

**To:** Valdez City Council

**From:** Council Members Devens, Foster, & Love

**Date:** June 26, 2024

**Subject:** Meals Hill Park Name

During the regular meeting on May 21, 2024, Council supported the formation of a subcommittee to identify a potential name for the park being created on Meals Hill. The subcommittee members included Council Members Devens, Foster, and Love. The work by the subcommittee stemmed from a recommendation contained in the Meals Hill Master Plan to consider an Alaska Native name for the park such as Suacit (sue-wa-gic), which is the Sugpiaq word for the Valdez area, which purportedly means “the people of the place that rises into view”.

The subcommittee met three times between May 21st and June 18th to identify potential Alaska Native names for the park. During the first meeting, the subcommittee agreed to pursue an Sugcestun (sugs-tune) name for the park because that is the language used by the Sugpiaq people who inhabited the Valdez area. The subcommittee considered that Suacit may not be an appropriate name for the park on Meals Hill because it describes the whole Valdez area and it may be better to have a name specific to the parkland. The subcommittee then discussed potentially using an appropriate value to name the park after such as stewardship, recovery, or preserve and came up with a list of more than a dozen potential values to consider, then translate into Sugcestun. The subcommittee was cognizant that Sugcestun may not have words that perfectly match the English meaning of the values we listed. Finally, at the first meeting the subcommittee identified entities to contact for Sugcestun language subject matter expertise including Chugach Corporation, Valdez Native Tribe, University of Alaska, and Valdez Historical Museum and Archive.

During the second subcommittee meeting each member reported out what they had learned from the various entities contacted. Representatives from Chugach Corporation, Valdez Native Tribe, and the Chugach Regional Resources Commission all recommended that we work with Diane Selanoff on Sugcestun translations for potential park names. Staff from University of Alaska Anchorage recommended that we contact an Alaska Native Studies adjunct instructor from Kodiak College about Sugcestun language translation. The instructor did not want to be identified in this report but provided feedback to improve our process of identifying a Sugcestun name for the park. The key feedback from the Alaska Native Studies instructor included: do not call it Suacit, ask if the parkland has a Sugcestun name already, and that Sugpiaq people typically name places after their utility or a geographic feature.

During the third meeting, the subcommittee met with Diane Selanoff to discuss an appropriate Sugcestun name for the park. Diane is Sugpiaq, is fluent in Sugcestun, and was raised in the village of Port Graham, but she now lives in Valdez. Diane said that there was no Sugcestun name for the land that encompasses the Meals Hill parkland. She agreed that the park should

not be named Suacit and went further to state that that word meant “warlike people” not “the people of the place that rises into view”. Diane was very supportive of the effort to find a Sugcestun name for the park, even if people may not be able to pronounce the name correctly, and she and her brother had brainstormed a couple name ideas. Diane shared two potential Sugcestun park names for the subcommittee to consider. One meant “to take care of” but she said pronouncing it slightly differently would mean “to run away”, so that name may not be the best choice. The other name she shared meant “to take care of” or “to guard” and this was her recommendation for the park name. After checking with another Sugcestun speaker from the village of Nanwalek on the meaning and spelling of her recommendation, Diane informed the committee that her recommended name is spelled Nayurluku and the phonetic spelling would be neigh-og-lou-goo.

The subcommittee believes that Nayurluku (neigh-og-lou-goo) would be an appropriate name because the word’s meaning “to take care of” or “to guard” closely aligns with the value of stewardship. Stewardship is a critical value applicable to this parkland because it was purchased with money from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council as a way to mitigate the environmental harm from the oil spill, and the citizens of Valdez have been entrusted to care for this land in perpetuity. In addition to recommending the park be named “Nayurluku Park”, the subcommittee offers the Council the following recommendations:

1. Name the parkland on Meals Hill “Nayurluku Park”
  - a. Ensure all signage includes the phonetic spelling of the Sugcestun name
  - b. Consider having at least one location where visitors can hear an audio recording of how to properly pronounce the name (e.g. a QR code to a link of the audio recording)
2. Confirm the meaning and spelling of Nayurluku
  - a. This would also include confirming the phonetic spelling of the name
3. Add a sign within the park generally describing the Sugpiaq culture and how they specifically utilized the Valdez area
4. During a later phase of development, install Suqpiq artwork inside the park
5. Confirm the meaning of Suacit
  - a. Does it mean “people of the place that rises into view” or “warlike people”?
  - b. Depending on the outcome of this inquiry, this may have impacts on other initiatives or actions in Valdez (e.g. the Meals Hill art installation proposed by Port Valdez Company or the naming of Suacit Hall at Prince William Sound College)