

To: Valdez City Council

From: Council Member Devens, Foster, and Love

Date: December 14, 2023

Subject: Meal Hill Art Installation Comments

Fellow Council Members,

Over the past few weeks we have worked to come up with the following comments and associated narrative regarding the Meals Hill art installation design that was proposed by Mr. John Clark. During the 11/21/23 Council meeting we provided Mr. Clark with some initial, verbal comments asking that the Exxon Valdez oil spill be incorporated into the art installation. In subsequent emails, Mr. Clark provided us some suggestions on how to incorporate the Exxon Valdez oil spill into the art installation. We based these comments on the suggestions from Mr. Clark, and we would like Council to consider sending these comments and narrative formally to Mr. Clark.

Comments to Mr. Clark

1. As you suggested, we think the center table of the art installation should be focused on the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. However, instead of designing a piece that shows the ship, oil spill response equipment, etc. we recommend that that the art show a map of the extent of spill affected region, showing where the oil went, and highlighting the communities that were directly impacted by oil. The map should convey the magnitude or scale of the spill. Page VII in this report includes a map of the spill that may be helpful for artistic inspiration: <https://www.arlis.org/docs/vol1/B/30000994.pdf>
2. We've drafted the below narrative regarding the oil spill, to accompany the central table for your consideration.
3. We request that the Alaska Native information in the art installation be fact checked by a qualified group or individual (e.g. Chugach Regional Resources Commission or an anthropologist with expertise in Ahtna, Alutiiq, and Eyak culture).

Narrative to Accompany Center Table

The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill was a disaster caused by human error and complacency that led to devastating harm to the environment and people of Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska. The oil traveled about 470 miles away from the spill site, reaching 1,300 miles of shoreline, and spreading over approximately 11,000 square miles of ocean. There were social, economic, cultural, and psychological impacts in communities throughout the region, in the form of lost commercial fishing and tourism income, disruptions in subsistence harvests, housing shortages, sowing of distrust for oil companies as well as state & federal agencies, increased levels of collective community stress, and strained community relations.

According to the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, an estimated “250,000 seabirds, 2,800 sea otters, 300 harbor seals, 250 bald eagles, up to 22 killer whales, and billions of salmon and herring eggs” were killed by the oil spill. This doesn’t account for the generations of wildlife that experienced chronic harm as a result of this disaster.

The recovery has already spanned decades, and in many ways, no complete recovery will ever occur among the communities and ecosystems harmed by the oil spill. However, the coastal habitat preserved within this park serves as a small part of the environmental and human recovery from the Exxon Valdez tragedy. The people of Valdez are now the stewards of this park and are entrusted with protecting and preserving this land forever.