Up
- Eastchester Park Advisory Group Site Visit (early Summer)

Project Updates and Links: <https://www.muni.org/Departments/parks/Pages/EastchesterMasterPlan.aspx>

Project Contacts:

Taylor Keegan, PLA, ASLA
Landscape Architect
E: taylor.keegan@anchorageak.gov
P: 907-343-4518

Nicolette Dent
Park Planner
E: nicolette.dent@anchorageak.gov
P: 907-343-4137

