

MEALS HILL MASTER PLAN

Valdez, Alaska



MASTER PLAN REPORT

JUNE 2021
FINAL REPORT



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THANK YOU

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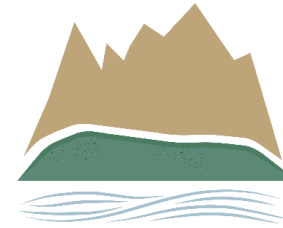
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The following Meals Hill Master Plan was developed for the City of Valdez Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Department by Huddle AK, Interior Trails, Parks and People, and ECI along with guidance from the Great Land Trust.

FUNDING

This project was funded by a grant from the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council (EVOSTC). Thank you to the EVOSTC and agency partners including the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program, the GLT, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the State of Alaska, and other partners for efforts on securing this funding to create this public asset that conserves this site to benefit the species and human services impacted by the oil spill.



**MEALS HILL
MASTER PLAN**
Valdez, Alaska



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PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION WORK SESSION

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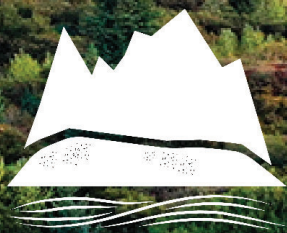
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MEALS HILL MASTER PLAN

Valdez, Alaska

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IMAGE 1

PLAN PURPOSE

The purpose of the Meals Hill Master Plan is to provide the City of Valdez (COV) a vision and implementation strategy to guide the future development and management of the Meals Hill site as a natural area and park that complements the community's existing recreation and cultural opportunities. The plan is grounded in a thorough background analysis and public process that included the research of existing COV plans, site visits with community members, a statistically significant community and visitor survey, stakeholder interviews, the contributions of a planning committee of residents, and a series of public meetings.

GUIDE TO THE PLAN

The Meals Hill Master Plan and appendices are a comprehensive report that summarize the project background information, the project process, and the final recommendations. The report is divided into two sections:

- PART I: PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PROCESS
- PART II: MEALS HILL MASTER PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The full document provides an in-depth analysis of the process and the development of the master plan. However, the first six pages of the document, including this executive summary along with the graphic master plan, provide an overview summary and the key takeaways of the plan.

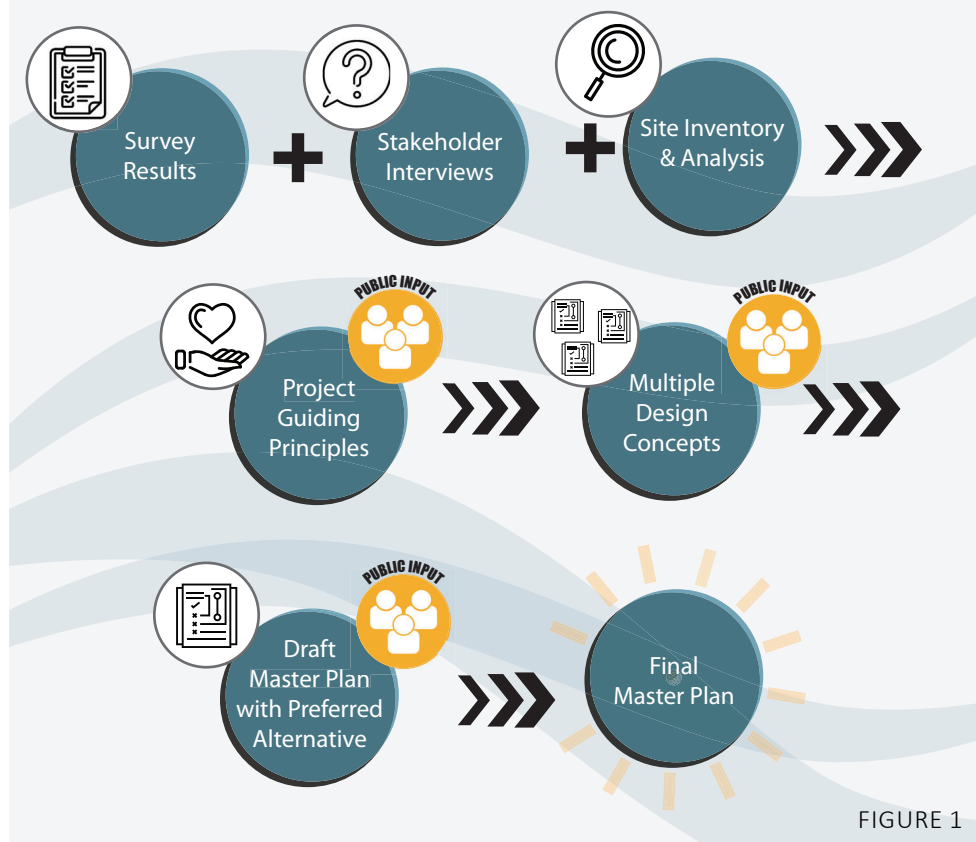
CONSERVATION EASEMENT

In 2019 the Great Land Trust (GLT) worked with the previous landowner, The Port Valdez Company, and agency partners to establish a conservation easement on the property and secure the funding needed to transfer land ownership to the City of Valdez for use as a natural area and public park. The acquisition was funded by a grant from the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council (EVOSTC) specifically for the purpose of benefiting the species and human services impacted by the oil spill.

The conservation easement legally establishes protections for the property in perpetuity with specific conditions, restrictions, and limitations to protect and restore the natural assets of the site and is held and enforced by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The easement also allows for limited non-motorized recreational enhancements to facilitate and benefit passive public recreational uses of the property.

The purpose of the easement is to ensure the conservation values of the property will be protected and maintained in perpetuity and to prevent any use or alteration that will impair, degrade, or interfere with its natural and undisturbed habitat values. These purposes include restoration and preservation of natural, scenic, forested, non-forested, wetlands, marine coastal shoreline, and other ecological values, as well as the conservation and protection of migratory bird, fish, and wildlife resources supported by habitats on the property. The conservation easement sets the foundation for the master plan through the conservation values and allowable uses that the easement establishes.

PROJECT PROCESS



PROJECT PROCESS & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The project process included initial research of existing COV plans, site visits with locals, analysis of existing conditions including terrain, soils, hydrology, vegetation and wildlife, and adjacent infrastructure. Following the initial existing condition and site analysis the project included a comprehensive community engagement process including:

- A statistically significant community and visitor survey
- Stakeholder interviews
- Three virtual public meetings with two in-person open houses
- Five Meals Hill Planning Committee (MHPC) meetings
- Two work sessions with the Parks and Recreation Commission, one as a joint session with the City Council

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Five guiding principles statements were adopted for the project to help guide the master plan. The guiding principles set the tone and intent of the plan and guided planning decisions. The statements were developed based on the conservation easement, initial survey results, stakeholder input, and were verified by an interactive poll completed by the public during the first public meeting.



MEALS HILL MASTER PLAN

With the foundation of existing conditions analysis and community engagement, the proposed master plan encompasses a community vision for Meals Hill that reflects the unique character of the site. The proposed Meals Hill Master Plan:



Balances the community's desire for nature-based recreation and habitat conservation.



Is community-focused providing trails, amenities, and access that best serve daily uses.



Serves a range of non-motorized users in a variety of terrain creating opportunities for year-round activity.



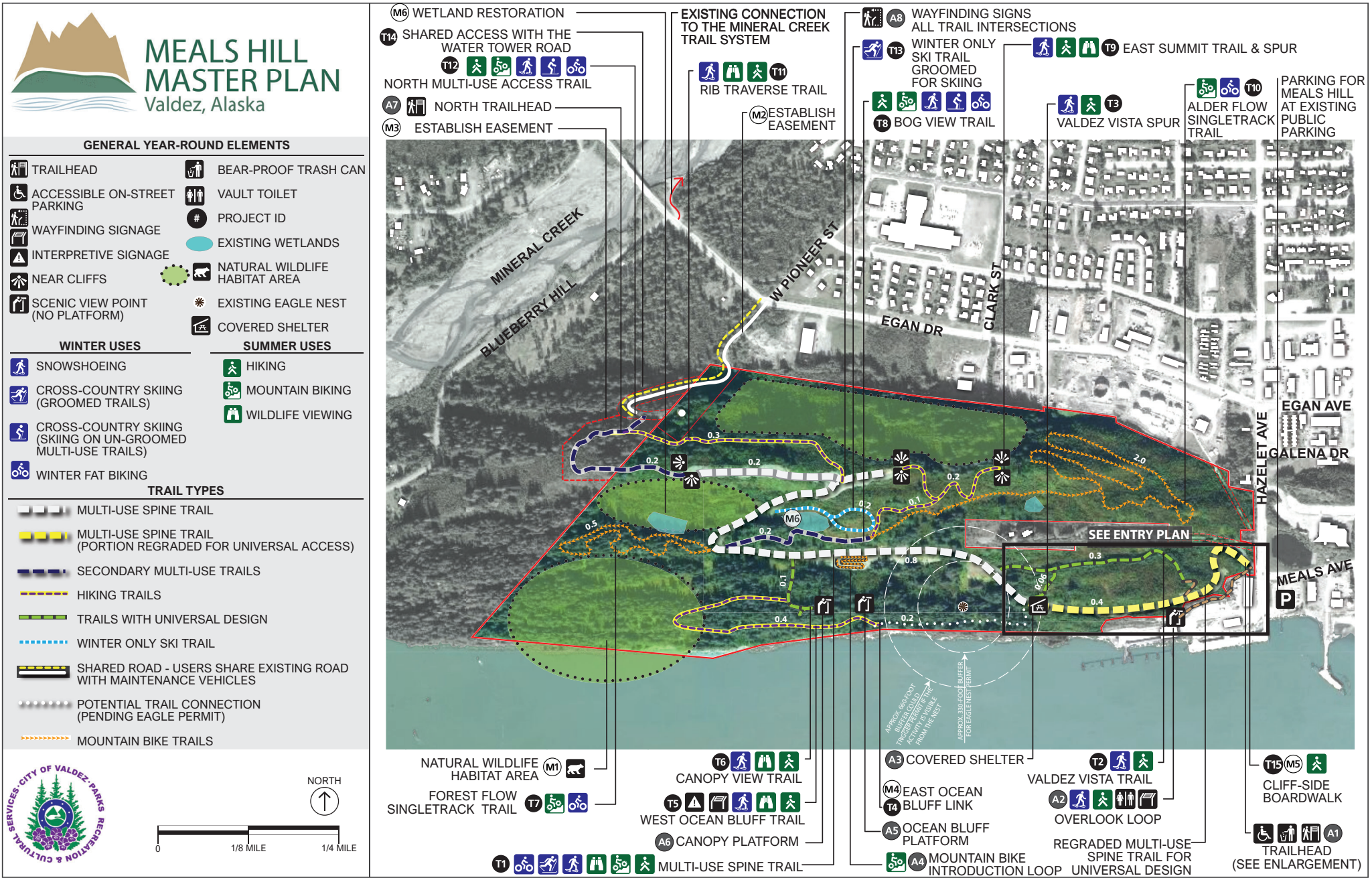
Uses the site's terrain, ecosystems, and vantage points to create vistas and opportunities for solitude.



Considers funding, maintenance, and long-term community well-being.

OVERALL SITE MASTER PLAN

MAP 1



TRAIL & AMENITY EXAMPLE IMAGES

IMAGE 2



T1

T1 - MULTI-USE SPINE TRAIL



T2 T3
T12 T6

T2 - VALDEZ VISTA TRAIL
T3 - VALDEZ VISTA SPUR
T6 - CANOPY VIEW TRAIL
T12 - NORTH MULTI-USE TRAIL



T4 T5

T4 - EAST OCEAN BLUFF LINK
T5 - WEST OCEAN BLUFF TRAIL



T7 T10

T7 - FOREST FLOW SINGLETRACK TRAIL
T10 - ALDER FLOW SINGLETRACK TRAIL



T11 T8

T8 - BOG VIEW MULTI-USE TRAIL
T11 - RIB TRAVERSE TRAIL



T9

T9 - EAST SUMMIT TRAIL & SPUR



T13

T13 - SKI LOOP (WINTER ONLY)



T15

T15 - CLIFF-SIDE BOARDWALK



A1

A1 - PARK ENTRY & TRAILHEAD



A2

PHOTO CREDIT: GRET LAND TRUST
A2 - OVERLOOK LOOP



A3

A3 - COVERED SHELTER



A4

PHOTO CREDIT: SKYLER KEHREN
A4 - MOUNTAIN BIKE INTRODUCTION LOOP



A6 A5

PHOTO CREDIT: GRET LAND TRUST
A5 - CANOPY PLATFORM
A6 - OCEAN BLUFF PLATFORM



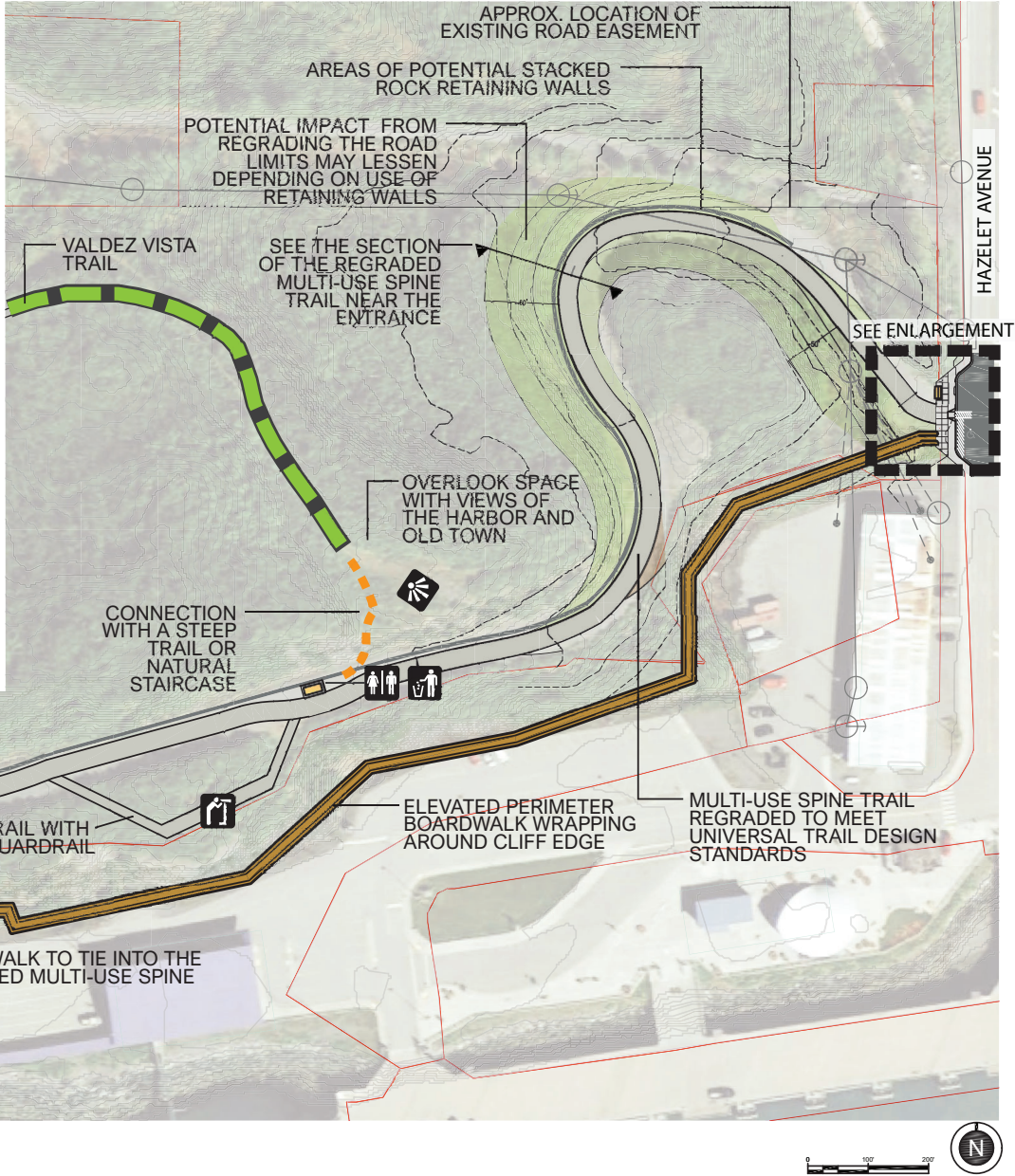
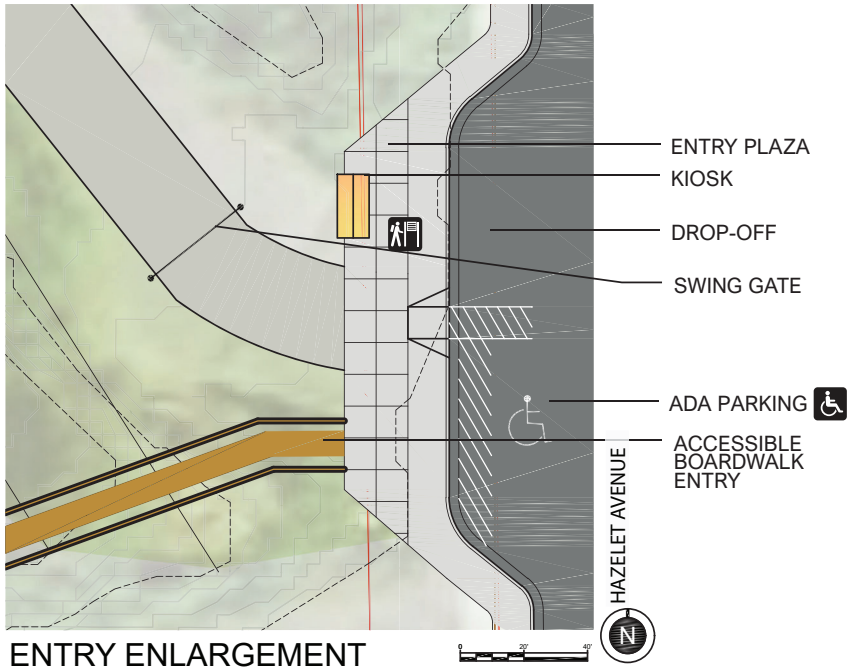
A7

A7 - NORTH TRAILHEAD

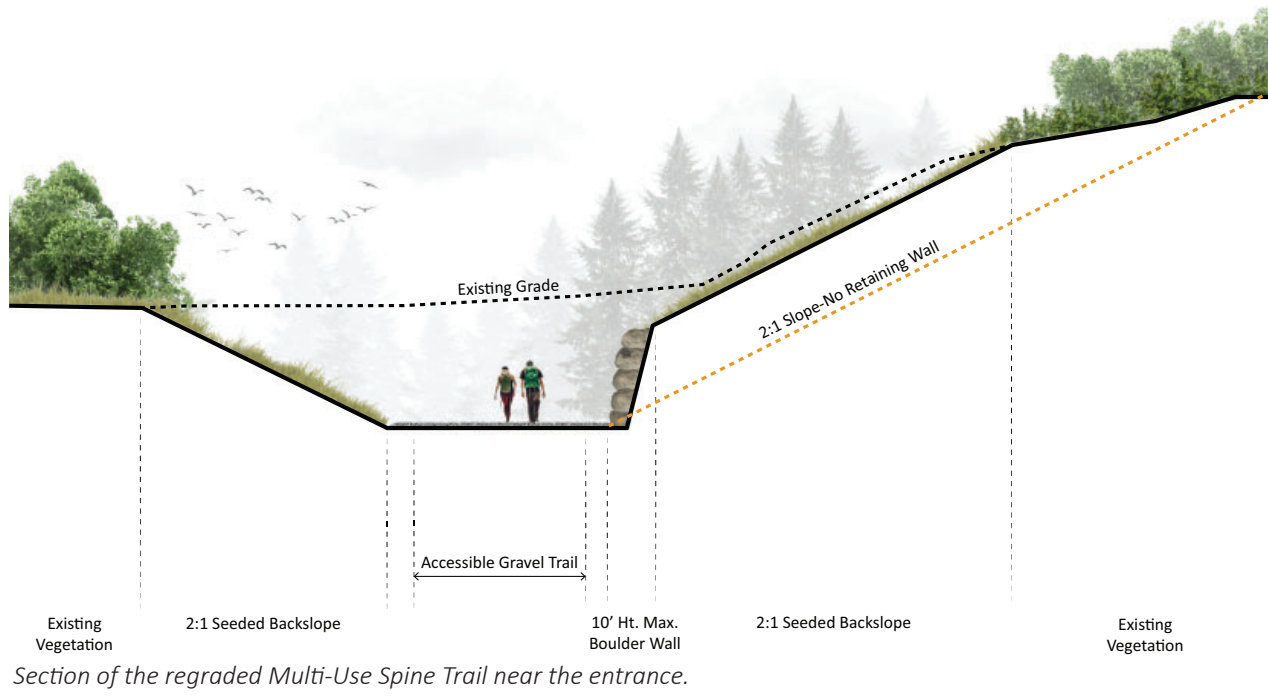


A8

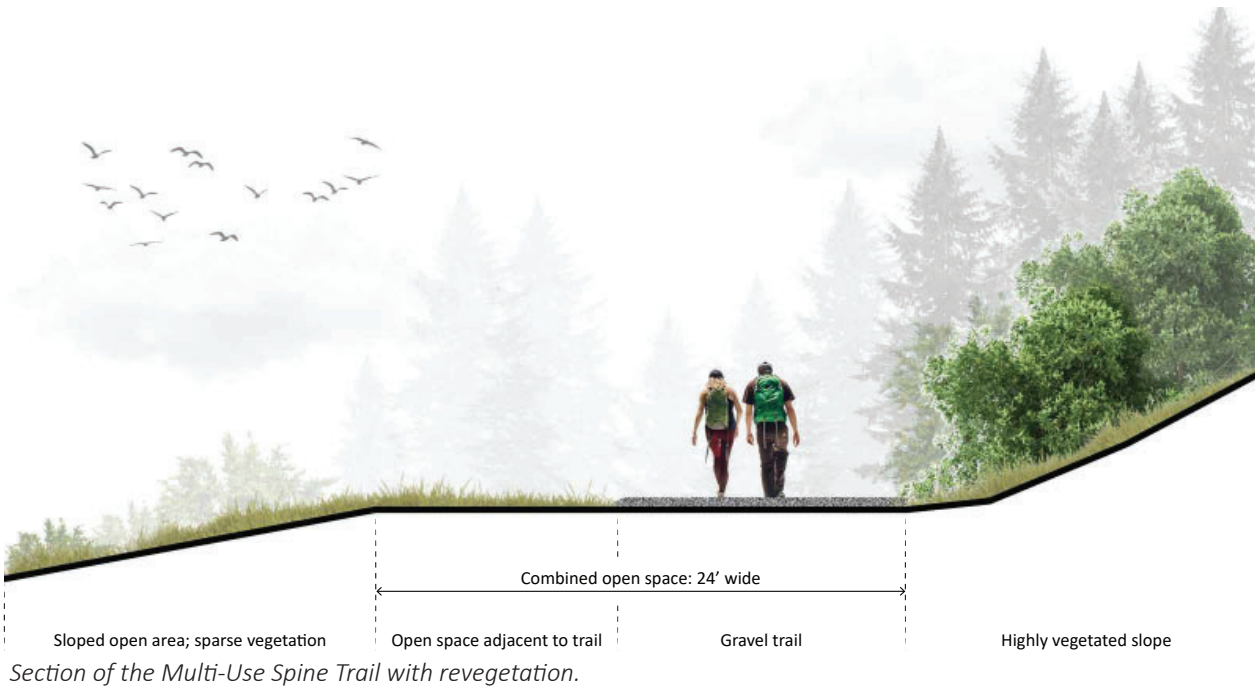
A8 - WAYFINDING



- | | | | |
|--|----------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| | TRAILHEAD | | SCENIC VIEW POINT (NO PLATFORM) |
| | ACCESSIBLE PARKING | | VIEWING PLATFORM |
| | WAYFINDING SIGNAGE | | BEAR-PROOF TRASH CAN |
| | INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE | | VAULT TOILET |
| | COVERED SHELTER | | |



Rendering of proposed covered shelter.



Rendering of proposed cliff-side boardwalk.



IMAGE 3

Bird's-eye view of Meals Hill looking east. Photo Credit: City of Valdez.

INTRODUCTION

Meals Hill is 184-acres of recently acquired public land adjacent to Valdez's downtown and waterfront. The landscape includes rocky coastline and native rainforest uplands with scenic vantages. The location and relatively undisturbed nature of the parcel are exceedingly rare to find in a city's core; it provides an incredibly unique opportunity for the community to converse a natural asset in the heart of the city and create an iconic public place. The purpose of this master plan is to listen to the community's goals, envision what the area could be, and create a plan that guides the future development and management of Meals Hill as a natural area that is consistent with the property's conservation easement and compliments the community's existing recreation and cultural opportunities.

The master planning effort was led by the City of Valdez (COV) Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Department along with a team of consultants including Huddle AK, Parks and People, Interior

Trails, and ECI Architects. The Great Land Trust (GLT) has provided guidance to the city and planning team throughout the process by providing interpretation of the conservation easement, review of draft plans, and coordination with partner agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), who holds the conservation easement and will enforce its requirements.

The project process has included research of existing COV plans, site visits with locals, a statistically significant community and visitor survey and stakeholder interviews. The team is also facilitated a comprehensive public engagement process that began with a planning committee of residents and included a series of public meetings over the course of the planning process. Below is a summary of the background of the project, existing site conditions, and the results from the survey and stakeholder interviews. The research conducted at this stage of the project in combination with the public involvement process is the foundation for developing the master plan.

BACKGROUND

VALDEZ AREA

Set between the waters of Prince William Sound and the Chugach Mountains along Alaska's southern coastline, the City of Valdez is rooted in a scenic landscape profoundly shaped by natural and human influences. With an economy formed by access to natural resources, the City is positioned along a waterfront harbor with a grid of commercial, residential, industrial and public developments branching from the coast. Meals Hill, 184-acres of undeveloped land, is uniquely positioned along the waterfront, adjacent the city's residential neighborhoods, waterfront, and west of the core downtown.

HISTORY

While the City of Valdez itself holds intriguing history shaped by the landscape, the Meals Hill parcel also reveals a fascinating past intertwined with the significant historic events of the region. The region was used by the Alaska Native Chugach and Ahtna tribes who hunted, fished, and traded in the area for thousands of years; as a dominate land feature along the coastline, Meals Hill itself was likely also used in that capacity.

During the Klondike gold rush of the late 1800s, what is known today as Meals Hill, became part of a 700-acre claim by two entrepreneurs, George Cheever Hazelet and Andrew Jackson Meals, who traveled to Alaska in search of gold, economic opportunities, and the new frontier. Over the turn of the century and through the early decades of the 1900s Valdez developed from a gold rush hub to a city along the northeast of the Port of Valdez waters. That changed in 1964 when the infamous Good Friday earthquake devastated and destroyed the historic townsite. To assist with the town relocation, the decedents of Meals and Hazelet formed The Port Valdez Company. In the aftermath of the earthquake, The Port Valdez Company worked with the city to relocate the townsite to Meals and Hazelet homestead lands.

As the new Valdez townsite grew, The Port Valdez Company continued to look for development opportunities on their remaining holdings. As a landmark with 360-degree views of the port, mountains, and town, Meals Hill had always been valued for its unique features. The Port Valdez Company investigated development opportunities on the Meals Hill site including a museum relocation, a lodge and conference center, a trail system, and housing. Although the project was not realized, both locals and The Port Valdez Company saw the site as an asset that could provide unique opportunities to the community.

ECONOMIC BENEFIT

Meals Hill, a now-protected natural area immediately adjacent to downtown Valdez, has the potential to spark economic benefit for the City, creating memorable experiences for residents and visitors alike. The intent of this Master Plan is to encourage economic benefit in two primary ways: 1) help the City attract and retain residents by improving the quality of life in Valdez, and 2) provide an authentic Alaskan experience to visitors.

Quality Of Life

As Valdez slowly transitions from an oil-based economy over the next two decades it will become increasingly important to develop new industries to support the City's economy, such as leveraging waterfront industries and tourism. Key to the success of this transition will be establishing a stable population base that can support self-sufficiency. Perhaps most importantly, the City must attract and retain residents who are in their prime earning years, since members of that demographic are most likely to establish new businesses to help the economy thrive. More than ever, members of that group are seeking quality of life as a primary reason to move to and remain in a new location. Recreation opportunities like those at Meals Hill, immediately accessible to residents (including those who want to start their bike, hike or ski adventure from their front door), help establish a quality of life that

makes Valdez increasingly competitive in attracting new residents. It also helps retain residents who are reluctant to give up that level of freedom up by moving elsewhere.

The current update to the Comprehensive Master Plan identifies housing development as a priority of residents. As an immediately accessible outdoor recreation hub, Meals Hill has the potential to spark residential development to the north and west, providing homes to residents who desire immediate access to this recreation resource. In turn, this new residential development will help support a more vibrant downtown core.

Authentic Alaskan Experience

Interviews conducted during recent development of the Valdez Waterfront Master Plan revealed that Valdez has great appeal to visitors because it provides a working waterfront and a more authentic experience than other Alaskan towns. Visitors appreciate seeing local fishing and oil industries at work. Meals Hill enhances this authentic experience by allowing visitors to enjoy the Prince William Sound flora and fauna that the conservation easement is established to protect. Meals Hill is immediately visible and accessible to visitors arriving by cruise ship and provides an opportunity to walk right off Kelsey Dock into an Alaskan wilderness experience. It is also a short walk from the small boat harbor, hotels and campgrounds frequented by visitors, allowing for a wilderness experience without need of shuttle access and encouraging visitors to stay and play for another day.

Valdez has a reputation as an outdoor recreation destination, but often that reputation is tied to extreme sports that are not accessible to most people. Meals Hill provides an opportunity to enjoy an outdoor recreation experience right next to downtown. In taking in this type of experience, visitors will return home feeling like they took part in the legendary Valdez outdoor experience.



IMAGE 4

View of the water from Meals Hill.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In the 2010s The Port Valdez Company began working with the Great Land Trust (GLT) to sell the Meals Hill property and establish a conservation easement. This opportunity became realized through funding secured from the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council (EVOSTC). The EVOSTC was formed in the aftermath of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill of 1989 to oversee the restoration of injured species, habitat, and resources and services affected by the spill. The purchase was possible because the site's environmental significance aligned with the EVOSTC mission to restore the species and human services impacted by the oil spill. The 184 acres includes undisturbed coastal rainforest, rocky coastal habitat, and wetlands that provide protection and recovery of species, habitat, and services injured by the oil spill which align with the EVOS Trustee Council's restoration goals and objectives. Through the efforts of the GLT, The Port Valdez Company, EVOSTC, the U.S. Department of the Interior, BLM, the City of Valdez, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and community members, the land transfer and conservation easement were successfully completed in 2019.

CONSERVATION EASEMENT

The Meals Hill property was highly ranked in a prioritization of lands with important habitat and resource value in the EVOS spill area. Many species and their habitat, as well as tourism and recreation resources, were damaged by the oil spill. The purpose of the conservation easement is to permanently conserve habitat for impacted species, while also supporting tourism and recreation.

The conservation easement legally establishes protections for the property in perpetuity with specific conditions, restrictions, and limitations and is held and enforced by the BLM. The purposes of the easement is to ensure the conservation values of the property will be protected and maintained in perpetuity and to prevent any use or alteration that will impair, degrade, or interfere with its natural

and undisturbed habitat values of the EVOSTC's goals. These purposes include restoration and preservation of natural, scenic, forested, non-forested, wetlands, marine coastal shoreline, and other ecological values, as well as the conservation and protection of migratory bird, fish, and wildlife resources supported by habitats on the property. The easement also allows for limited recreational enhancements to facilitate and benefit passive public recreational uses of the property provided by those natural resources, while still ensuring protection of the habitat values.

The conservation easement document in the appendix provides the details of the agreement; while it is important to refer to that document directly some important elements from Article III of the document include the lists of the restricted uses and prohibited activities:

Restricted Uses from the Conservation Easement:

- Removing, destroying, cutting or clearing trees, brush or other plants on the Protected Property;
- Filling, excavating or otherwise disturbing or altering the natural surface or topography of the Protected Property.
- Using biocides or other chemicals, except as reasonably necessary to control or remove non-native fish, wildlife, or plants.
- Manipulating or altering natural water courses, shoreline, marshes, wetlands, or other water bodies or conducting or allowing any activities or uses that are detrimental to water quality or purity on the Protected Property.
- Discharge of firearms or other explosives and trapping.
- Motorized equipment or vehicles, except by the city or its employees, contractors, or agents, as



EXISTING CONDITIONS
AERIAL CONTEXT MAP

- PROPERTY BOUNDARY
- - - EASEMENTS
- - - NEARBY TRAILS
- NEARBY PARKS



reasonably necessary to protect public safety and for the limited purposes of construction, maintenance, replacement or repair of permitted enhancements.

- Constructing or placing buildings, other structures, lodges, other accommodations or mobile homes, roads, parking lots, utility towers, fences, billboards, commercial signs, or any other structures or improvements on the Protected Property, except for the reasonable enhancements to facilitate public recreational use for passive activities, which do not materially diminish the conservation values of the Protected Property. Such enhancements may include the construction or improvement of pedestrian trails or boardwalks, overlooks and roofed shelters from the weather, picnic tables, outhouses, gates, limited fencing to control access, a parking area at the entrance

to the Protected Property, or non-commercial informational signs, plaques, or interpretative panels.* No commercial signs or establishments shall be permitted on the Protected Property.

- Subdividing or creating or constructing any subdivisions or subdivision infrastructure on the Protected Property.

*Although the list above is within the “restricted uses” section of the Conservation Easement, bullet number seven includes examples of potential enhancements as underlined above.

Prohibited Activities from the Conservation Easement:

- The introduction of fish, wildlife, or plants which are not native to Prince William Sound, Alaska (including, but not limited to, non-indigenous wild game such as reindeer or

bison), or the use of the Protected Property for agriculture purposes or wild fish or game farming, including, but not limited to, farm crops, aquaculture hatcheries, or the grazing of domestic or other farm animals.

- The placing, storing, dumping or burning of garbage, trash, other unsightly or offensive items or material and/or hazardous materials or substances, except that City-maintained trash collection containers may be placed and serviced as necessary.

The master plan solutions are based on the conservation easement, the conservation values and allowed uses that the easement establishes.

PLANNING CONTEXT

In addition to the conservation easement, as described above, the City of Valdez has planning regulations and other adopted plans that affect the design and planning decisions of this master plan.

REGULATION AND CODE

The COV land use regulations and development requirements are established under the Charter of the City of Valdez. Title 17 provides the Municipal zoning code. The site is currently split-lot zoned with R-A Single-Family Residential District, G General Commercial, RC Multifamily Residential, and WC Water Front Commercial.

While the uses on Meals Hill will not reflect a typical use under these zones, “parks, playgrounds and open space for informal recreation” are allowed within the R-A, G, and RC district. “Waterfront parks, paths and boardwalks” are permitted in the WC zone. It will be important to work with the current Valdez Comprehensive Plan Revision to ensure future zoning and land use recommendations are consistent with this plan and the Conservation Easement.



MAP 4



EXISTING CONDITIONS ZONING MAP

PUBLIC LANDS (P)	COMMERCIAL RESIDENTIAL (C-R)
SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL (R-A)	NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL (N-C)
LIGHT INDUSTRIAL (L-I)	CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT (CBD)
UNCLASSIFIED LANDS (UL)	RURAL RESIDENTIAL (R-R)
GENERAL COMMERCIAL (G)	WATER FRONT COMMERCIAL
MULTIPLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL (R-C)	PROPERTY BOUNDARY
	EASEMENTS



ADJACENT LAND USE AND LAND OWNERSHIP

The Meals Hill site is bordered by a mix of publicly and privately owned land with a range of uses from industrial to public facilities. Immediately east and southeast of the site is the Valdez waterfront. The ferry terminal parcel to the southeast is owned by the State of Alaska. Just north of the terminal is a COV owned parcel that houses the Parks and Recreation maintenance equipment and the Museum's archives. Hazelet Avenue is directly east of the Meals Hill parcel and provides the current access point to the site. Across from Hazelet Avenue is Ruth Pond Park, the Overlook Trail, and the Valdez Civic Convention Center.

While most of the parcels to the north of the site are privately held there is one City owned parcel that is used for maintenance and storage. The parcel to the northeast is a tank farm owned and operated by Petro Star. Petro Star also has an easement running across the northeast corner of the site for their pipelines. Another significant adjacent land use is a privately owned parcel that sits within the boundary of Meals Hill. The site is a private residence and a bed and breakfast business. The private parcel is accessed from Hazelet by a steep, gravel private road with an easement. At the northwest corner of the parcel is a water tank with an easement. The tank itself is accessed from Eagan Drive to the north.

The University of Alaska (UA) owns a large undeveloped parcel to the west. Although Meals Hill is visually seen as one large dominate silhouette, a notable portion of the terrain is UA land. While the UA parcel is currently undeveloped, there is a cabin facility on the shoreline to the south. West of the UA property is the Blueberry Hill residential area and just beyond that is Mineral Creek, a local hub for trail-based recreation.



IMAGE 5

Harbor view from near the top of the parcel.



EXISTING CONDITIONS LAND OWNERSHIP MAP

- PROPERTY BOUNDARY
- - - EASEMENTS
- CITY OF VALDEZ
- UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA
- STATE OF ALASKA
- PRIVATE



PREVIOUS AND CONCURRENT PLANS & STUDIES

To better understand the context of the study area, previous and concurrent plans and projects were reviewed for relevant information related to this planning process. Below is a table outlining relevant plans.

TABLE OF RELATED PLANS & STUDIES

TABLE 1

PLAN / STUDY	PLAN DESCRIPTION	CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE MEALS HILL MASTER PLAN
Valdez Comprehensive Plan Revision (Ongoing)	The City of Valdez is currently revising its comprehensive plan through extensive public input and research to develop a plan that outlines a common vision for the community over the next 20 years. It will outline goals, objectives, and an implementation strategy.	It will be important to work with the comprehensive plan team during the concept design process to ensure land use and zoning recommendations are consistent with the results of this master plan.
Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2020)	The recently adopted Parks and Recreation Master Plan provides a comprehensive inventory of the recreation system in Valdez and outlines recommendations for improvements to achieve a system that reflects the community's needs and desires.	<p>Key opportunities and goals to consider from the Parks & Recreation Master Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing trails and pathway connectivity • Maintaining what the City has/Level of Service and quality • Sustaining the current system • Branding, wayfinding, and marketing • Expand trail connectivity <p>Specific Recommendations Related to Meals Hill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on connecting Ruth Pond Trail, Overlook Trail, and the newly acquired Meals Hill property. • Consider connecting Meals Hill to the Mineral Creek Trail.
Tracts C & E, Port Valdez Subdivision (Meals Hill) Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (2019)	In 2019 BGES, Inc. prepared a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment Analysis for the Meals Hill site. The purpose of this assessment was to evaluate the potential for environmental impacts and conditions of the site.	While the report did not identify specific events of contamination on the site, a key takeaway is that nearby contaminated sites and pipelines that run along the northeast corner cannot be ruled out for environmental impact.
Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council (EVOSTC) Benefit Report & Resolution #17-03	The benefit report was developed in 2017 by the Great Land Trust. The report addresses how protection of the Meals Hill property helps species and services that were injured by the Exxon Valdez oil spill. The species and services described in the report are those that the EVOSTC seeks to conserve, protect, and restore. The resolution approves the EVOSTC funding associated with the parcel.	The report highlights that “protection of the parcels would conserve habitat for fish, shore birds, seabirds, migratory birds, and mammal species. The protection of Meals Hill will provide recreational opportunities by securing public access to a unique, locally accessible coastal property (...).” The report outlines the reason behind the conservation easement and provides a basis for the Master Plan.
City of Valdez Resolution #17-42	A resolution of the city council of the City of Valdez supporting the Meals Hill Conservation project.	This adopted resolution provides the city's support for the project.



IMAGE 6

Bird's-eye view of Meals Hill looking north towards Mineral Creek. Photo Credit: City of Valdez.

Valdez Alaska Business Climate and COVID-19 Impacts Survey (2020)	This survey report was commissioned by the City of Valdez Mayor's COVID-19 Economic Task Force to understand the economic impacts the current pandemic is having on local businesses.	While this study is specific to the immediate issues of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it is important to consider how impacts may reflect systematic issues that could have gone unnoticed outside of the current circumstances. The study is specific to Valdez businesses, but even a park design can consider the results as part of a long-term resiliency plan. This study supports a need to approach the plan with an eye on the long-term uses through economic ebbs and flows.
Valdez Comprehensive Waterfront Master Plan (2019)	This plan provides guidelines for opportunities along waterfront within 5 key zones: small boat harbor, new boat harbor, sea otter park, Valdez container terminal, and old town. Projects include short-term and long-term visions for the waterfront.	The plan includes improvements for pedestrian access, circulation, and park amenities along the waterfront. It will be important to consider how access to and from Meals Hill could tie into these improvements.
Valdez Museum & Historical Archive Master Interpretive Plan (2016)	This plan provides a vision and guidelines for the Museum's programming and interpretive content while also providing specific recommendations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connecting the Meals Hill site to the cultural resources of the community will be important for the success of the project. The museum provides natural history, photography, and cultural history walking tours. Meals Hill could provide an opportunity for small walking tour groups.
The Port Valdez Company Museum Hill Proposal (2013) <i>Not a public plan. Study/memorandum for the Port Valdez Company.</i>	This memorandum was prepared by Northern Economics for The Port Valdez Company. The memorandum looks at the feasibility of developing a museum, hotel, housing, and trail system on the Meals Hill site.	Although this study analyzed uses no longer permitted on the Meals Hill parcel, it does provide information including design layouts of parking lots and trail systems for previous plans which will be useful when developing design concepts.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

TERRAIN, SOILS, & HYDROLOGY

For a parcel the size of Meals Hill, the terrain is remarkably complex, made more so by the site's history of human development. Meals Hill is the highest point of land close to town; its south side fronts the ocean. This combination results in exceptional views in all directions—ocean, mountains, town, industrial infrastructure. The top of the hill provides a spectacular 360-degree vista.

The natural terrain is composed of steep bedrock cliffs on the ocean side, while rocky terraces and narrow ridges make up most of the rest of the hill. Where soils exist, they are generally shallow, and mostly poorly drained. The eastern side of the hill contains the access road and includes the most moderately sloped terrain on the site. The most suitable slopes for trail construction are 20-40% (11-20 degrees). Although Meals Hill contains slopes suitable for trail construction, there are many places the terrain is either much flatter, with intermittent trapped water or ponding, or much steeper.

Meals Hill contains several overlapping mini-ecosystems: tidal salt water, intact coastal rainforest, second/third growth forest, sphagnum bog wetlands, and bedrock outcrops. Non-natural impacts to the site include the construction of an access road that used excess excavated rock material from a recent harbor expansion project. The fill created a steep, gravel roadbed that disrupted some of the site's natural drainage patterns. Dense alder thickets have proliferated in the disturbed areas around the roadbed, and on the north side of the hill. Side slopes range from near vertical cliff bands at ocean's edge and close to the summit, to flat saturated soils near the toe of the steeper slopes. In some locations on site, saturated ground shows impact from ATV use. The most suitable slopes for trails are on the southern and eastern sides of the site, with some potential passable routes on the north and west sides. There are portions of the parcel that are too steep for sustainable trail construction.

VEGETATION

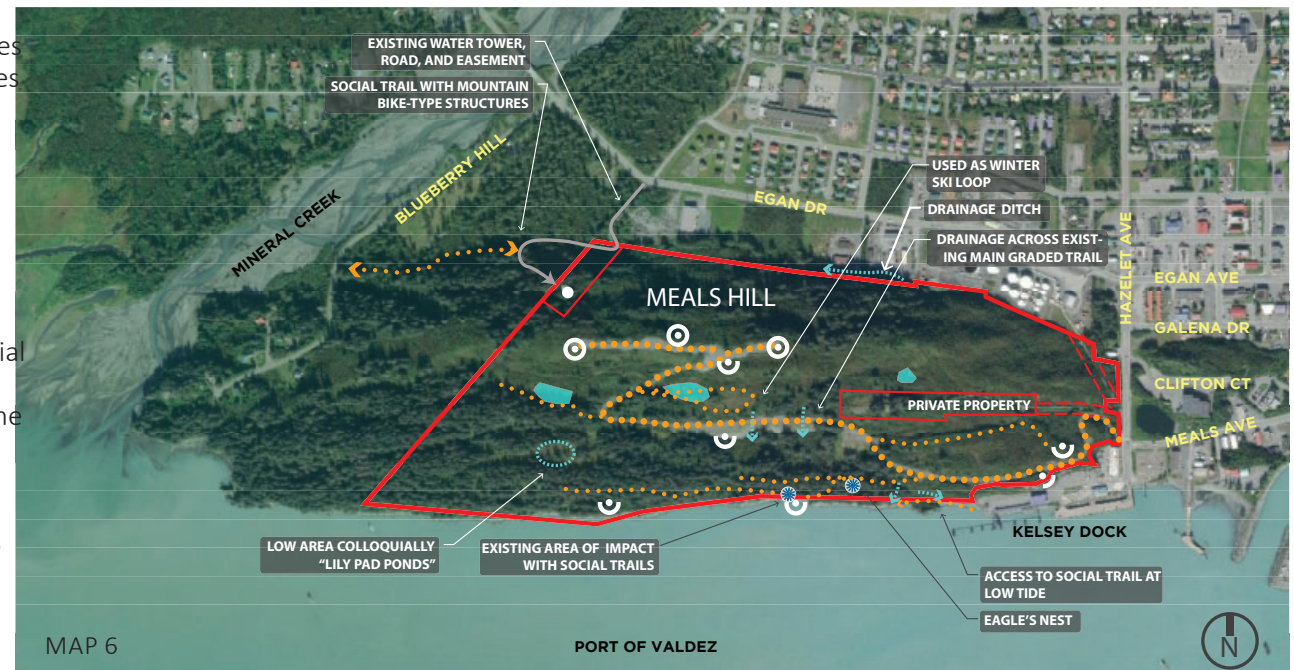
The intact forest portion of the parcel contains plenty of ground suitable for enhancements that are consistent with the conservation easement. The vegetation is mostly a mix of large, well-spaced old growth conifers (primarily Sitka spruce), some mixed forest with deciduous trees, and second growth spruce forest with thicker underbrush, sometimes including thick blueberry and salmonberry shrubs. The disturbed ground along the road and the gravel sites at the top have obliterated natural plant communities to favor thickly over-grown alder. Devil's club, willow & grasses are present in a few wet areas—some naturally occurring and others as a result of disrupted drainage—which are too saturated for development, but may be crossable with trail structures, such as boardwalk.

WILDLIFE

There is a large variety of wildlife on Meals Hill, including common forest birds, owls, raptors, foxes, moose and bears, which will present the biggest potential public hazard. Evidence of animal trails, nests, and bedding-down areas implies that animal patterns are well-established, and development may be potentially disruptive to animal behavior, something the trail design will take into consideration.

EXISTING ACCESS/INFRASTRUCTURE

In addition to a 1.25-mile road corridor (400' elevation gain from Hazelet Ave. to the top of the parcel) with large cast piles of fill and fill slopes, the parcel has a short section of fence line to the SE.



EXISTING CONDITIONS ON-SITE DIAGRAM

- PROPERTY BOUNDARY
- EASEMENTS
- EXISTING MAIN TRAIL TO THE TOP
- EXISTING SOCIAL TRAILS

- WETLANDS IDENTIFIED BY USF&WS
- AREA OF NOTE
- DRAINAGE NOTES

- OPPORTUNITIES FOR VIEWS
- 360 DEGREE VIEWS
- 180 DEGREE VIEWS
- 90 DEGREE VIEWS



There are several old 2-track scars on the property as well, diverging from the roadbed paralleling the coast, and accessing the private inholding to the east. Within the parcel there is a water tank with an ~1/3rd mile access road that leaves the parcel to the northeast and connects with Egan Avenue to the north. There are several very rough social trail alignments (with a few unauthorized mountain bike features) most of which go off the property to the adjoining parcel owned by the University of Alaska. An existing pipeline crosses the site with an easement through the northeast corner. The pipeline is part of the Petro Star tank facilities just north of the parcel. South of the pipeline and intersecting Hazelet Avenue is a private drive that accesses a private residence bounded by the Meals Hill parcel. The private drive has an easement running east-west between the right-of-way and private parcel.



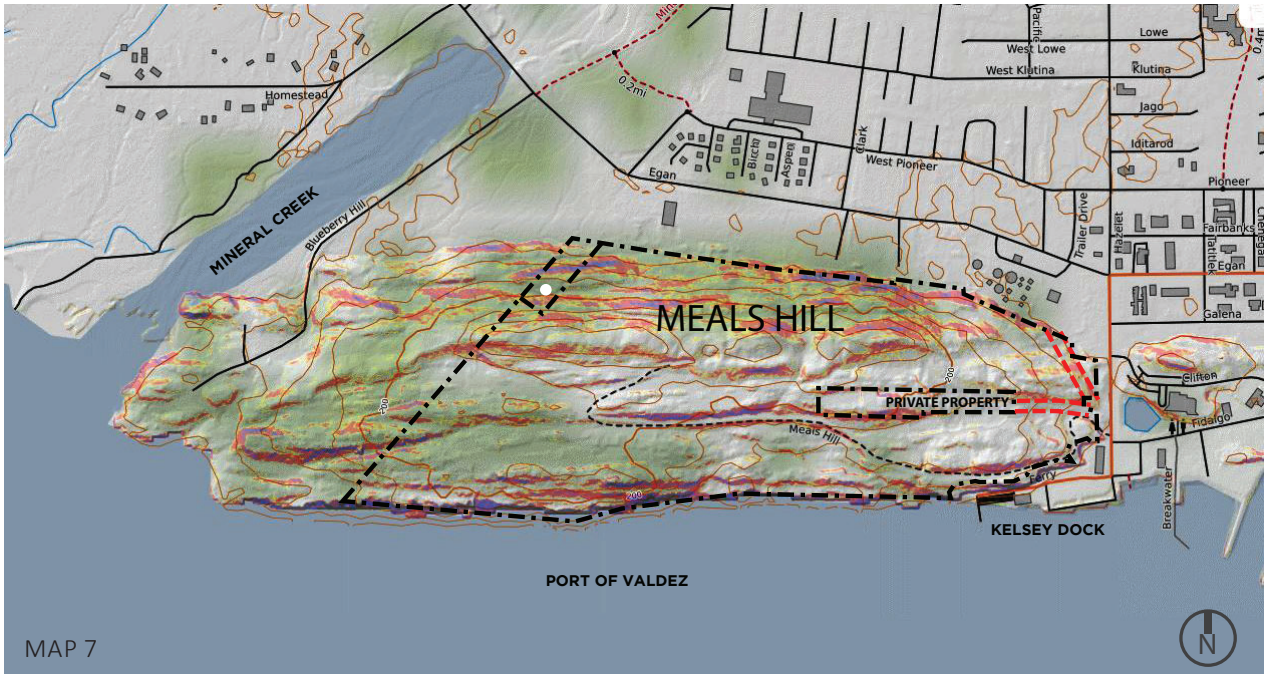
Alder vegetation along existing road bed.



ATV activity in the wetlands area.

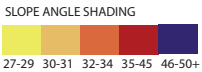
SITE ANALYSIS SUMMARY

The master plan designs consider the stated desires of users along with the conservation easement; any trail alignment will seek to minimize the necessity of costly maintenance, and to provide views to the ocean and mountains. With its variety of terrain, the parcel is well-suited to a variety of trails, with some trails in open, flat areas and steeper side-slopes hosting narrower more technical trails. User experiences will be designed around the survey results and public input. Experiences will be designed within the appropriate ecological zones, with as little disturbance to their natural states as possible. Existing conditions and neighboring uses will be considered to assess appropriate connectivity to other Valdez recreation and cultural resources.



EXISTING CONDITIONS
SLOPE ANGLE SHADING

- PROPERTY BOUNDARY
- - - ONSITE EASEMENTS
- - - EXISTING MAIN TRAIL TO THE TOP
- ROADS



SURVEY & STAKEHOLDER
INTERVIEW RESULTS

The following is an overview of the executive summary from the survey results and stakeholder interviews. Please see the project survey report in the appendix for the full report.

METHODS

Data collection occurred between August 10th and October 18th of 2020. This study utilized mixed-method interviews and surveys to investigate stakeholders’ and visitors’ visions, desired uses, and preferences regarding the development of Meals Hill as a new community park. Surveys and interview scripts were designed by, and oriented around, five (5) guiding themes developed by members of the Valdez Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services Department and Meals Hill Master Plan Development Team. These themes included:

- Theme 1: What, if any, is the significance of Meals Hill for Stakeholders?
- Theme 2: What are the desired uses of Meals Hill?
- Theme 3: What are users’ preferences in the development of Meals Hill?
- Theme 4: What does short and long-term success look like in the development of Meals Hill?
- Theme 5: What degree of support exists regarding the development of Meals Hill?

SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION
PLAN

Surveys were administered in electronic and physical-form. A broad range of distribution methods were integrated to ensure a diverse stakeholder and visitor sample. A survey link was shared via the Meals Hill Master Plan Development webpage, 2,025 postcards delivered in community members’ post-office boxes, public radio broadcasts, poster-style advertisements displayed



428 Surveys collected
352 Community stakeholders | 76 Visitors

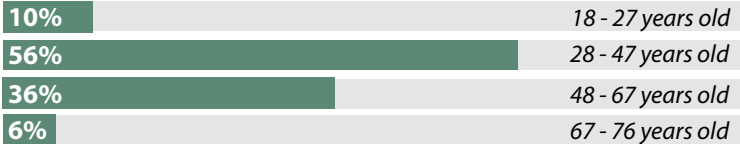


24 Interviews conducted
16 Community stakeholders | 8 Visitor agencies

About the **STAKEHOLDERS:**

88%

of respondents reside in Valdez



Age Range of Stakeholders

at the community theater, local symposium announcements, phone calls to visitor agencies, hard copy surveys were placed in the Civic Center and Visitors’ Bureau, among other methods.

Interviews included community stakeholders (i.e. community members, individuals employed in Valdez, season visitors, past residents) and visitor organization representatives. Each interview was conducted over the phone and focused on gaining a richer understanding of users’ preferences in, beliefs in the significance of, and areas of concerns regarding, the development of Meals Hill. Interviews continued until researchers achieved saturation in the information provided by interviewees and no new themes we identified.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Stakeholders’ Degree of Support Regarding the Development of Meals Hill

Stakeholders overwhelmingly support the development of Meals Hill and expressed excitement about the potential of the property as a non-motorized recreational use area. Seventy-three percent (73%) support additional development for non-motorized recreational opportunities, 18% support the improvement of existing infrastructure, and 9% of respondents do not support any development.

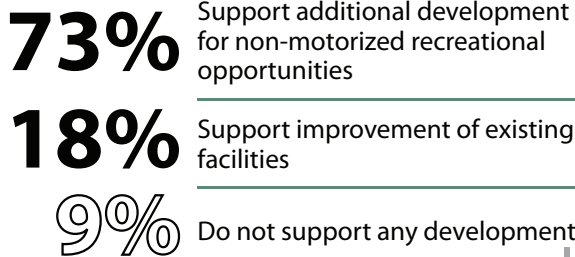
Significance of Meals Hill for Stakeholders

Stakeholders shared a vision of Meals Hill as an exciting opportunity to establish a public image of Valdez with accessible nature-based recreation opportunities within close proximity of town. Stakeholders view Meals Hill as having the potential to provide a unique identity to Valdez for both stakeholders and visitors. When asked what makes Meals Hill special to stakeholders, scenic views (50%), close proximity to town (35%), and opportunities to engage in nature (32%) were indicated most frequently.

Regarding the significance of Meals Hill for the City of Valdez, stakeholders most frequently indicated opportunities to recreate in nature (43%). During interviews, stakeholders explained this significance further stating the importance of moderate to easy-difficulty outdoor recreation opportunities (e.g. mountain biking, snow shoeing; 81%), opportunities



Degree of Support



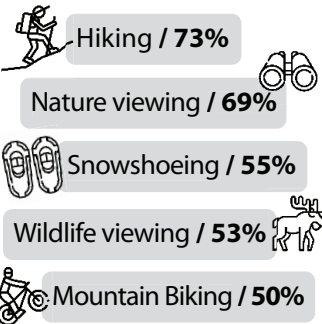


Desired Uses of Meals Hill

Ranked in order:

- 1** Community access
- 2** Conservation
- 3** Education opportunities
- 4** Visitor access
- 5** Economic

Recreational desires:



to experience undeveloped nature (56%), and an opportunity to attract visitors (50%). Historic and cultural significance was not significantly mentioned by stakeholders. However, the expressed vision of Meals Hill indicates a desire for it to be incorporated into the existing and future culture of the city.

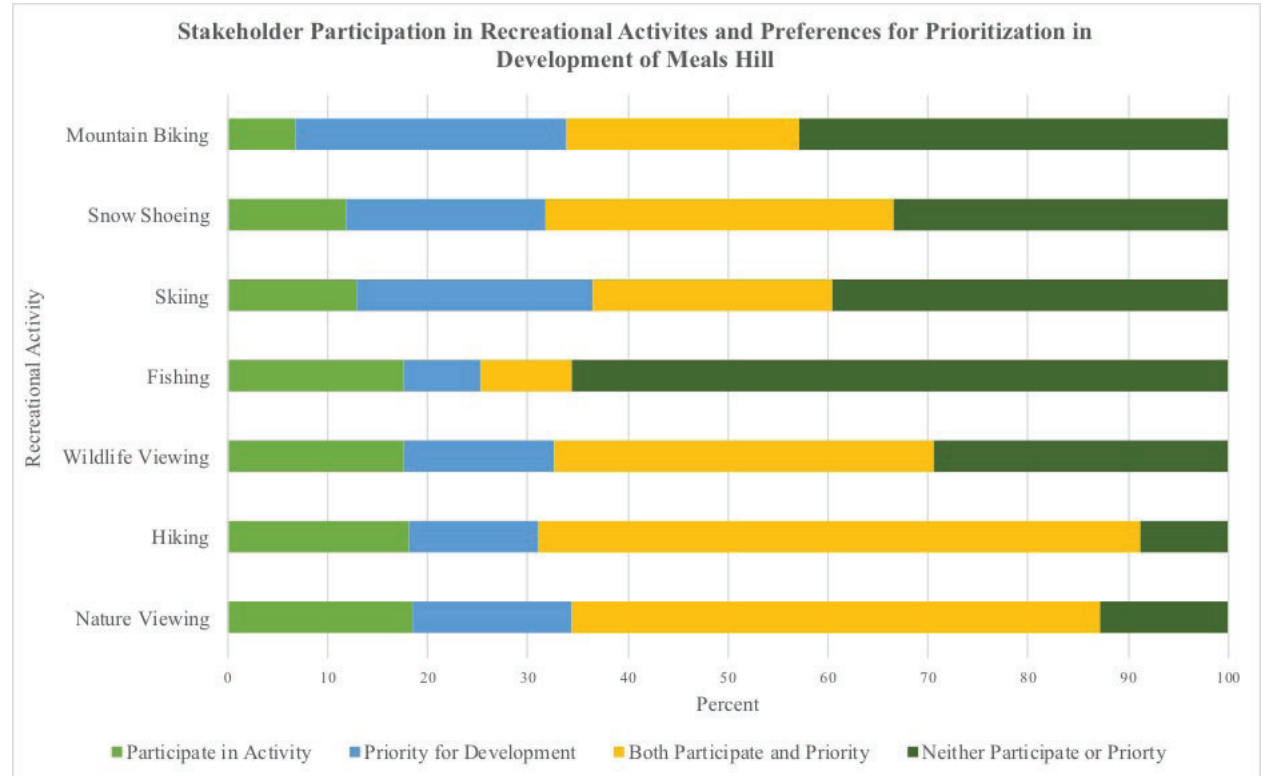
Desired Uses of Meals Hill

Stakeholders ranked desired uses for Meals Hill in the following order: (1) Community access (2) Conservation (3) Education opportunities (4) Visitor access and (5) Economic. Regarding recreational desires, hiking (73%), nature viewing (69%), snow shoeing (55%), wildlife viewing (53%), and mountain biking (50%) were indicated as desired uses to be prioritized in development. Conversely, though more than 70% of stakeholders indicated that they do not currently participate in mountain biking, about 50% of stakeholders feel it should be a priority for development.

Stakeholders value solitude and indicated a high degree of acceptability in encountering little to no other users when recreating on Meals Hill. Stakeholders were not supportive of overnight camping on the property.

Stakeholder preferences for the development of Meals Hill include the following:

- Opportunities for community recreation (e.g.



Stakeholder Participation in Recreational Activities and preferences for Prioritization in Development of Meals Hill.

Credit: Parks & People.

- Mtn. biking trails, hiking, ice climbing) 81% Stakeholder Interview Data (SI)
- Opportunities to engage in nature 56% (SI)
- Avoiding overcrowding 31% (SI)
- Connectivity to other trails 31% (SI)
- Informative signs (wildlife, trail maps, emergency info) 25% (SI)
- Multi use trails 25% (SI)
- Connectivity to town
- Accessible opportunities (inclusivity and kid friendly options)
- Proper maintenance and cleanliness

Stakeholders also ranked park elements by importance. The following elements were noted as important by stakeholders (In order of importance):

- Trash and recycling bins
- Moderate length trails 1.5 – 3 miles

- Kid friendly options
- Allowing pets on trails
- Others indicated as important: access to waterfront, signs along trails

Stakeholders do not think overnight camping, opportunities for large groups, a parking lot or overnight camping are important in the development of Meals Hill.



Desired Park Elements

In order of importance:

- **Trash cans & recycling bins**
- **Moderate length trails**
- **Kid-friendly options**
- **Allowing pets on trails**
- **Access to waterfront**

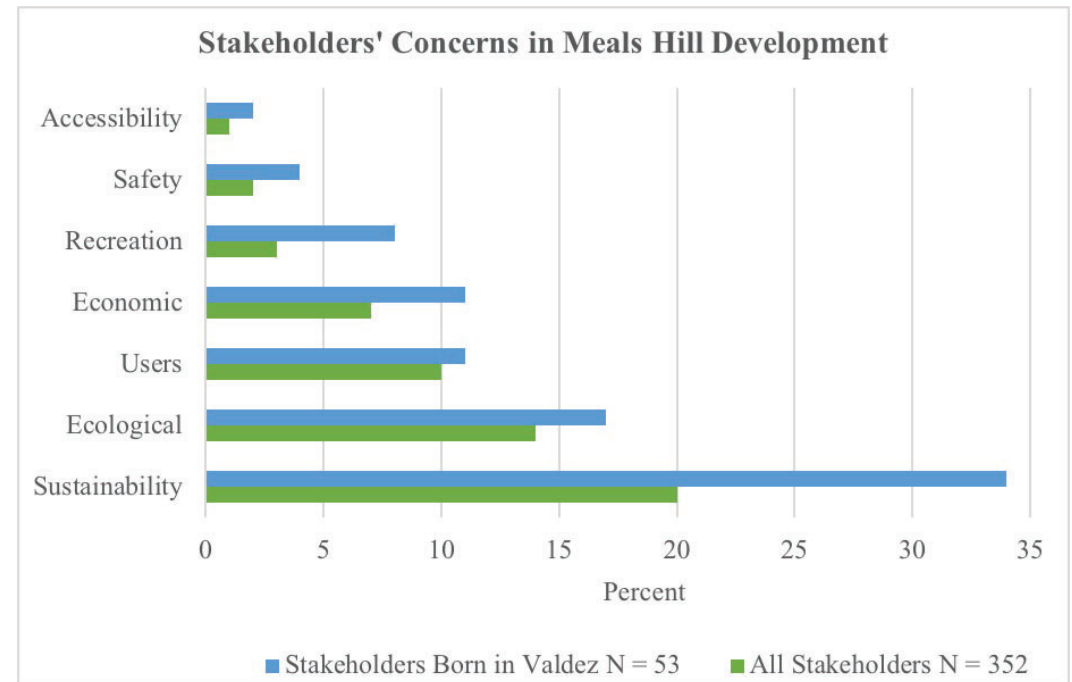
ENSURING SUCCESS

Understanding stakeholders and using their input to plan, develop, and manage Meals Hill is critical to ensure the property is developed in a manner that serves the community. Stakeholders in Valdez expressed a range of environmental values. The most common values were based on experiences held in nature, the beauty of nature, and the ability to control natural environments in order to be safe and convenient for recreation. Meals Hill has the potential to support all these values as it can provide meaningful experiences in nature and is positioned in a way that will have iconic scenic viewing opportunities. Management will have to focus on a safe and comfortable experience for recreationists to fully meet the needs and desires of stakeholders.

Though excited about and widely supportive of the development of Meals Hill, stakeholders indicated a range of concerns. Sustainability concerns, particularly lack of long-term plan (desire for planning in phases), maintenance costs, motorized user on property, or concerns of “modernizing Valdez” were indicated by 74% of respondents. Ecological concerns including degradation, over clearing, disturbing animal habitats, fire hazards, human wildlife interactions were indicated by 48% of stakeholder respondents. Finally, user concerns including trash, crowding, taboo rec, dog waste were indicated by 34% of respondents.

Challenges that stakeholders face in pursuing nature-based recreational activities are also critical to consider in the planning and management of Meals Hill. A lack of recreation opportunities (e.g. mountain biking trails, loop trails, trails accessing alpine, kayak launches, wildlife viewing areas; 9%), accessibility (e.g. physical ability required, uneven terrain, availability of places to rest; 7%), and poor maintenance (e.g. drainage issues, over-growth, damage from motorized users; 7%) were the most frequently indicated challenges.

Visitors to Valdez will also play a role in the success of Meals Hill and the benefits it can provide to the city as a whole. Visitors indicated that their main



Stakeholders' Concerns in Meals Hill Development. Credit: Parks & People.

motivations for visiting Valdez included seeing natural scenery (67%), seeing wildlife (55%), and opportunities to recreate in nature (51%). Because Meals Hill meets all of these, it has the potential to make Valdez an even more desirable destination for visitors.

Influential elements that would encourage visitors to participate in nature-based recreation once in Valdez include (In order of influence):

- Opportunities for scenic views
- Easy access to trails
- Chance of seeing wildlife
- Quick recreational opportunities (3 hours or less)
- Clear signage directing visitors

Meals Hill is unique in that it has the capacity to provide all the listed elements. Its proximity to town will make it an accessible and available opportunity to visitors and its opportunities for potential wildlife

viewing and scenic views will undoubtedly attract visitors to Valdez. The most common barriers and challenges indicated by visitors were transportation, information, and time restrictions. The location of Meals Hill will allow it to be easily accessible to visitors, well known, and an experience they can engage in with limited amounts of time.

PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Thoughtful and strategic planning and management are critical to ensuring its success. The results presented in this report should guide the planning process, development and management of Meals Hill. Based on the information gained from stakeholder and visitor input, the following planning and management implications should be considered:



Panoramic from the top of Meals Hill looking south. Photo Credit: Great Land Trust.

Planning Implications

- Meals Hill is significant to its stakeholders because of its potential to be an icon in Valdez and to shape the public image of the city. Its proximity to town and astounding beauty are rare, even in scenic and iconic Alaskan destinations. Planning of the site should ensure that it will serve as a source of community pride by showcasing views and ensuring easy access from town for all users.
- Some community members are not aware of, or do not have adequate information explaining, the conservation easement in place that will limit development of Meals Hill. Therefore, there are community members who have a vision of Meals Hill that is not possible (e.g., residential development, high end hotel development). Strategic communication should be initiated in the community to make information regarding the conservation easement and development restrictions available to more community members. Additionally, interpretive information should be available on site to explain conservation goals and restrictions to development and activities.
- Results indicated a low tolerance for crowding and a desire for solitude. Combined with high predicted use, these results indicate a need for several “peak experiences” rather than one summit on Meals Hill. Trails should be designed to showcase the beauty of the area and each option should include an opportunity for scenic views. The design of trails should not lead to one “peak experience”, rather multiple opportunities for novel experiences should be available to disperse visitors and protect opportunities for solitude.
- Stakeholders indicated that they want a natural experience while recreating at Meals Hill but that trails should be well maintained. Planning should design for natural trails ideal for upkeep and maintenance.
- Different user groups hold unique preferences in regards to trail length and other important park characteristics. Development should consider these diverse preferences.
- Accessibility should be considered in planning and development of Meals Hill. Considerations for inclusivity should be integrated while planning rather than later during the management process. These trails should include hard-packed and level terrain. A trail experience that is accessible to all and includes an opportunity for a scenic view should be considered.
- Visitors value a chance to see wildlife in their choice of recreational activities. Signs that inform visitors of native wildlife in the area can increase excitement and desire to recreate at Meals Hill.
- Stakeholders’ responses were analyzed in numerous ways (e.g. data separated by age, gender, years of residency, frequency of trail use, among others). While unique preferences and desired uses for certain groups were identified, no significant differences were identified between stakeholders born in Valdez and those who relocated to Valdez for alternative reasons (e.g. employment, outdoor recreation, education, etc.).

Planning and development of Meals Hill should:

- Include opportunities for scenic views
- Prioritize moderate length trails (1.5-3 miles)
- Allow pets

- Prioritize family friendly recreational experiences (considerations should be given to degree of difficulty, accessibility (all ages and ability levels, strollers, etc.), incorporate areas for breaks or activities (avoid narrow trails with few stopping points))

Planning and development of Meals Hill should not:

- Prioritize opportunities for overnight camping
- Prioritize development of a parking lot
- Prioritize planning for large groups

Management Implications

- Results from stakeholder and visitor surveys predict very high use of Meals Hill once developed. This is due to its location (both proximity to town and water) and the scenic views it provides which were identified as contributing factors to selection of recreation areas by stakeholders. Further, Meals Hill stakeholders value the natural environment

because of the experiences it provides and its beauty. Meals Hill will fit the value systems of its stakeholders provided it is maintained and conserved.

- Mineral Creek was indicated as the most used trail system in Valdez due to its ability to meet recreational needs and its proximity to residents and stakeholders. Meals Hill has the potential to also meet these needs and could therefore lower use of Mineral Creek by dispersing recreational use of visitors between the two trail systems.
- When considering use of trails, results from this study predict potential for conflicts between user groups particularly for use of trails. To address this the plan should consider techniques for managing user conflicts.
- Trail etiquette was indicated as a concern and, if not addressed, could lead to dissatisfaction with recreational experiences at Meals Hill. Management should include frequent

inspections by park staff to ensure trail etiquette expectations are being adhered to and interventions (education, announcements, signs, etc.) should be implemented to quickly address issues that may occur as use increases over time.

- Visitors indicated a lack of information as a barrier to participation in nature-based recreation. Therefore, the city should focus on marketing opportunities to recreate at Meals Hill through visitor organizations. Further, clear signage including distances or time commitments will make activities more accessible to visitors or those new to the property.
- As use of Meals Hill increases, follow up data collection should be conducted to ensure that the property is meeting needs and expectations of stakeholders. Follow up research should be conducted at minimum 5-year intervals to ensure changes, needs, and preference are identified and met by the management team.



IMAGE 9

View of Meals Hill and Mineral Creek from the south.



Meals Hill site visit with the Meals Hill Planning Committee.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

The public involvement process included an extensive survey at the beginning of the project, three public meetings, five Meals Hill Planning Committee meetings, and work sessions and presentations with the Parks and Recreation Commission and Valdez City Council. Public meetings and comment periods were advertised via an e-newsletter to the project email list, Facebook events and posts, flyers, radio announcements, and postcards were mailed to all Valdez residents.

All meeting summaries can be found in Appendix B.

MEALS HILL PLANNING COMMITTEE

As part of the public process, a small group of Valdez residents applied and were selected to serve on the Meals Hill Planning Committee (MHPC). The role of the committee was to work more closely with the project team in an advisory role during the planning process. The final committee was comprised of nine people who represented diverse interests in the development of Meals Hill.

Throughout the master planning process, the MHPC met with the project team a total of five times; some meetings were held in-person and others were held virtually using Zoom.

SURVEY

At the beginning of the master planning process, an in-depth survey was used to gather information from residents and visitors to Valdez. A total of 428 survey responses were collected; 352 (88%) completed by residents of Valdez. Additionally, 24 stakeholder interviews were conducted: 16 with community stakeholders and 8 with visitor agencies.

The survey results indicated that most people were in support of additional development for non-motorized recreational opportunities on Meals Hill. The information collected from the survey was used to create the five guiding principles of the master plan process and to guide development of the preliminary design concepts.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING #1

Virtual Public Meeting #1 was held on Monday,

November 16, 2020, from 6-7:30pm using the Zoom webinar platform. The purpose of this public meeting was to introduce the project to the public, present the results from the survey and stakeholder interviews, and to gain feedback on proposed project guiding principles. The meeting was attended by 33 community members and the meeting materials were posted to the project website after the meeting. The public was generally supportive of the guiding principles.

For those who could not attend the first public meeting, an in-person event was provided on Tuesday, November 17, 2021, from 5-6pm at the Valdez Civic Center. The project team was available to talk one-on-one with individuals and people had the opportunity to submit comments. Four people attended this event.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING #2

The second Virtual Public Meeting was held on Monday, February 8, 2021, from 6:30-8pm using the Zoom webinar platform. The overall goal of this meeting was to introduce the preliminary design concepts and receive feedback for further concept refinement and to move toward a preferred design concept alternative. Fifty-six community members attended the second public meeting.

The project team presented 2 trail concepts and 3 access concepts that were developed from information learned during the survey and the first public meeting. One trail option emphasized hiking with areas of land preservation. The second option expanded trail opportunities for mountain biking while still including trails for hiking and areas of land preservation. All access concepts focused on the entrance from Hazelet Avenue and provided design solutions to create a universal trail with some component of onsite parking and drop-off. Universal design provides an opportunity for people of all ages and abilities to have a similar trail experience. A 'no action' option was not developed. All proposed concepts included improvements to allow people of all abilities to experience part of Meals Hill. More

details on each of the concepts are included in the appendix under “Public Meeting #2” and “Public Meeting #2 Comment Summary”.

The attendees were generally supportive of the proposed trail concepts and excited about the mountain biking trail options. During the meeting, several attendees commented that they would have wanted to see an option with no parking or driving on the hill. Members of the public were also excited about the prospect of interpretive historic information being included on the site through education signage and potentially art pieces.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD: PRELIMINARY DESIGN CONCEPTS

After public meeting #2, comments on the preliminary design concepts were collected via two methods. The first was an online platform that was linked to the project website. The online platform presented the various options with example photos of the proposed park elements. The second method was a paper questionnaire provided at the Civic Center. Posters of the concepts were provided at the Civic Center for review while filling out the in-person survey. The questionnaire was open from February 8th through February 19th. During that time 126 individuals took the survey. Five of those questionnaires were taken in-person and entered manually into the questionnaire results.

The majority of questionnaire respondents chose Trail Concept 2, the trail option with the most development and bike-specific infrastructure. While 49 respondents selected Access Concept A, five of those respondents commented that they would prefer no parking on the hill along with 32 other individuals who made a similar comment, for a total of 37 commenting they would prefer no parking. Comment trends and changes people want to see related to access included:

- No parking (37)
- Parking only for ADA / Drop-off (9)



Public open house and MHPC meeting #2.

A more detailed summary of the concepts options that were presented as well as the comment results are provided in the appendix.

MARCH 2021 PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION + MEALS HILL PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The design team met with the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC), on March 9th, and the Meal Hill Planning Committee (MHPC), on March 10th, to present the summary of the public feedback and to make recommendations on the on which design solutions the planning team should advance.

At both meetings, the design team presented the comment trends, as well as revised entry designs that addressed the public comments received: Access Concept A and access options without parking. The first new option regraded the main existing road to a universal trail standard. The second new option proposed a new boardwalk that would wrap around the perimeter of the site to provide an accessible means to access the site. The feedback received at both meeting helped guide the planning team to selecting the preferred alternative.

SELECTING THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

After reviewing the comment trends from the public



and the MHPC and the PRC meetings, the planning team advanced Trail Concept 2 in combination with the new no parking options as the preferred alternative. Trail Concept 2 had the most consensus of the trail options presented, and the community expressed a lot of enthusiasm for the biking specific infrastructure. It became clear that there was not the same consensus around the access options. The desire of the community to limit vehicle access and concern for vehicle and pedestrian conflict drove the final selection for the options without parking.

While both new no-parking options have been included in the final overall master plan they are proposed in a phased approach. The first access proposal is to regrade the existing road alignment into a multi-use trail to allow for universal access from the park entry. The second access proposal is for the accessible cliffside boardwalk. The regraded road is proposed to be installed in a phase prior to the boardwalk.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING #3

The third and final public meeting was held on Monday, May 3, 2021, from 6:30 – 8 pm using the Zoom webinar platform. The goal of this public meeting was to present the draft final Meals Hill Master Plan to the public.

FIGURE 5

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



THEME 1 DEGREE OF SUPPORT

The Valdez community supports the development of Meals Hill with nature-based recreation amenities while conserving habitat.

- The Meals Hill Conservation Easement was specifically established to protect what has been
- determined to be “significant natural, scenic, wooded and non-wooded lands and waters that provide
- important habitat and protection supporting species of migratory birds, fish, and wildlife, including
- many that were injured as a result of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill.” In accepting responsibility for Meals
- Hill, the City of Valdez agreed to “preserve and protect the Protected Property in perpetuity in order to
- restore, enhance, and rehabilitate natural habitat and resources injured by the *Exxon Valdez* oils spill,
- and to support the services, including recreating and tourism, provided by those natural resources.”
- Five guiding principles statements were adopted for the project to help guide the master planning
- process. Guiding principles set the tone and intent of the plan and guided planning decisions. The
- statements were developed based on the conservation easement and the initial survey results,
- stakeholder input, and were voted on by the public during the first public meeting. The guiding
- principles are centered around five themes derived from the survey process.



THEME 2 SIGNIFICANCE

Meals Hill is an iconic landmark that helps shape the public image of the City and reflects the existing and future culture of the community.



THEME 3 DESIRED USES

The Meals Hill plan prioritizes community access for a range of year-round, nature-based recreation activities inclusive of varying user abilities.

MEALS HILL MASTER PLAN

The proposed Meals Hill Master Plan balances the community’s desire for nature-based recreation and habitat conservation. The plan is community-focused, providing trails, amenities, and access that best serve daily uses. The plan serves a range of non-motorized users in a variety of terrain creating opportunities for vistas, solitude, and year-round activity. The plan is forward looking with phasing recommendations that take funding, management strategies, and timelines into account.

The master plan is a result of significant public input through a broad reaching survey, an engaged Meals Hill Planning Committee (MHPC) of community representatives, agency and stakeholder feedback, and input from the Valdez Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) and City Council.



THEME 4 PREFERENCES

Meals Hill is easily navigated through clear signage while emphasizing opportunities for solitude and engagement with a wilderness environment.



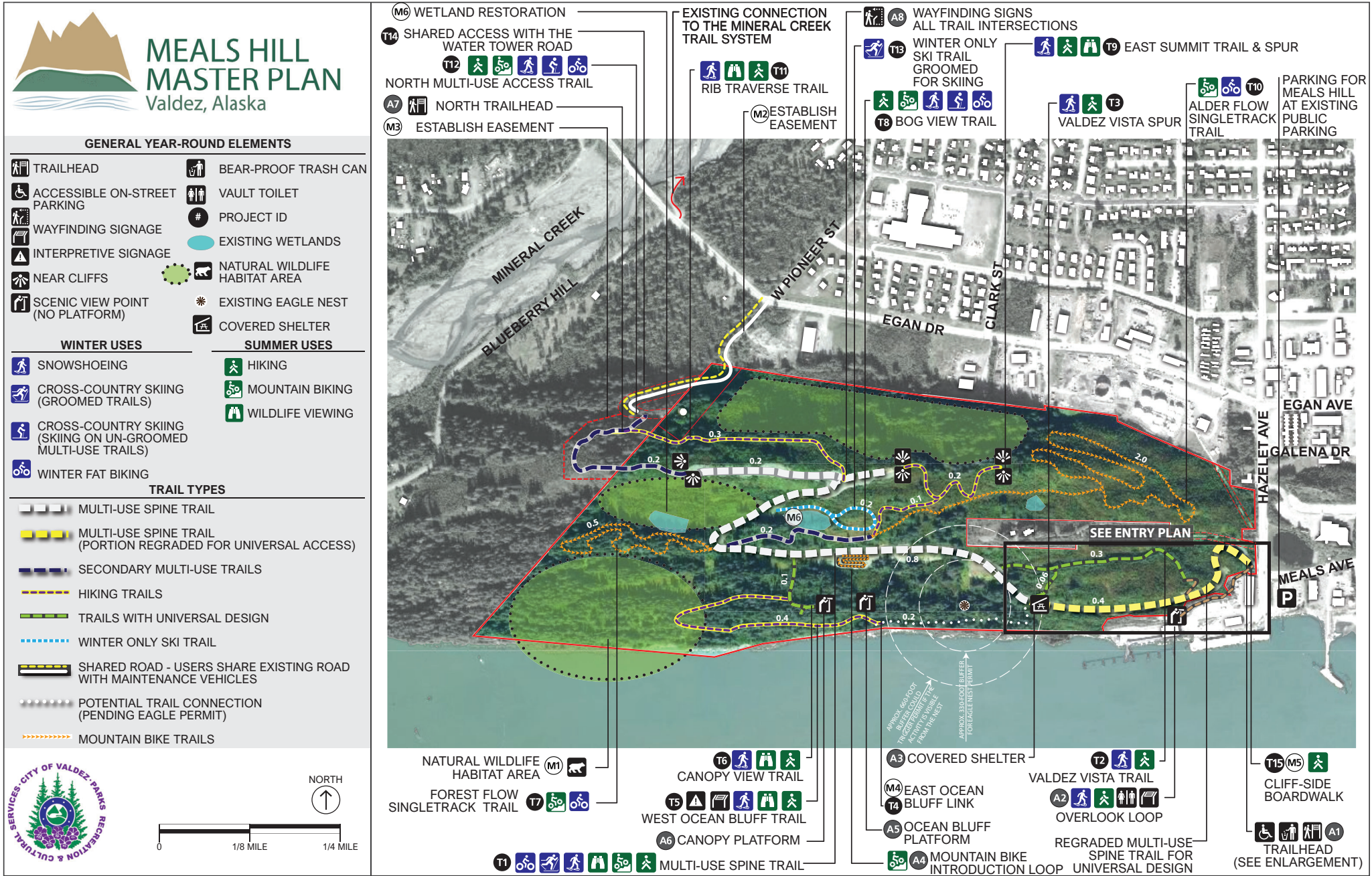
THEME 5 LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Meals Hill is responsibly developed with a long-term, phased plan for sustainable maintenance and management; the plan is oriented towards advancing the quality of life and experiences Valdez has to offer.

The planning team developed the initial concepts and preferred alternative based on the survey results, stakeholder interviews, site inventory and analysis, public comments, and feedback from the MHPC, PRC, and City Council. Project guiding principles developed early in the planning process helped guide the planning decisions and the final designs.

The following overall site plan of Meals Hill along with plan enlargements, sections, sketches, and example images provides a graphic overview of the plan. Each element is further described by trails, access and amenity elements, and management practices.

OVERALL SITE MASTER PLAN



MAP 8

TRAIL & AMENITY EXAMPLE IMAGES



T1

T1 - MULTI-USE SPINE TRAIL



T2 T3
T12 T6

T2 - VALDEZ VISTA TRAIL
T3 - VALDEZ VISTA SPUR
T6 - CANOPY VIEW TRAIL
T12 - NORTH MULTI-USE TRAIL



T4 T5

T4 - EAST OCEAN BLUFF LINK
T5 - WEST OCEAN BLUFF TRAIL



T7 T10

T7 - FOREST FLOW SINGLETRACK TRAIL
T10 - ALDER FLOW SINGLETRACK TRAIL



T11 T8

T8 - BOG VIEW MULTI-USE TRAIL
T11 - RIB TRAVERSE TRAIL



T9

T9 - EAST SUMMIT TRAIL & SPUR



T13

T13 - SKI LOOP (WINTER ONLY)



T15

T15 - CLIFF-SIDE BOARDWALK



A1

A1 - PARK ENTRY & TRAILHEAD



A2

PHOTO CREDIT: GRET LAND TRUST
A2 - OVERLOOK LOOP



A3

A3 - COVERED SHELTER



A4

PHOTO CREDIT: SKYLER KEHREN
A4 - MOUNTAIN BIKE INTRODUCTION LOOP



A6 A5

PHOTO CREDIT: GRET LAND TRUST
A5 - CANOPY PLATFORM
A6 - OCEAN BLUFF PLATFORM



A7

A7 - NORTH TRAILHEAD

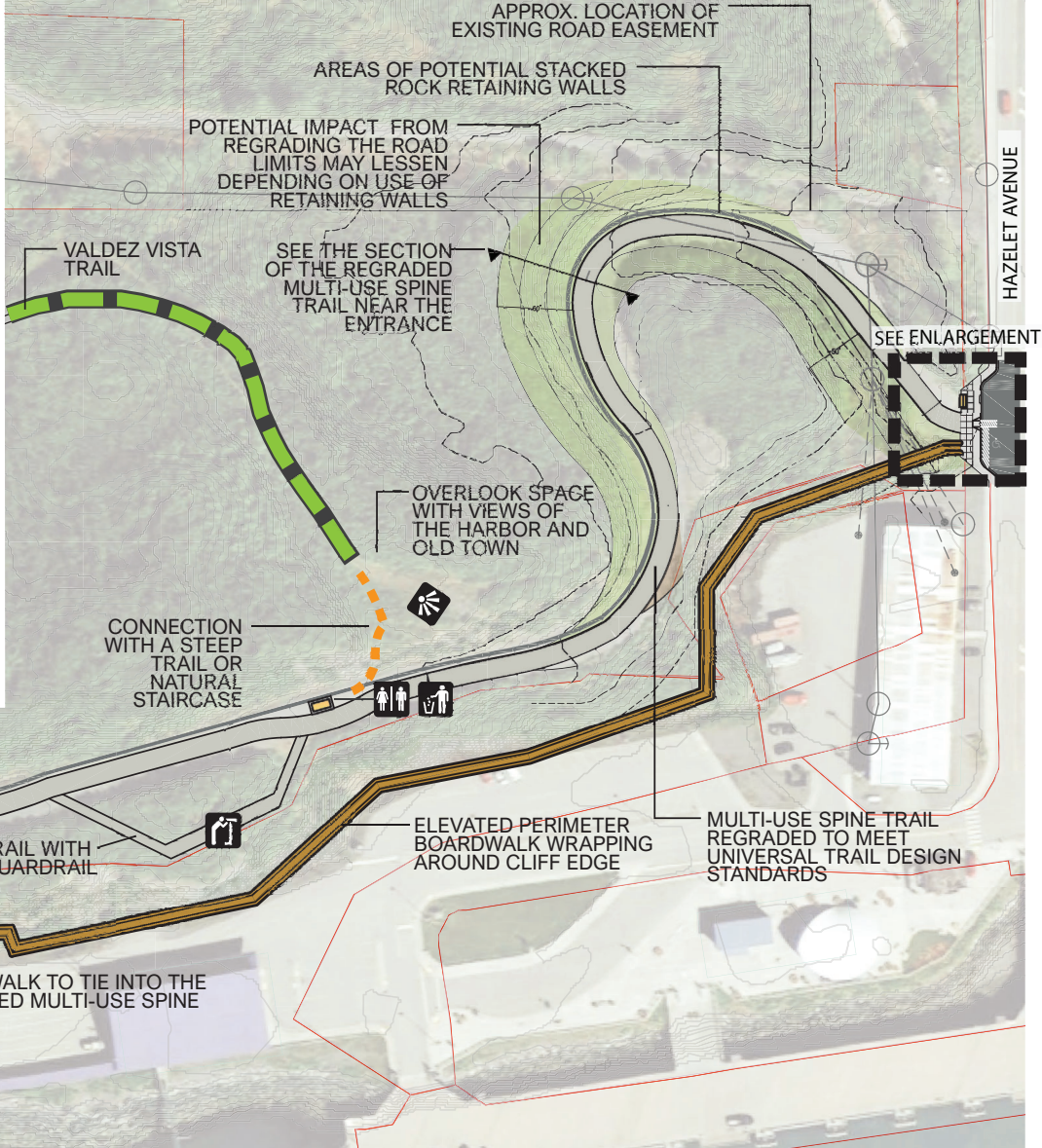
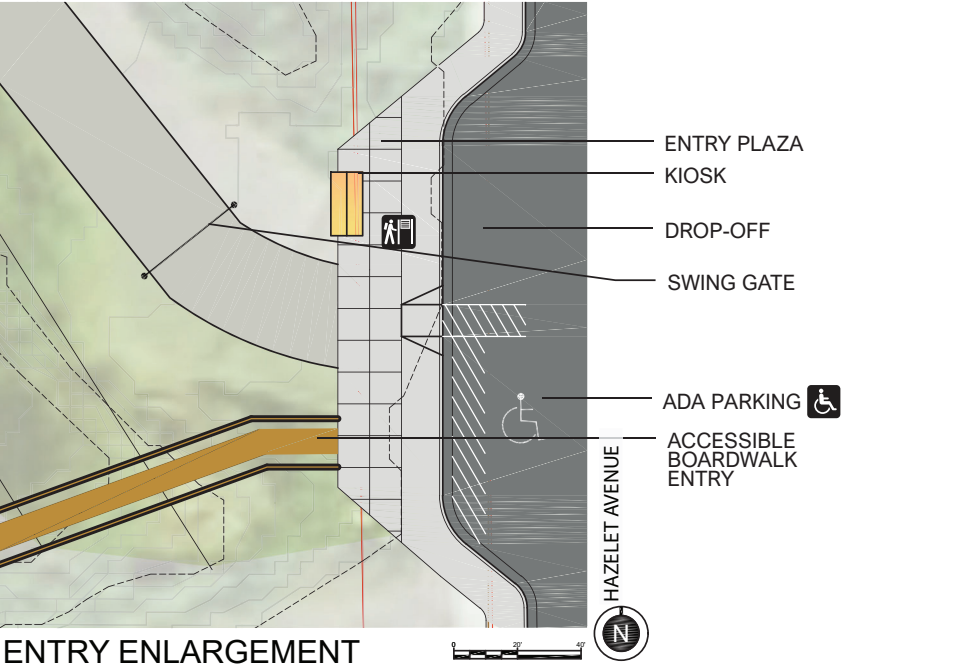


A8

A8 - WAYFINDING

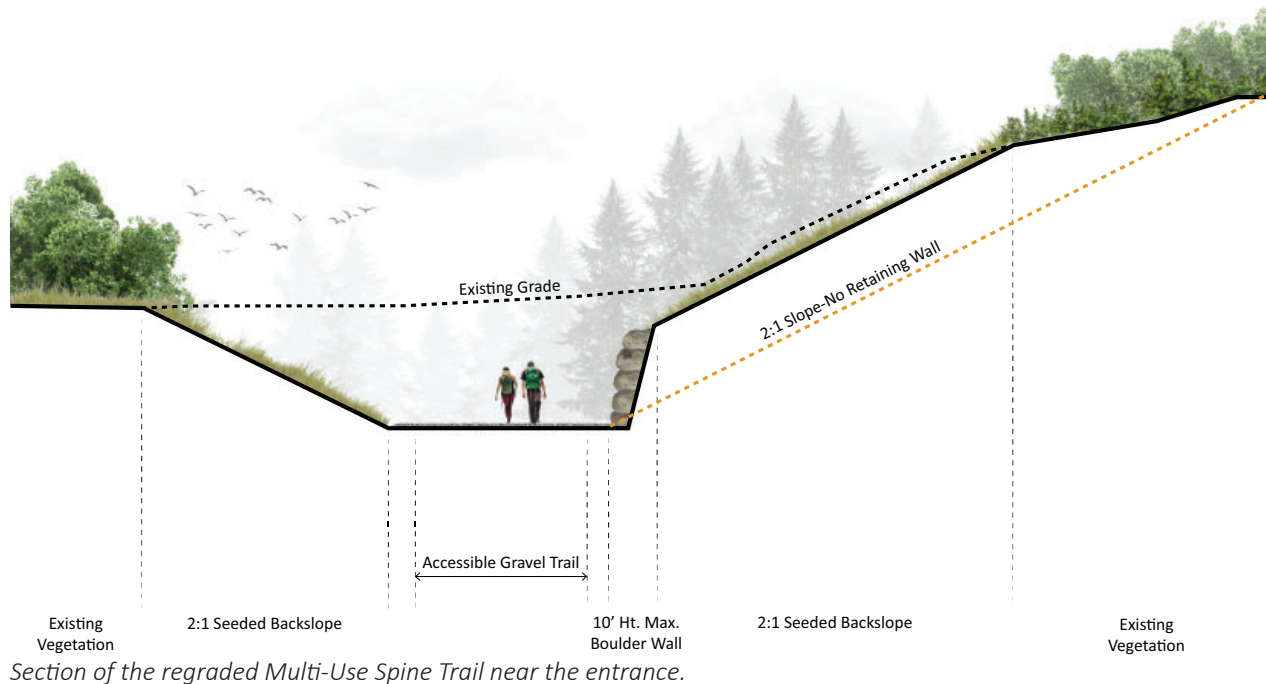
Example images of proposed trails and amenities.

ENTRY PLAN



MAP 9

FIGURE 6



TRAILS

T1 – MULTI-USE SPINE TRAIL

- Use: Non-motorized, multi-use (hiking, biking, groomed skiing, snowshoeing, winter-biking)
- Width: 14 feet
- Materials: Compact gravel over existing roadbed
- Design Considerations: PistenBully grooming and emergency vehicle use

The Multi-Use Spine Trail is proposed through the center of the site following an existing road alignment. Starting at Hazlet Avenue, at the southeast corner of the site, the trail will serve as the main access to the park. The existing road alignment bisects the site and with a steady incline it eventually reaches two highpoints at the center of the site. The proposed trail will follow that same alignment.

The first quarter mile (1/4 mi.) of the trail will be regraded to a Universal Design standard with an average grade of five percent (5%). Above that point, grades steepen. To make the main thoroughfare feel less like a road and more like a trail, segments of the existing road and areas of impact will be narrowed to a 14-foot-wide trail with landscaped berms and reseeding to create curvilinear alignments while preserving safe sight lines. This will be site's major artery for all users providing access to other trail branches and connecting east and north access points.

T2 – VALDEZ VISTA TRAIL

- Use: Non-motorized, hiking/snowshoeing trail
- Width: 6 feet
- Materials: Compact gravel over existing roadbed

The Valdez Vista Trail will be the first trail to branch off from the Main Multi-Use Spine Trail. Approximately 900 feet into the site a short steep connection (a trail with greater than a 10% grade or stairs) will provide access to a peak experience at an open elevated space with views to the harbor and downtown, and to the historic Valdez Town

FIGURE 7



Perspective of the Multi-Use Spine Trail with berming.

site. From there a universally designed alignment will provide a 0.3-mile trail to the west to access an upper portion of the Multi-Use Spine Trail. This section of trail will be designed to a universal standard and will follow an existing road alignment. The Valdez Vista Trail provides users an alternative means to access upper areas of the park without having to stay on the main artery.

T3 - VALDEZ VISTA SPUR

- Use: Non-motorized, hiking/snowshoeing trail
- Width: 6 feet
- Materials: Elevated boardwalk and compact gravel

The Valdez Vista Spur Trail will provide an alternative connection between the Multi-Use Spine Trail and the Valdez Vista Trail. The alignment does not

overlap an existing area of impact so new trail will be built using a combination of elevated boardwalk sections and compact gravel. The segment is short at approximately 300-feet long. The trail will connect the Valdez Vista Trail to the proposed location of the covered shelter. While this spur is short it will provide users of limited mobility another trail opportunity coming from the Multi-Use Spine Trail. This provides visitors who want to stay near the entry access to new terrain and alternative vistas. The trail should be installed and designed in a way that mitigates construction impacts, such as the use of helical piles, the use of natural materials on the boardwalk sections, and routing the trail through dry upland terrain to the extent feasible.

T4 – EAST OCEAN BLUFF LINK

- Use: Non-motorized, hiking/snowshoeing trail (bikes prohibited)
- Width: 2 feet
- Materials: Natural surface
- Design Considerations: Bench-cut construction / Pending eagle permits

The East Ocean Bluff Link is a proposed trail connection between the Multi-Use Spine Trail and the West Ocean Bluff Trail. This would allow users to easily connect from the Valdez Vista Trail down to the ocean bluff. The trail would create almost three-quarters of a mile (3/4 mi.) of connected hiking trail through the old growth forest. Due to an existing eagle's nest in the vicinity the exact location and layout will need to be determined based on the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines, conducting a nest survey by a certified biologist, and by working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The routing should be determined after a biologist has conducted a survey of the existing eagle's nest. The trail route should avoid the nest to the extent feasible. Although the diagram shows a trail near the eagle's nest the intention is that the trail would be well below the nest's elevation and buffered with existing vegetation. The trail location should be based on working with the USFWS and may need to be significantly rerouted to the north or west depending on their recommendations. More information on the bald eagle permitting process is provided in the management section under M4-Bald Eagle Permit.

This trail project should also be accompanied by rehabilitation of the existing roadbed that runs immediately adjacent to the nest as determined necessary to prevent visitor use and disturbance of the nest.

T5 – WEST OCEAN BLUFF TRAIL

- Use: Non-motorized, hiking/snowshoeing trail (bikes prohibited)
- Width: 2 feet
- Materials: Natural surface
- Design Considerations: Bench-cut construction



Perspective of the proposed covered shelter.

FIGURE 8

The Ocean Bluff Trail will run along the southern boundary of the property traversing the ocean bluffs and coastal rainforest. The trail will weave through the old growth trees providing regular ocean views. A rugged walking surface with sections of steeper grades, up to 20%, will provide a more primitive hiking experience.

T6 - CANOPY VIEW TRAIL

- Use: Non-motorized, hiking/snowshoeing trail (bikes prohibited)
- Width: 6 feet
- Materials: Elevated boardwalk / compact gravel / natural surface

The Canopy View Trail serves as the connection between the Multi-Use Spine Trail and the West Ocean Bluff Trail. The Canopy View Trail will provide

intimate views into the old growth forest canopy with distant ocean and mountain views. The trail will provide an “out of the way” experience with potential for bird and wildlife watching. The trail terminates at a viewing platform with benches and interpretive panels.

T7 - FOREST FLOW SINGLETRACK TRAIL

- Use: Non-motorized, biking
- Width: 2 feet
- Materials: Natural surface

This purpose-built flow style mountain bike trail will traverse up and around a series of rocky fins primarily through the forest with an open understory. Banked turns and limited technical features provide kinesthetic variety for beginner

and intermediate riders. The trail will be designed for biking as the preferred use; other users are not prohibited, but hikers and skiers will likely not want to use these trails due to their undulating design style.

T8 - BOG VIEW MULTI-USE TRAIL

- Use: Non-motorized, multi-use (hiking, biking, ungroomed skiing, snowshoeing, winter-biking)
- Width: 6 feet
- Materials: Natural surface / Compacted gravel / Boardwalk

The Bog View Trail is a multi-use connection mid-way up the Multi-Use Spine Trail. The trail begins in a forested area then crosses a bog and meadow providing users access from the spine to the East Summit Spur and Alder Flow Singletrack Trail. The trail will provide open views to the site.

T9 - EAST SUMMIT TRAIL & SPUR

- Use: Non-motorized, hiking/snowshoeing trail (bikes prohibited)
- Width: 6 feet
- Materials: Natural surface

The East Summit Trail and Spur are hiking trails that will provide access to the eastern high point on Meals Hill. The East Summit Trail runs east-west from the end of the Multi-Use Spine Trail to the hill's high point. Its alignment is curvilinear on intermittent bedrock through alder groves with consistent views of the whole site, terminating at a peak experience with 360-degree views.

The East Summit Spur will be the connection between the Bog View Multi-Use Trail and the East Summit Trail. Like the East Summit Trail, this spur will be curvilinear on intermittent bedrock in mixed vegetation with consistent views of the whole site.

Both trails will consist of steeper grades of up to 20% on bedrock and a rugged walking surface will provide a more primitive and intimate hiking experience.

T10 - ALDER FLOW SINGLETRACK TRAIL

- Use: Non-motorized, biking
- Width: 2 feet
- Materials: Natural surface

The Alder Flow Singletrack Trail will branch off from the Bog View Multi-Use Trail to the east. This purpose-built flow style mountain bike trail will weave through terrain features to provide two miles (2 mi.) of a bike-specific trail experience. Banked turns and natural and constructed features provide kinesthetic variety for intermediate riders. The trail will be designed for biking as the preferred use; other users are not prohibited but will likely not want to use these trails due to their design style. Trail designers and builders should use terrain and routing to block sight lines between the trails and private residence to the south to the extent feasible.

T11 - RIB TRAVERSE TRAIL

- Use: Non-motorized, hiking/snowshoeing trail (bikes prohibited)
- Width: 2 feet
- Materials: Natural surface

The Rib Traverse Trail will begin at the saddle in the Multi-Use Spine Trail and connect to the proposed non-motorized north access point from the water tower road. The trail will traverse multiple rib-like bedrock features in mixed forest with significant views of mountains to the north. Steeper grades, up to 20%, on bedrock and a rugged walking surface will provide a more primitive and intimate hiking experience.

T12 - NORTH MULTI-USE ACCESS TRAIL

- Use: Non-motorized, multi-use (hiking, biking, ungroomed skiing, snowshoeing, winter-biking)
- Width: 6 feet
- Materials: Natural surface

The North Multi-Use Access Trail will connect the existing water tower road to the west terminus of the Multi-Use Spine Trail. This north access point will serve as a non-motorized entry point for nearby neighborhoods and as a connection to the Mineral Creek trail system. The alignment will traverse forested slopes studded with old-growth Sitka spruce, providing views overlooking lower bogs to the southwest and dramatic views of the ocean and the Mineral Creek Delta to the west. Due to the existing terrain features this trail will not be able to be wide enough to accommodate a PistenBully for ski grooming, but the trail will be able to be maintained with a snow machine.

T13 – SKI LOOP (WINTER ONLY)

- Use: Non-motorized, groomed skiing
- Width: 14 feet
- Materials: No improvements, only snow grooming in winter

The ski-only winter loop will branch off the Multi-Use Spine Trail just before the summit. The trail will cross a flat area and skirt and cross an area that is identified as a Fresh Water Emergent Wetland by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service's wetlands mapping application (available through the Google Earth Pro program). The wetland extent has not been identified in the field therefore it is critical that this area not be disturbed. The loop can only be groomed and used once the ground is frozen and there is sufficient snow coverage to ensure protection of the underlying vegetation, soil, and waters. No improvements to the trail alignment or grading work are proposed since all use and maintenance will be winter based.

T14 – SHARED USE WITH THE WATER TOWER ROAD

- Use: Non-motorized, multi-use (hiking, biking, ungroomed skiing, snowshoeing, winter-biking)
- Width: Existing road width
- Materials: Existing dirt road, road maintenance as needed

Access to the site and connectivity to the Mineral Creek trail system were identified as priorities by stakeholders and public early in the project. In addition to the primary park entrance from the southeast corner of the site an additional access point is proposed in the northwest where the existing water tower road is. Non-motorized users would be able to access the site by sharing the existing water tower road with the occasional city maintenance vehicle. The road would lead users to a small secondary, non-motorized only, trailhead. This additional access option will require enhancements to existing fencing, gates, and signage to separate recreational users from the water tower. Prior to establishing access those improvements should be coordinated with the city's Water Department and easement establishment will be needed as described under the management section.

T15 – CLIFFSIDE BOARDWALK

- Use: Non-motorized, hiking boardwalk, summer-only
- Width: 6 feet with pull-off spaces
- Materials: Steel frame, extruded metal grates, and wood accents such as handrails

The Cliffside Boardwalk is proposed as an alternative scenic trail opportunity along the southern edge of the site. The boardwalk would start at the park entry on Hazelet Avenue and ramp-up as it wrapped along the southern cliff faces. Its terminus would be near the proposed Overlook Loop. The boardwalk would not only provide an additional means of universal access onto the site but create a highly visible iconic feature that could tie into the proposed improvements of the Waterfront Master Plan. The boardwalk could attract visitors and provide a looped walking opportunity linking the regraded section of the Multi-Use Spine Trail to the boardwalk.

The boardwalk, with catwalk elements that extend out from the cliff face, is 6 feet wide and construction of electroplated steel members, stainless steel bar grating, railings, and guardrail mesh. The catwalk elements are anchored to the cliff with concrete piers and steel bracing extending out to hold the walkway. The materials and coatings are selected to withstand the harsh coastal environment.

AMENITIES & ACCESS

A1 – PARK ENTRY & TRAILHEAD (DROP OFF, ADA PARKING, & KIOSK)

The existing entrance to Meals Hill is on a steep, roughly graded road off Hazelet Avenue. While this existing entrance will remain the main entrance to the park it will be enhanced. The proposed improvements at the base of the hill include two parallel parking spots- one for an accessible stall, the other for drop off- a kiosk, and a bear-proof trash can. From the entry road to the first peak



Perspective rendering of the proposed cliff-side boardwalk (T15).

FIGURE 9

experience at the Overlook Loop the existing road will be regraded to a universal trail standard of 5% grade or less.

Additional parking needs will be met by the nearby existing public parking lots. This includes the 'Uplands' parking lot at the intersection of Meals Avenue and Hazelet Avenue and the parking at the Civic Center if needed.

A2 – OVERLOOK LOOP WITH INTERPRETIVE INFORMATION AND VAULT TOILET

The first proposed 'peak experience' is an overlook

that loops off the Multi-Use Spine Trail's edge. The loop will provide views of the port, Old Town, and the sound. The Overlook Loop is .02 miles from the park entry. The trail will have guardrails where necessary and interpretive information on the history of the area. A vault toilet should be installed near the overlook loop.

A3 – COVERED SHELTER

Just beyond the Overlook Loop a covered shelter is proposed. The shelter will provide a covered area for small groups to gather at the edge of the coastal Sitka spruce groves. The covered area can accommodate groups up to 12 with space for table



Existing social trails along the ocean bluff.

IMAGE 13

seating and circulation. The location is at an existing area of impact and will be oriented south-southwest with views over Port Valdez. The structure is heavy-timber post and beam with steel plate joinery and a metal standing seam roof. The design aesthetic echoes new construction at nearby Kelsey Dock with expressed steel connections and natural wood. The proposed location is well outside the 330-foot buffer zone of the existing eagle's nest that would trigger a permit. The eagle's nest location relative to the shelter should still be verified by a biologist prior to design and construction, see section M4 – Bald Eagle Permit. If the shelter is visible from the nest and within the 660-foot zone a permit may still be required.

A4 – MOUNTAIN BIKE INTRODUCTION LOOP

The Mountain Bike Introduction Loop will provide an opportunity for beginner and intermediate riders to practice riding technique. The loop is located on an area of existing impact approximately three-quarters of a mile (3/4 mi.) from the entrance. Placing the loop in an existing area of impact rehabilitates the space as a program element supported by the community. The loop trail should be developed in a way that limits impact, buffers the use from its surroundings and ties in aesthetically to its surrounding. Small riding features should be made up of natural materials such as logs and boulders.

Berms planted with native vegetation of trees, shrubs, and grasses should be placed strategically throughout and around the space to buffer the use from the Multi-Use Spine Trail and surrounding habitat.

A5 – CANOPY PLATFORM

The canopy platform will be a structure nestled in the Sitka spruce forest. The platform will provide a place to observe wildlife with distant views to Port Valdez. The trail leading up to the platform branches from the Multi-Use Spine Trail and will be developed to a universal trail design standard. This will create a peak experience within the forested area for people who may not want to continue down the more rugged Ocean Bluff Trail.

A6 – OCEAN BLUFF PLATFORM

An ocean bluff platform is proposed along the coastal edge to provide views of the Port of Valdez and create a destination along the Ocean Bluff Trail. Creating a destination along this trail will help concentrate hikers to a 'peak experience' to help prevent trail braiding or people trying to gain views along the edge of the cliff band. The trail will be aligned in a way that pulls people from the cliff edge and directs them to the platform to gain ocean view. In addition, signs should be provided warning visitors of abrupt nearby cliff edge.

A7 – NORTH TRAILHEAD

Throughout the public engagement process the public voiced the importance of access to the site and connectivity to the trail network Valdez has to offer. The planning team looked for opportunities for connections but found the terrain a limiting factor. One location that did prove to be a viable connection was to the northwest of the site. In the northwest corner of the site there is an existing water tower with a single-lane dirt road connecting



View of the existing water tower road.

IMAGE 14

to Egan Drive. Just before the road reaches the water tower there is an opportunity to create a secondary trailhead where the North Multi-Use Trail and Rib Traverse Trail are proposed. The North Trailhead is intended for non-motorized access only. This access point is intended to serve users coming from the nearby neighborhood, Mineral Creek, or the schools. Since many of those users would likely be arriving to the park by non-motorized means this access point is meant to serve those local users.

A8 – INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING

Something that became clear during the planning process is that the community values educational opportunities and clear directional signage that is subtle but informative. The community wants the site to provide learning opportunities of local flora and fauna and local history. Many community members expressed interest in seeing interpretive signage at strategic park locations.

Two areas for interpretive material are proposed:

- The Overlook Loop; and
- Along the Canopy View Trail to the Ocean Bluff Trail

Topics should include:

- Indigenous history
- The Indigenous place name for Valdez
- Gold rush era to recent history
- Flora and fauna information
- Foraging
- Conservation easement information

Sign information and content should be developed in collaboration with local historians, subject matter experts, the Valdez Native Tribe, and local artists.

In addition to informational signage a wayfinding system of simple directional signs should be developed throughout the park. Signs should be placed at all trail intersections providing trail names and allowed / prohibited uses.

MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

M1 - NATURAL WILDLIFE HABITAT AREAS

The main objective of the conservation easement is to protect the conservation values that the EVOSTC seeks to restore and preserve. This includes the unique coastal habitat that the site provides. The community echoed this value during the project comment periods. It was clear that it was important for the community to see a plan that balanced preservation with recreational opportunities.

To achieve this outcome there are three zones identified as Natural Wildlife Habitat Areas. These zones are areas of the site intended to remain undeveloped. The first zone is in the southwest corner of the property and includes the ocean bluff as well as a large area of the dense Sitka spruce forest. The second zone sits just below the western summit of the site and includes a Fresh Water Emergent Wetland identified by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service's wetlands mapping application. The third zone is along the northern edge of the property and includes steep terrain of a large dense forest.

While there is not existing data on where exactly wildlife exists on the site the zones are intentionally identified on the western side of the property. Based on observations by visitors and from recommendations from the Valdez Bear Working Group most wildlife on the site is expected to be closer to the Mineral Creek drainage. Future management practices should take the following into consideration:

- Natural Wildlife Habitat Areas should remain undeveloped.
- Parks and Recreation staff should observe the zones for any human impact such as social trails.
- If prohibited uses do extend into these zones the Parks and Recreation Department should take steps to mitigate their impacts. Depending

on the type of impact this could include revegetation, signage, intermittent site visits to observe adverse impacts, or educational material or events about the habitat values the areas provide.

M2 - WATER TOWER ROAD ACCESS - ESTABLISH EASEMENT

The existing water tower road begins at the intersection of Egan Drive and West Pioneer Street. Just south of the intersection the road crosses a private parcel. The City of Valdez has been working on establishing a formal easement with the property owner to secure access. This easement should be established prior to allowing public access to Meals Hill via the northwest access routes.

M3 - UA PARCEL EASEMENT

The trails that create the northwest access point to the site will need to cross onto the adjacent undeveloped parcel owned by the University of Alaska (UA). An easement will need to be established on the property to secure rights for a trail and public use. UA has identified the parcel for disposal and will be moving towards the sale of the property in the near future. The city should work with UA or potential future landowners to secure the easement. While securing an easement may not seem ideal for the adjacent landowner the area where the easement crosses is actually steep terrain and would not serve a development capacity well. Selling the easement access rights to that area would provide the landowner with an alternative source of value to an otherwise undevelopable area.

M4 - BALD EAGLE PERMIT

There is an existing bald eagle nest at the center of the site adjacent to an existing area of impact. The National Bald Eagle Act was established to help protect the eagle population and sets the standards for development near an eagle's nest. In order to ensure that the nest and its use is protected:

- The city should work with a certified biologist to identify and observe the nest to confirm its exact location and observe activity in and around the nest.
- Construction activity will need to follow federal guidelines for both location and timing with the nest's active window.
- The nest is within a 330-foot radius of the East Ocean Bluff Link and therefore will need a permit through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The trail should be routed in a way that avoids the nest to the largest extent feasible.
- Once the East Ocean Bluff Link route is determined any existing trails that do not overlap the new alignment should be revegetated to deter people from disturbing the existing nest.
- Once the exact nest location is established other nearby improvements should be confirmed as to whether they impede on setback zones and will require submitting a permit application to USFWS.

M5 – ESTABLISH ACCESS FOR CLIFFSIDE BOARDWALK

The boardwalk that runs along the south cliff edge from Hazelet Avenue to the first peak experience at the Overlook Loop will need to overlap the parcel to the south which is owned by the State of Alaska. Legal access and ability to construct on the parcel will need to be established to develop this portion of the project.

M6 – WETLAND & SOCIAL TRAIL RESTORATION

There are two areas mid-way up the existing road that are identified as Fresh Water Emergent Wetlands identified by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service's wetlands mapping application (available through the Google Earth Pro program). These areas have experienced damage from motor vehicle tracks. Areas of damage should be restored

to prevent soil erosion and restore wetland function. The extent of damage should be inventoried, and a restoration plan should be established. The extent of restoration will depend on the extent of damage. Some of the damage may have grow-back due to the prohibition of motor vehicles. Additional restoration may be necessary such as reseeding, plantings, or vegetation mat installation. The extent of restoration should be determined after detailed observations are performed now that motor vehicles are prohibited.

While some of the proposed trails are routed over existing social trails there are additional existing social trails that will not be managed as new hiking or biking trails. These existing social trails should be rehabilitated by tilling up existing compacted soils and reseeding with native seeds. Temporary signage should be provided that states the trails are undergoing rehabilitation and should not be used.



Existing social trail.

IMAGE 15

IMPLEMENTATION

The Meals Hill Master Plan provides a vision for a fully developed park with a variety of recreation and conservation zones: realizing that vision will be a step-by-step process that takes place over several years. How the project is phased will depend on funding availability and the priorities of the community. The following section provides development and phasing recommendations to consider related to existing funding and potential funding. Following are general recommendations for phasing projects identified in the plan.

PHASE I

Phase I should consider projects that can happen in the near-term, 1-2 years after plan adoption. Projects implemented in phase I should be infrastructure, improvement, or rehabilitation projects that will help the city manage, operate, and maintain the park in a sustainable manner in anticipation of increased park use. Project types could be natural resource rehabilitation and protection (wetland repair, road rehabilitation, trail repair), park management features like signs, gates, restrooms, entry development, sustainably developing trails that overlap existing areas of impact or social trails, and regulatory, wayfinding, and interpretive signage. The city will need to work with the GLT to confirm which elements can be funded with the existing EVOSTC grant (see the Funding Opportunities table on page 31 for more information on the grant).

PHASE II

Phase II projects should be implemented 2 to 5 years out from plan adoption or sooner if additional funds are identified. Projects could include establishing access easements on the west side of the park, building new trails, trail connections, overlooks, and amenities that were not developed in phase I. The phase II time frame provides a great opportunity for the city to work with community groups and other partners to seek funding for

specific trail projects or amenities. The city should aim to build most of the park master plan in the phase II time frame.

PHASE III

Phase III projects are longer-term projects anticipated to be implemented more than 5 years from plan adoption or sooner if a funding source is identified. If the majority of the park is developed in phase II, phase III should be specific to the Cliff-Side Boardwalk Trail. This trail feature is one of the largest pieces of infrastructure in the plan requiring extensive engineering, design, and coordination with the State of Alaska for authorization to develop on state property. The project would tie-in well with the funding and construction of other waterfront projects identified in the Valdez Comprehensive Waterfront Master Plan.

CONCEPT LEVEL COST ESTIMATE

The following cost table provides a preliminary concept level estimate. As the designs are further developed project costs will need to be revisited, but this gives an early-stage number to help the city budget and seek funding for implementation.

FUNDING

OVERVIEW

The capital budget included with this report identifies how construction of access, trails and amenities at Meals Hill could be initially funded through an existing grant in combination with other funds. Depending on funding possibilities, future implementation could be broken down into as many phases as necessary, ranging from small to large. Unlike a building or road project, there is no single major component that must be constructed for the system of trails to succeed, which is why trail systems often develop organically as funding becomes available. It is best if a trail system receives an initial injection of funding that yields recognizable progress and enjoyable community experiences.

CONCEPT LEVEL COST ESTIMATE TABLE

(All costs in 2021 dollars)		Totals
Project Reference ID	Description	\$ 6,515,739
Multi-Use Spine Trail		
T1	Multi-Use Spine Trail <i>Regrading for Universal Design from Entrance for the first 0.4 mi.</i>	\$ 491,165
T1	Multi-Use Spine Trail <i>Min. grading to reduce road width and fix drainage</i>	\$ 195,725
T1	Berming <i>Landscaping to narrow road as trail</i>	\$ 114,310
T1	Retaining Wall <i>Approx. 10-Foot Tall</i>	\$ 568,000
T1	Retaining Wall <i>Approx. 2 to 5 Feet Tall</i>	\$ 204,764
T1	Utility Impacts	\$ 150,000
Secondary Multi-use		
T12	North Multi-Use Access Trail	\$ 24,018
T8	Bog View Trail <i>Section without boardwalk</i>	\$ 15,177
T8	Bog View Trail <i>Section with boardwalk</i>	\$ 296,780
Hiking Walking Trails		
T11	Rib Traverse Trail	\$ 37,581
T9	East Summit Trail	\$ 21,896
T9	East Summit Spur	\$ 12,963
T5	West Ocean Bluff Trail	\$ 39,035
T4 / M4	East Ocean Bluff Trail	\$ 23,517
Universal Trails		
T2	Valdez Vista Trail	\$ 32,546
T3	Valdez Vista Spur <i>Section with steep stepped connection</i>	\$ 4,981
T3	Valdez Vista Spur <i>Section without boardwalk (gravel)</i>	\$ 4,467
T3	Valdez Vista Spur <i>Section with boardwalk</i>	\$ 64,752
T6	Canopy View Trail <i>Section without boardwalk / natural bench cut surface</i>	\$ 5,194
T6	Canopy View Trail <i>Section without boardwalk (gravel)</i>	\$ 10,632
T6	Canopy View Trail <i>Section with boardwalk</i>	\$ 53,960

Project Reference ID	Description	Total Cost
Mountain Bike Trails/Infrastructure		
T10	Alder Flow Singletrack Trail	\$ 242,472
T7	Forest Flow Singletrack Trail	\$ 66,818
A4	Mountain Bike Introduction Loop	\$ 142,000
Amenities, Other Trail Connections, & Miscellaneous		
M3	University of Alaska Parcel Easement	\$ 130,000
T14	Shared Use Road with the Water Tower	\$ 67,478
A1	Swing Gate	\$ 8,520
A1	Parking Area	\$ 85,006
A1	Main Trailhead Kiosk	\$ 14,200
A1	Bearproof Trash Can	\$ 1,704
A7	North Trailhead	\$ 9,940
A3	Covered Shelter	\$ 204,480
A2	Vault Toilet	\$ 291,100
A2 / A7	Grading for Shelter and Toilet	\$ 26,239
A5	Canopy Platform	\$ 153,360
A6	Ocean Bluff Platform	\$ 153,360
A8	Wayfinding Signs	\$ 11,360
A8	Interpretive Signs	\$ 56,800
A2	Overlook Loop Trail	\$ 357,398
M4	Eagle Nest Survey	\$ 15,000
M4	Bald Eagle Permit	\$ 15,000
N/A	Cultural Site Review/Survey	\$ 20,000
Cliff-side Boardwalk		
T15	Boardwalk Along Graded Benches	\$ 1,502,529
T15	Boardwalk Elevated from Ground	\$ 541,109
M5	Easements on State Land	\$ 28,400

TABLE 2

FUNDING PLAN

A first step in implementing the Meals Hill Master Plan is to create a funding plan for the project. The funding plan should start with a list of potential funders and, after initial contact with those funders, be narrowed down to include the most likely funders and potential funding amounts. Once potential funding has been identified, the development should be broken into multiple additional phases as required. As a starting point towards a funding plan, the master plan team has created the following matrix of potential funding sources for the project.

STAFFING

In the summer of 2020, the City of Valdez adopted the Parks & Recreation Master Plan, a 10-year strategic plan to guide the department's decisions to best meet the recreation needs of the community. The plan provides recommendations on improvements to the system based on Level of Service (LOS) analysis of existing facilities. While these recommendations are for the larger system as a whole and do not explicitly address Meals Hill, the recommendations do provide a starting point for how the department will need to adapt as the Meals Hill Master Plan is implemented.

One of the recommended objectives of the 2020 Parks & Recreation Master Plan is to “staff appropriately to meet current demand and maintain established quality of service”. The recommendation suggests that staffing be increased, especially as additional facilities are developed, and emphasizes a need for additional maintenance support. The addition of recreational facilities on Meals Hill will only increase the demands on staff. To help alleviate the new responsibility and maintain a high-quality level of service (LOS) the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Department should consider adding staff dedicated to overseeing the initial implementation and ongoing management of Meals Hill.

The staff dedicated specifically to Meals Hill should be a coordinator level position that reports directly to the Parks and Recreation Department Director. Initially the Meals Hill Coordinator would be focused on park project implementation and collaborating with Capital Projects & Engineering to oversee initial capital improvements. Over time that responsibility would shift to management and maintenance of the park as well as ongoing community engagement. The Meals Hill Coordinator will need to collaborate between the maintenance and recreation divisions and would also build capacity for the department to work with community volunteer and stakeholder groups. For example, if the community developed a ‘Friends of Meals Hill’ group or a mountain bike user group to assist with ongoing maintenance upkeep. Staffing increases should be considered for the 2022 year. The 2020 Parks & Recreation Master

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES TABLE

Funding Opportunity	Potential Funding Source	Less Likely Funding Source	Description
City of Valdez			
Existing EVOS (Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council) Funding			Administrator: Great Land Trust in partnership with the City of Valdez (Using EVOS funds provided as part of original purchase) Description: As part of the original protection of the property, approximately \$900,000 in additional funding was secured for master planning, design, restoration, and construction of trail improvements.
CIP (Capital Improvement Project)			Administrator: City of Valdez Description: The City of Valdez has a variety of funding options available to support a capital improvement plan, including savings accounts and/or property tax revenues. CIP funding is determined by the City Council.
General Obligation Bond			Administrator: Alaska Municipal Bond Bank Authority Description: Alaska Municipal Bond Bank Authority (AMBBA) can assist eligible Alaska borrowers with bond financing for capital improvements. General obligation bonds are backed by a city's taxing authority, such as a local property tax. Bond funding is subject to ballot approval by Valdez voters.
Temporary Bed Tax			Administrator: City of Valdez
Foundations and Private Contributions			Description: Public accommodation tax revenue – including the option of temporary increase if supported by Valdez residents – is a possible source of funds for trail improvements. Bed tax funding is subject to ballot approval by Valdez voters.
Private Fundraising: Capital Campaign and Naming Opportunities			Administrator: Typically administered by a non-profit group, such as a "Friends of ..." group Description: A capital campaign by an affiliated non-profit group can open up opportunities to receive funding that might otherwise be difficult for the City to receive. Funds raised are often used as part of a required match for Foundation grants (for example, the Rasmuson Foundation almost always requires matching funding from a capital campaign to show community support). Many parts of the Meals Hill Master Plan are candidates for naming opportunities, such as shelters, overlooks and individual trails.

TABLE 3

Rasmuson Foundation			Administrator: Rasmuson Foundation Description: Rasmuson Foundation grant programs are designed to support capital projects of “demonstrable strategic importance or innovative nature that address issues of broad community or statewide significance.” The Foundation specifies that they are rarely the largest or only contributor and generally expect the project will have multiple other funding sources that demonstrate widespread community support. Anecdotally, Rasmuson prefers to be the last funder, and seldom funds more than the final 20% of a project. Two different grant programs (Tier 1 and Tier 2) are available, one for grants up to \$25,000 and the other for grants of more than \$25,000.
Volunteer Labor			Administrator: Valdez Parks & Recreation Department Description: Volunteer labor can simultaneously build civic pride in a project and help offset some construction costs. For trailwork, volunteer labor is usually best deployed as part of the hand finishing process, after machine work has been completed. Volunteer labor is sometimes overseen by a club who carries necessary insurance and collects waivers from volunteers. While typically not a major cost offset, volunteer labor also helps establish relationships with clubs who can help maintain the trails in the future.
Federal Grants			
FTA Recreational Trails Program			Administrator: Administered by various federal agencies, depending on grant program. Description: Federal grant opportunities vary annually subject to congressional appropriation. The grant opportunities listed at the left are those that currently show the greatest opportunity of successful funding for a project like Meals Hill. Recent federal funding, including a lot of CARES Act funding, has targeted recreation and wellness. The best first step in pursuing federal funding is to contact the offices of Alaska's congressional delegation.
EDA CARES Act Funding			
Outdoors for All Act			
Land & Water Conservation Fund			
USDA Rural Development Economic Impact Initiative Grant			
State of Alaska			
Community Development Block Grant			Administrator: Typically administered by DCED Description: While State grant opportunities have been limited over the past six years, there are signs that new opportunities will arise as the State sees an influx of federal stimulus money. A statewide general obligation bond is also being considered, but Meals Hill is likely not a strong candidate. Meals Hill is a strong candidate for a Community Development Block Grant, especially if the State utilizes CARES funding to support that program.
Designated Legislative Grants			

TABLE 3

Plan should be referenced for additional staff recruitment barriers and recommendations.

As use of Meals Hill increases, follow up data collection should be conducted to ensure that the property and management strategies are consistent with the conservation easement while meeting needs and expectations of the community. Follow up research should be conducted at minimum 5-year intervals to ensure changes, needs, and preference are identified and met by the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department.

WORKING WITH THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Not only does the conservation easement provide the basis for the development of this plan, but it also will need to guide implementation and management strategies moving forward. While the City of Valdez (COV) is the landowner the conservation easement is held by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). It is BLM’s responsibility to enforce the terms of the conservation easement. Therefore, the COV will need to work closely with the BLM through implementation phases.

The COV should review projects with the BLM to confirm plans are consistent with the conservation easement and confirm if environmental or historic reviews are required as a part of the implementation process. A line item for a cultural survey of the site has been included in the concept level estimate to provide a sense of the costs associated with such a survey. If required, this survey should be performed prior to any development projects. The city should also confirm what the BLM’s review process needs to be during design and construction. The city should contact the field manager at the Glennallen Field Office to determine which staff members at BLM to work directly with.

PARK RENAMING

During the public involvement process, some members of the public expressed interest in renaming Meals Hill. The project team discussed this idea with the Meals Hill Planning Committee (MHPC) and the committee was supportive of developing a park name that is different from the location name of Meals Hill (see MHPC Meeting #5 Summary for more detailed information on the discussion). One of the proposed names is Suacit, the Indigenous place name for Valdez – the first part of the word means “people” and the second part of the word means “to surface or to rise into view”. The city should work with the Valdez Native Tribe to determine if using this place name is appropriate.