

# City of Valdez

212 Chenega Ave.  
Valdez, AK 99686



## Meeting Minutes –Final

**Tuesday, April 11, 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 6:33 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 Carter moves, seconded by Commissioner Gressel to discuss the approval of meeting minutes from 4.11.2023.

VOTE: All approved. 7 yeas, 0 nays. Meeting Minutes are approved.

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

There is no public business from the floor.

### **V. NEW BUSINESS**

#### **1. Discussion and Update on the Overall Development and Establishment of the Meals Hill Project.**

Mr. Wilson mentions that at the previous Commission meeting on February 14, it was requested that an overall update be given on the Meals Hill project. Mr. Wilson gives a project summary to-date to the Commission. The acquisition discussion of the property began back in 2017. The City of Valdez City Council passed a resolution to support the conveyance of the property for future recreational opportunities.

In 2019 the Meals Hill land was officially conveyed to the City through the Great Land Trust. In 2020, the City awarded a contract to Huddle AK, LLC to work with the Valdez community to create a Master Plan draft. The conveyance also included \$900,000 from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS) new for the City of Valdez to use to support very specific aspects of Meals Hill Development.

The Meal Hill Master Plan Committee made up of community members and staff, was created for this project. Five discussion meetings were held with the committee over the project. The City's Parks and Recreation Commission unanimously voted to approve the recommendation to the Valdez City Council to adopt the Meals Hill Master Plan. Support letters from local business and organizations were gathered. The EVOS funds were used on developing the Meals Hill Master Plan and left \$612,076 of these funds remaining for allowable uses by December 31, 2023. The items identified for use of EVOS funds are trails and amenities for impacted areas of the park.

In June 2021, City Council approved the Meals Hill Master Plan. In January of 2022 the City of Valdez applied for the ARPA EDA grant and was awarded in September. On February 9, 2023 the City of Valdez City Council authorized funding for the design of Meals Hill. The total amount of the award is \$2.5 million in grant funds, and the match for the grant from the City of Valdez is \$633 K. The 35% design was completed and presented to the Parks & Recreation Commission on February 14, 2023. An onsite visit was held in March with Huddle and city staff at Meals Hill.

Plans to execute 65% of the design are on track for completion the end of April 2023.

In May we will have Huddle attend our monthly meeting via zoom to go over the 65% design. Mr. Wilson explains we have submitted our 1<sup>st</sup> quarter economic development progress report to the EDA on the completion of the 35% design, anticipating 65% design documents by May of 2023.

Mr. Wilson adds, an extension of the project start date has been requested for June of 2024, in order to work out whether we can use funding for different areas. Mr. Wilson adds that we also want Huddle to be the ones to do our designing, as they have been so heavily involved in our Meals Hill project. We are waiting on a response to this request from the EDA.

An amendment was submitted. We need to complete an application for AK DOT permit for construction for state right of way, and an established estimate submission will be completed for the second quarter of 2023. The grant amendment will utilize the designer of record for additional services, as well as reallocate grant funds for different categories, and also extend the official start date. Commission Chair Jorgenson-Owen clarified the original start date was September of 2023.

We hope to have answers and a clearer picture at our next Commission Meeting, Mr. Wilson concludes.

#### Public Feedback:

Nate Duval, Capital Facilities Director, clarifies that the 35 % design is only for the aspects covered by EVOS funds. There are additional trails to be designed by EDA money, as EVOS will not pay for these. This is actually just 26% of the total project. Mr. Duval explains it is still the intention to do the complete project, but we are still ironing out who will pay for what reason being for why we requested an extension. We still have five years to spend the grant although we have hurdles to get through currently, Mr. Duval concludes.

Commissioner Robida states the Meals Hill Project Committee is made up of tax payers and the ask was primarily for trails and not bathrooms and shelters. In terms of prioritization and what gets built first. What options are there as to what gets built. Commissioner Robida recommends a matrix be made on the project to better understand options and decisions made.

Commissioner Chair Jorgenson-Owen adds that although we are working on vaulted toilet and a shelter, it doesn't take priority over trails. This is the section of the project we are able to advance in the first phase.

Mr. Wilson responds that we do have a spreadsheet identifying which funds pay for what. Mr. Duval can share this to help with further understanding of project funds.

Because of the bureaucratic steps of the process, money is in different buckets so we are starting on particular amenities now, but do not take precedence over trails, Mr. Duval states.

Commissioner Gressel asks for a timeline of completion for a trail?  
Commissioner Gressel expresses that this is what the community cares about.  
Mr. Duval states that as it stands right now, we should have a trail completed for the winter season of 2024.

Commissioner Carter mentions that 40 cruise ships are coming in this summer and wished we could have had the glass walkway option for Meals Hill.  
Commissioner Carter is against the big dig and doesn't see a need for the cost entailed of at least 1 million to blast the area that could have been done with switchbacks and so on. Mr. Duval replies that the Geotech report came back favorable and work can be done with an excavator, saving money, although estimate was built for a worst- case scenario. These extra funds can be put towards trails.

Commissioner Jorgenson-Owen asks for a monthly update to be included at each future Commission Meeting. Mr. Wilson replies that this is an easy ask and project updates will be provided monthly.

Mr. Duval concludes that money left over will go into trails, as it is a community priority. Chair Jorgenson-Owen adds for clarity that Meals Hill funds are mostly from grants, and not taxpayer funds.

## **2. Shoup Bay Trail Renaming**

Commission Chair Jorgenson-Owen recuses Commissioner Carter and Commissioner Rush from this agenda topic discussion as they serve on the Valdez Adventure Alliance Board.

Commissioner Johnson moves, seconded by Commissioner Klause to discuss Shoup Bay Trail Renaming.

Mr. Peter Carter, VAA Board President, addresses the Commission. Jack Blackwell, Superintendent for State of AK, supported the renaming of the trail as long as there is no public opposition. Prior to this there was a DNR Advisory Board for the town that supported the idea, but it was disbanded. Therefore, Mr. Carter explains, the ask comes to the Parks & Recreation Commission to support the trail renaming. The renaming helps with identification, funding, and helps with a safety concern of when avalanches come down to sea level near Gold Creek. The renaming helps with grant writing for the Valdez Adventure Alliance to obtain funds to maintain Shoup Bay. Last summer, VAA obtained signatures of support from the Valdez community.

Mr. Wilson mentions that he has met with Mr. Carter and has pushed the decision of renaming to the State of AK as we do not own the whole trail, only the first section. Mr. Jack Blackwell asked for the approval and a letter of support from the Parks & Recreation Commission. Mr. Wilson reiterates, the main purpose of renaming is for additional funding for each segment of the trail in order to do maintenance.

Commissioner Johnson confirms that the funding is for three different sections of the trail. Mr. Carter mentions it would be ideal if the City took over the first mile and the Valdez Adventure Alliance maintained the section two sections.

Commissioner Johnson enjoys this area as it provides an option to hike within town and would love to be able to hike further on the trail to the Gold Creek Trail.

Mr. Robida agrees with the renaming and mentions the trail beyond Gold Creek hasn't been functional for years. It is unfortunate to have these state park assets out there and would like to see the state better partner in the future. State Park cabins out by Shoup should be more accessible to the public. Driving more traffic down the trail would make maintenance much easier and would be ideal if we could access the cabins, Mr. Robida concludes.

Commissioner Carter states his gratitude that if it wasn't for the City's support to-date, the Shoup Bay area would have never evolved to where it is today.

Commissioner Gressel mentions that Shoup Bay Trail is the most popular for visitors. Our trail system is very much lacking, compared to McCarthy or Cordova. Commissioner Gressel states although he appreciates all of VAA's work, and although he approves of this request, he does not want the original trail name to be lost.

Chair Jorgenson-Owen understands Commissioner Gressel's concern and is in full support of the work the Valdez Adventure Alliance is doing on the trail and the renaming. The renaming of the trail will help with safety concerns and with clarity identification. Chair Jorgenson-Owen feels we could do some volunteering events around the renaming.

VOTE: All Commissioners vote for the Should Bay Trail renaming. All approved. 5 yeas, 2 abstain, 0 nays. Motion carries. Director Wilson will put together a letter of support of the renaming for the Valdez Adventure Alliance

### **3. Director's Report**

Mr. Wilson goes over the PRCS monthly report. Starting with Park Maintenance numbers, the total hours of grooming for the season was 89 hours. For special events, the 120 races we had 15 hours and for Mayor's Cup we had 29 hours total. Park Maintenance also prepped a dog sled trail for the homeschool and middle school. In Town Trail grooming took a total of 162 hours to complete.

Mr. Wilson states for the Shooting Range, a contractor has been arranged to groom the range, so it is EDA accessible for all citizens to use. Ideally we would like a truncated dome and curved ramp to ensure it fully meetings EDA compliance in the parking lot.

Mr. Wilson states the Meals Hill onsite visit was held on March 21<sup>st</sup>. The next phase of design will be completed at the end of April, and we plan to have a joint commission meeting in May with Huddle and the Trails Sub-Committee to review 65% design.

The annual flower planting and care contract has been approved, Mr. Wilson explains. Staff are working on upcoming volunteer events and I Share the Trails program. We now hold a pesticide applicators license and staff will herbicide the ballfields and address water issues at Ruth Pond. A discussion has been had with Dept. of Fish and Wildlife to stock the pond once it has been treated.

Each month we will provide the Commission a by-the-numbers report for our divisions to compare future stats and where we stand on programs, etc, Mr. Wilson announces.

For Recreation, our Coordinator, Sarah Winn has done a great job with programming. Mr. Wilson praises that she has added new programming, such as more Jr Highschool dances that are very popular with the youth.

Commissioner Johnson reminds the group that the GMS Rockwall is rentable and is a great opportunity when the weather is poor for kids year-round. Commissioner Johnson thanks Recreation for all of their programming.

Commissioner Klause inquires about stats for the Ski Hill. Mr. Wilson can provide what numbers we have at the next Commission meeting. The Ski Hill is a well-loved facility and hopes it can stay open longer in the future.

Commissioner Gressel inquires about childcare situation and what the department is doing to help. Mr. Wilson explains we have extended our Summer Fun camp to 10 weeks of all-day camps for youth ages 5 years-5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Commissioner Rush inquires when grooming stops. Mr Wilson replies that we typically stop winter trail grooming on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April. Commissioner Rush asks about using the pond for kayaking classes will be an issue with treating the pond. Mr. Wilson reassures it will not impact kayaking. Maintenance will be using a muck-away product that will rid the leaches, etc. from the water.

Commissioner Carter was surprised grooming was done after the Mayor's Cup and states Park Maintenance staff does a great job. Commissioner Carter feels we should have an app designed to track and follow our groomer in town. Johnson states that the Valdez Snowmachine uses a tracking app during Mayors Cup and is really helpful.

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

The Commissioners have no further comments.

Chair Jorgenson-Owen thanks Mr. Duval for attending our meeting and is grateful that we have finally approved the Shoup Bay Trail renaming.

## **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Commissioner Chair Jorgenson-Owen adjourned the meeting at 7:37 PM. Our next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 9th at 6:30 PM In Council Chambers.