

# City of Valdez

212 Chenega Ave.  
Valdez, AK 99686



## Meeting Minutes –Final

Tuesday, May 9, 2023

Regular Meeting

Council Chambers

Parks and Recreation Commission

## REGULAR AGENDA – 6:30 PM

### I. CALL TO ORDER

The Valdez Parks & Recreation Regular Commission Meeting was called to order at 6:34 PM, in City Council Chambers.

### II. ROLL CALL

Present: 7- Commission Chair Sarah Jorgenson-Owen  
Commissioner Pete Carter  
Commissioner Ben Rush  
Commissioner Jeremy Robida  
Commissioner Kyle Klause  
Commissioner Carl Gressel  
Commissioner Heidi Johnson

Also present: 2 - PRCS Director Ken Wilson  
PRCS Office Manager Anne (Nikki) Duhamel

### **III. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

#### **1. Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes from April 11, 2023.**

MOTION: Commissioner Rush moves, seconded by Commissioner Klause to discuss the approval of meeting minutes from 4.11.2023.

Commissioner Chair Jorgenson-Owen identifies an error, the meetings minute up for approval are from February 9, 2023. The minutes read on the back of page one as April 11, 2023.

VOTE: All approve minutes aside from the date correction. Commissioners vote 7 yeas, 0 nays. Meeting Minutes are approved.

### **IV. PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR**

Matthew Smelcer, citizen, representing the Friends of Valdez Ice Rink:

It takes 25-30,000 gallons of water, poured within a 7 to 10 timespan, in order to properly freeze the rink, Mr. Smelcer explains. Due to weather conditions and available fire department personnel and volunteers, the rink was unable to happen this year. Mr. Smelcer had a great meeting with PRCS Director Ken Wilson, coming up with ideas on how to hold the water a little better this year.

Matthew Smelcer, longtime citizen, representing the Valdez Snowmachine Club:

Mr. Smelcer expresses that this winter/spring has been the best snowmachine season yet. Each weekend there have been approximately 50-70 racers participating. Mr. Smelcer gives thanks to the Parks and Recreation staff, particularly Park Maintenance Supervisor, Marcie Robertson who permitted the club to use the groomer. The Valdez Snowmachine Club's 6 board members and volunteers helped build the track this year, hosting the largest events in Valdez from October through May. The SnowCross Series includes racers from ages 4yrs. through adults.

Mr. Smelcer adds that they also host the second largest cross-country race in Alaska, which is the Mayor's Cup, with over 100 competitors. This year there were 27 junior racers and 78 adults. Mr. Smelcer adds that this race brings people from all over the state to our hotels and businesses. Mr. Smelcer concluded, stating that the Hill Climb event was such a success with over 150 racers, they are looking to extend the event to 4 full days. The Valdez Snowmachine Club will put together a survey to present to City Council showing the economic growth that these events bring to Valdez. Looking to partner with other organizations to put together some sort of statewide series, Mr. Smelcer concludes.

### **V. NEW BUSINESS**

#### **1. Meals Hill 65% Design and Funding Update**

MOTION: Commissioner Rush moves, seconded by Commissioner Robida to discuss the Meals Hill 65% Design and Funding Update.

Director Ken Wilson welcomes Capital Facilities Director (and Interim City Manager) Nathan Duval, who presented recently to City Council on Meals Hill funding and Huddle AK, LLC, will be presenting tonight the progress on the Meals Hill design.

Bri Keifer, Landscape Architect with the planning and design firm Huddle AK, and colleague Peyton Johnson, work together with PND Engineers and RSA Engineers on portions of the Meals Hill construction documents. Referring to the PowerPoint presentation included in the Agenda Packet, Ms. Keifer explains this evening Huddle will go through a quick overview of the project in general, and speak to the specific changes that were made in getting to the 65% design decision making process.

Slide #1: The scope of the design effort is an entry plaza along Hazlet with amenities and such as a trashcan and kiosk, as well as improvements to the multi-use trail, up to a mile. The main improvement was to get to universal standards by improving accessibility. The Overlook Loop off the multi-use trail and new vaulted toilets, wayfinding signs, and the main change being relocation of vaulted toilet and the picnic shelter. The vaulted toilet will be located north of the Overlook on the other side of the trail now to the west of the trail. The main reason being grading needed for maintenance vehicles to be able to access. The picnic shelter currently shown to the west will now be moved, Ms. Keifer explains.

Slide #2: Between Huddle's 35-65% site visits an environmental specialist with PND, was able to locate and identify the eagle's nest in the area. Due to observations, recommendations were made to move the trail to the east, avoiding disturbing the nesting area. These are the two main changes coming to the 65% design, Ms. Keifer states. The overlook trail is still in the same loop with the improvements to the Entry Plaza.

Slide #3: Showing two different models of the vaulted toilet, the Romtec model was preferred due to aesthetics and maintenance reasons, Ms. Keifer explains.

Slide #4: Zooming into the entry plaza at Hazlet, there is an accessible stall proposed at the drop off area, and a concrete plaza connecting the sidewalks of the north and south with amenities, kiosk, benches, and a bear proof trashcan. To the left is an entry gate to prevent vehicles from coming through but will be accessible by maintenance in order to lock and close it, with a pedestrian route to the right, Ms. Keifer states. The trail line was adjusted with grading for maintenance access.

Slide #5: In the 35% set of slides, Huddle showed a variety of ways amenities could be placed. The preferred being galvanized metal accents for attachments and arm rests. The kiosk with a front and side view will include a map and interpretive content and park rules and information, Ms. Keifer concludes.

Side #6 This slide shows what the park gate can look like with the bollards to the right, showing how pedestrians would walk around the gate easily when closed.

This all will be a combination of galvanized metal and wood, Ms. Keifer states.

Slide #7: The guard rail, made of mostly wood and galvanized metal, (similar in design as the Harbor), which will go around the overlook loop and shelter, Ms. Keifer explains. Also, there will be 4 wayfinding and interpretive signs: 2 at the overlook loop, and 2 at the picnics shelter.

Slide #8: Ms. Keifer shows the design of the kiosk and wayfinding signs. The two types of images preferred, photography and watercolor imagery (of plant and animal species), were both utilized and merged into the sign design highlighting the coastal rainforest species. Ms. Keifer opens the floor for any questions on the information presented.

Commissioner Johnson comments that she likes the progress being made and particularly that it is friendly to all ages. Although the signage is beautiful, Commissioner Johnson suggests that sea life be included on the signage.

Commissioner Robida inquires about the new signage that went up in town last year, and whether it will be removed in the winter? Mr. Robida adds he foresees the plow or weather taking a toll on signage prematurely. Ms. Keifer responds that there is no plan to remove signs seasonally, but receiving feedback from maintenance that snow builds up on the sign, we have angled the sign in a way that is visible to people. Ms. Keifer adds that the material of the sign is a high-pressure laminate material that is designed and built for exterior weather conditions. Success has been seen with this product in Anchorage. Other signs will be the same material and will go under the kiosk with the overhead canopy to further protect, Ms. Keifer explains.

Mr. Robida asks about the guardrail on the overlook trail to get an idea of what the cliff-side boardwalk would look like and whether it would look down into the parking lot below. Ms. Keifer responds that the cliff-side boardwalk is identified in the master plan, but this project specifically is the overlook loop, not the boardwalk. A shorter branch trail will be graded off from the multi-use trail, and then we will not need a boardwalk, Ms. Keifer states.

Commissioner Klausen enquires about the wood composite material on the handrail and whether it is an actual cap or is it made from wood composite. Ms. Keifer responds that although we are envisioning all wood, the cap itself is made of a high-pressure laminate plastic made to withstand the outside elements.

Commissioner Gressel suggests that we put harmful species, such as cow's parsnip/devil's club on the signs. Ms. Keifer agrees this should be added to the signage.

Commissioner Gressel asks about the costs of the vaulted toilet, confirming total of \$67,000 for materials for vaulted toilet. Ms. Keifer confirms that this is the latest rate from Romtec. Director Duval responds that this Romtec unit will be like the one located at Alpine Woods Park. It has been scaled back to a single stall until so we will have more funds for trail design.

Commissioner Rush inquires about the posts. As snow comes and goes, the posts become dangerous for skiers. Chair Jorgenson-Owen responds we will need to add flagging, etc. for awareness of what is under the snow.

Commissioner Rush asks about the galvanized steel fence. Director Duval responds that the fence will be similar to the Harbor, and is meant to stand up to the winter elements.

Commissioner Carter voices he is in support of the boardwalk. Although expensive, this would bring great economic growth for Valdez. Commissioner Carter states he prefers to walk on a ridge vs. the current trail design.

Director Wilson responds, we are bound by the EDA grant (and the government) to follow a process. The items identified within the grant are the items we must build. The boardwalk will be in phase 2 to come, if we obtained the funding. There is no drawing board for phase 2 at this time, Director Wilson concludes.

Commissioner Carter asks if it is too late to modify trail designs? Commissioner Carter suggested we take extra funds and add a trail so we can be out looking at the water while climbing the hill.

Director Duval responds that the conservation easement held by BLM is relatively strict. They do not want re-grading to the entry way, even though some is needed. They have allowed us to move alders and reclaim a bed for a trail, that is all Director Duval states. The guiding document that we must follow is the BLM conservation easement, which includes 15 other players, with all different rules to follow, Mr. Duval concludes.

Commissioner Gressel states that there are two bathrooms within 200 yards walking distance of the trail. Mr. Gressel adds that taxpayers critique the City's spending and this seems a very wasteful expense

Director Duval responds that this is part of the universal design to have access to a restroom on the trail. GLT and EVOS are both in favor of it so people are not going on the trail itself. Director Wilson states that from a programming standpoint, it would be very inconvenient to bring groups or youth to another location to use the restroom.

Commissioner Gressel agrees that if we are doing group programming or a field trip, especially with younger children, that the restroom is important. Chair Jorgenson-Owen agrees that restrooms are very important for younger children.

Director Duval mentions that the two restroom facilities at the bottom of the hill are not available after September 15 and before April 1<sup>st</sup>, restroom facilities at the two existing locations will be closed, while the restroom off the Outlook Trail will be more accessing through the year as weather conditions allow.

Capital Facilities Director Nate Duval presents a funding spreadsheet shared in the agenda packet. Director Duval acknowledges the mountain bike trails or other multi-use trails are not identified at this time. The reason for that is due to who is paying for what items. Specific trails were not named, although there is some flexibility on which trails we build first, Director Duval explains. The spine and overlook trails were two of the required trails, leaving three other trails that can be implemented in some shape or form. GLT is bound by conservation, so they will not pay for these other types of trails.

Director Duval further explains that initially when submitting the EDA grant application, staff had the understanding that all line items including trails would be designed, as it is a construction project, and therefore did not include a line item for design work. The grant application also did not include a line item for construction inspections or construction administration throughout the process, Director Duval adds. There is also EDA requirements that need to be incorporated within the design drawing of the project. We are \$350,00 short from completion, and the funding partners are not going to pay for these needs Director Duval states.

Director Duval identifies what it means for City Council to contribute grant dollars outside

of the contract. The \$200,000 that EVOS was going to pay for materials will now be able to be all put into trails. The downside is the additional funds, council is split on the idea. Director Duval states he does not know another feasible way to move forward on the project without these funds. There are other grants available, but adding a third funding partner would make for more complication. Director Duval states that Council appears to be receptive to this flux of money. If Council approves the funds, the money will allow design to begin immediately by putting together a bid package, to which the Commission will have the opportunity to review when the time comes, Director Duval states.

Currently we are in a holding pattern until this will go to this next Council meeting. Director Duval states he will go back to GLT one more time and see if they are willing to pay for any of the design, but the outcome is unlikely. The concern is it takes six months to pay for a toilet, and since we cannot fully pay for it until the toilet is on site, it needs to be ordered in early June, Director Duval states. There will be steel package that will be put together for the steel and wood materials for the shelter that will be procuring while construction is going on. The other items are not very high dollar so the toilet and shelter are the big ticket items, Director Duval concludes.

Commissioner Robida thanks Director Duval for putting the funding spreadsheet together as it was an ask of his at the last Commission meeting. This helps get a sense of who is paying for what, Commissioner Robida states. At the last Council meeting there was a discussion about 350 K. Long term trail maintenance and cost associated with building these trails. Steering back to the cliffside boardwalk, which would look down to the parking lot wouldn't be ideal when further up the trail the water could be seen further up the trail and money saved.

Director Duval responds that this trail is not included in the Master Plan. There is an existing fence line separating the DOT fence line. Clearing out the alders would allow us to walk along this fence line, but it is not included in any projects, and is in the future planning following the Master Plan. The picnic shelter will be the only one which is 16 x 24. It is long enough to have two picnic tables in it and able to walk around them. We are not asking for recommendation but if Commission wants to put one together in support that is an option.

Chair Jorgenson-Owen opens Public Comment on this Agenda Item to the Public.

Ken Lares, longtime citizen of Valdez, inquires if there any objection for mountain bike enthusiast to go out and build these trails? Mr. Lares also stated that he appreciates the Parks & Recreation staff and has enjoyed working with us this past season.

Director Wilson responds to Mr. Lares stating that the department has all intent on building mountain bike and multi-use trails. Director Duval adds, as long as it is included in the master plan, we have free reign to proceed. There is no reason why we cannot add trails after the master plan with BLM's conservation approval.

Robbin Capers, Trails Sub-Committee member, encourages Parks & Recreation to keep the bathroom/trashcan open year-round if possible at Meals Hill location.

Ms. Capers inquires if the department is any further on obtaining an easement for two trail heads that run over to Eagan Drive on the other side by Mineral Creek.. Ms. Capers adds it would be great to have this connectivity and she hopes to see this on a future agenda.

Director Wilson responds that there has not been any progress as we are focused on obtaining Meals Hill funding and design completion, but as we move forward we want

interconnectivity to all our hike and bike trails, such as Homestead and a loop near Shoup bay for ease of access and movement around the facilities, Director Wilson concludes.

Chair Jorgenson-Owen states there has been a lot of time, effort, and man hours put into this project to date and inquires if the Parks & Recreation Commission would be in favor of a formal recommendation to City Council.

With four thumbs up, Commissioner Jorgenson-Owen will work with Director Wilson to write a letter of recommendation and encourages Commissioners to look at the next Council agendas.

Director Duval summarizes, the City is looking at a 3.5-3.75 million dollar loss if we stop the project. Also if we fail to meet grant requirements, we are unlikely to get grants in the future, Director Duval concludes.

Commissioner Carter asks where the artwork will be located. Director Duval responds that if you look at the entry plaza, you will see how we have dog legged a trail to Meals, to the north. Because GLT will not pay for us to design the art installation, its preferred we do not put the artwork on the drawings, Director Duval explains.

## **VI. REPORTS**

Director Wilson passes out the PRCS monthly report for the Commissioners to review. Chair Jorgenson-Owen reminds the Commission that the department is looking for a new Civic Center manager as Jennifer James is leaving in June.

## **VII. COMMISSION BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR**

Thank you for support of the Valdez snowmachine clubs this winter, Commissioner Johnson states once more.

Commissioner Robida thanks Director Duval for attending.

Commissioner Klause mentions that while we are making recommendations to Council, perhaps every meeting we should get a recommendation to City Council, particularly on trail building.

Commissioner Gressel states he is now in support of the restroom on Meals Hill.

Commissioner Rush requests to have the PRCS monthly report emailed instead of printed out for the meetings. Director agrees that when able, we will keep the reports electronic.

Commissioner Carter likes the printed compass magazines and wishes every resident could get one in their mailbox each edition.

Chair Jorgenson-Owen reminds the commission to attend or listen in on the next couple of council meetings so they know our Commission and the public are behind the Meals Hill project. Council meetings are on the first and third Tuesday of the month.



## VIII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Chair Jorgenson-Owen adjourned the meeting at 7:48 PM. Our next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday June 13<sup>th</sup>, 6:30 PM, in Council Chambers.

**CITY OF VALDEZ, ALASKA**

  
**Sarah Jorgenson-Owen, Parks and Rec Chair**

**ATTEST:**

  
**Ken Wilson, PRCS Director**