

Lee Hart  
PO Box 33  
Valdez AK 99686  
303.898.4141

Mayor Jeremy O'Neil & Valdez City Council  
Chair Rhonda Wade & Valdez Economic Diversification Commission  
City of Valdez  
212 Chenega  
Valdez AK 99686

Jan. 7, 2019

Dear Honorable Mayor, City Council and Economic Diversification Commissioners,

I'm writing to thank you for the opportunity to give back to our city as a member of the Valdez Economic Diversification Commission. I'm writing to inform you that I am resigning my seat on the Economic Diversification Commission. I have stepped down as Executive Director of the Valdez Adventure Alliance and have moved to Anchorage to continue my work to coalesce Alaska's outdoor recreation industry at a statewide level.

I wish my fellow commissioners and the City great success with charting a course for the future and hope the new Comp Plan and Waterfront Master Plan will be useful tools for decisions to come that will turn the community's shared vision for Valdez into a reality.

I hope that someone will continue to wave the banner for diversifying and stimulating our local economy through outdoor recreation. As the early good snowfalls of this season demonstrate, Valdez has a great opportunity to promote winter visitation thus helping reduce the seasonality of cash flow for our businesses.

Very specifically, I hope the city agrees to take title to Meals Hill. I understand that the issue is scheduled for discussion at the Jan. 15 City Council meeting. Preserving Meals Hill for public access in perpetuity is a legacy gift to the community that will pay dividends for generations of residents and prove to be a magnet for visitors. I can no longer speak for the board of the Valdez Adventure Alliance but I would note that in the past they have expressed openness to conversations with the City to explore opportunities to partner in planning, development and stewardship of this magnificent asset.

I would also encourage the City to complete its review of the Master Trails Plan VAA has drafted with the help of a National Park Service Rivers Trails Conservation Assistance grant program. This outlook is not unique to VAA. Volumes of government and private studies demonstrate the value of trails to the economy and well-being of residents. Along with seven other community-based trails groups from Southeast to South Central and beyond VAA is helping

guide development of a statewide trails paper advocating for greater investment in trails. As stewards of Valdez area state parks, VAA is well aware of the challenges and costs of maintaining trails, let alone constructing new ones. Yet we would note, Infrastructure investment in trails delivers on average a 10:1 return on investment. Trails inspire visitors to stay longer thus improving the economy and contribute to higher levels of mental and physical well-being of residents.

Finally, as concerns the Comp Plan and Waterfront Master Plan: I would have been the voice at the table advocating for the city to incorporate plans to provide more access to our stunning waterfront and riverways. Again there is abundant quantifiable data that water attracts people. Across the country communities have been revitalizing polluted waterfronts and replacing low-head dams with whitewater parks for paddling enthusiasts because it makes economic sense. The City would do well to better spotlight and provide access to the main waterways of Valdez: Prince William Sound, Lowe River, Mineral Creek and the dozens of streams that create the bounty of waterfalls that are a year-round delight. Arguably, the popularity of the Shoup Trail, and community's consistency in naming it a top trail priority, points to the desire to have trails that facilitate interaction with the coastal environment and take in the views that naturally make Valdez the incredibly special place it is has been since well before the Gold Rush era.

I will close wishing this Council and my fellow members of the Economic Diversification Commission all the best of success. As you work to shape the future of the built environment please take care to ensure consideration for and provide greater access to our precious natural environment.

Cheers,  
Sincerely,  
Lee Hart  
leehartak@gmail.com  
303.898.4141