



MEETING MINUTES
PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2020 – 5:30 PM
Zoom Webinar

I. Call to Order at 5:30 p.m. – C. Mertl, Chair

Present: Josh Anderson, Alex Beebe-Giudice, Edric Carrillo, Kirk Duncan, Chris Mertl, Will Muldoon, Emily Palmer, Tom Rutecki

Absent: Ron Crenshaw

Staff Present: George Schaaf, Director; Michele Elfers, Deputy Director; Lauren Verrelli, Staff Liaison

II. Agenda Changes – None

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes –

A. From January 7, 2020 – J. Anderson moves to approve the minutes; no objection.
Minutes adopted.

B. From March 3, 2020 – J. Anderson moves to approve the minutes; no objection.
Minutes adopted.

IV. Public Participation on Non-Agenda Items – None

V. New Business –

A. Montana Creek Road

G. Schaaf: Montana Creek Natural Area Park land management is complicated. It is one of our largest natural area parks and is surrounded by USFS and DNR land. DOT deeded the road to the timber bridge to CBJ in 2007. Beyond the timber bridge is DNR land. State land allows ORV and snow machines use in the area and the Montana Creek Road gives access to this land. Back in 2012, there was a lot of resource damage and illegal dumping. To address this, we installed trail cameras and installed a gate in 2014 near the HHRR. The gate was an outcome of many conversations with user groups, DNR and USFS and would be closed each night and opened in the morning by the caretaker at the HHRR. The gate has been very successful, as the dumping have decreased. The area has become extremely popular with Nordic skiers and has brought in a lot more use of the park. As the area has become more popular, there is now more conflict between users, particularly between snow machines and Nordic skiers in the winter time. In CBJ Code 67.01.090, you cannot operate motorized vehicles on parkland, just roadways and parking lots. In addition, there is CBJ Code 72.02.455 that allows snow machines or ORV's to be driven on roadways when that road is impassible because of snow or ice. The last tool we have for us is CBJ Code 72.01.09 that allows that City Manage to close a street. There are multiple users groups that use this area and before we take any action that could negatively affect a user group, we need to go through a public process. We are hearing two requests for Montana Creek Road. One is the seasonal closure at the gate; we would need to engage with stakeholders, invite written public comment and bring it back to the PRAC hopefully in October. The other is the potential year-round closure at the gate, which would have more impacts for a lot more people; we would need to engage with the USFS, DNR, stakeholders, invite written

public comment.

E. Palmer: I agree we need to hear from more user groups before we take action.

J. Anderson: I am not here advocating for one side or the other; unfortunately, the ORV crowd keeps getting pushed aside. It would be nice to instead of keep closing off areas, if we could find an area for that user group to help relieve some of the pressure on the areas where other groups want to play. It would be great if the user groups could get together and work it out. I do not want us to keep shutting the door to other recreation.

E. Carrillo: Looking at the map, you cannot access the DNR or USFS land without going through the City land, is there any ramifications for cutting off public access to those lands? I think more information is needed before we can make a decision.

G. Schaaf: That will be one of our first questions to those organizations.

C. Mertl: If we close the area off to motorized use, would that prohibit the JNSC to use their grooming machine?

G. Schaaf: No, we would need an agreement to allow grooming back there.

PUBLIC COMMENT –

Allison Smith (Twin Lakes): I support the seasonal closure. I use the area heavily for Nordic skiing. Montana Creek is a unique area since the snow stays there the longest. I urge you to adopt a seasonal closure to preserve it for Nordic skiing.

Mara Jennings (Mendenhaven): I am a volunteer board member with Trout Unlimited Tongass Chapter with 150 members in Southeast Alaska. We are lucky to have a Montana Creek in our backyard with it being the best urban and wild trout fishing around town. We have collaborated with CBJ in the past to get buffers around Montana Creek as part of the comprehensive plan. The watershed upstream is home to Dolly Varden, coho, steelhead and trout. We are concerned about the impact of ORV use on the watershed past the bridge. A survey of the area earlier this summer show that ATVs are causing substantial impacts to the small tributaries that are used as rearing areas for small juvenile fish. We're sympathetic with having a place for ATV users to ride but Montana Creek is not the place.

C. Mertl: A lot of the upper watershed is State land and out of CBJ jurisdiction. Do you feel that if there is a designated trail with bridges for ATV that we could allow controlled motorized use back there?

Mara Jennings: Anything that allows easy access for users to do allowable activities helps decrease the impact of restricted activities.

Wayne Carnes (North Douglas): I am representing the JNSC that has over 600 members. We are requesting the continued winter closure of Montana Creek Road and a permanent installation of the pedestrian "kissing" gate from November 1 to May 1. Grooming started about 15 years ago and they now have regular grooming efforts on a daily basis. Last year the club groomed 156 days. Last year with the kissing gate dismantled, it allowed unauthorized motorized users to drive through and tear up the tracks. Snow machiners have thousands of acres to go ride around Juneau. Motorized users are incompatible with skiers, snowshoers and hikers on this narrow roadway. Having another public process is unnecessary since it was in 2014. We are not asking for anything new, we are asking for the existing agreement to be continued.

Luke Mather (Russell Rd.): My family and I frequently took advantage of Montana Creek last winter for Nordic skiing. I also taught some youth Nordic skiing lessons through the 4H Club. Based on the nature of the limited space, it is not compatible to have motorized vehicles moving up and down that corridor when there are folks Nordic skiing, especially young kids.

Shawn Eisele (6th St.): I urge you not to make this too big of a deal. Keep the gate locked during the winter months for Nordic skiing. Someone has mentioned that you are going to get conflicts when you close an area off to people and I want to clarify that you are not closing an area off to people, you're selecting how an area is going to be used. ORVs are damaging use; one user can destroy the use for skiing for hundreds and can wreak havoc on the streams.

Gary Mendivil (Canter Ct.): Urge you to close the section of Montana Creek Road beyond the gate during winter months. This is consistent with existing plans and policies adopted by CBJ.

John Thedinga (Wilma Ave.): I am an avid Nordic skier and volunteer trail groomer. I support closing the road during the winter. I am concerned about safety on the road. Having skiers and motorized vehicles is not a safe situation.

Fred Hiltner (N. Douglas): I am on the JNSC board but speaking as a citizen. I am requesting that Parks & Rec puts in a winter closure on Montana Creek Road. Thanks to Anderson and Carrillo in developing an area for ATV riders. I agree that putting effort into a new area would save a lot of conflict between users groups. Safety is very important.

Ben Williams (Douglas): I am a volunteer groomer and avid Nordic skier. A couple of the cases out there this past winter were caused by motorcycles. Grooming is volunteer money and time. These motorcycles and ATVs take advantage of the groomed terrain.

Marina Lindsey (Mendenhall Valley): I support continued closure of the gate so Nordic skiers can use the Montana Creek area safely. About 15 years ago, Ray Howard was the president of the snowmobile group. He did a wonderful job working with both groups to merge the interests and work together. I support both groups to talk again. I support that we need to find another area for motorized groups.

Tim Blust (N. Douglas): I am a board member on the JNSC. The public process was already completed in 2014.

PUBLIC COMMENT ENDS –

T. Rutecki: We are hearing that we already went through the process.

G. Schaaf: The focus of the public process back in 2012 was focused on the resource damage, dumping and vehicles getting stuck in the unmaintained snow. Those were the topic of discussion when we were going through the public process about installing the gate. The public process was not about the use of the area for Nordic skiing and ORVs. We put the gate in as a physical barrier but did not take legal action to close the road to motorized vehicles. Currently, it is not illegal for people to ride motorized vehicles on the road. We want to go through a public process because we know there is other user groups; we want to give them an opportunity to be heard as well.

C. Mertl: Have you gotten any complaints from motorized users since the gate went up?

G. Schaaf: No, we have not.

C. Mertl: Can we do a seasonal closure for a year to see if we get any input from the ORV users?

G. Schaaf: The PRAC can make that recommendation.

K. Duncan: I think we need to hold off on making any decision and wait until staff makes a recommendation at the next meeting.

C. Mertl: The Department will do some additional research, get public comment, and bring it back to the PRAC with a recommendation.

VI. Unfinished Business – None

VII. Information Items –

A. Infrastructure Bond

G. Schaaf: The full Assembly approved to place the \$15 million general obligation bond package on the October municipal election ballot. The intent is to break it up into three buckets -- \$5 million for school facilities, \$5 million for Parks & Rec facilities and \$5 million for street repairs and deferred building maintenance. It is possible that the school roofs will cost more than \$5 million so they could pull from the other buckets.

B. Biathlon Course

M. Elfers: There is a small group of JNSC members that approached Parks & Rec with a proposal to construct a biathlon course in the Montana Creek Natural Area. They have showed us a conceptual design, their goal is to apply for grant funding this fall & winter. We will have more information later this fall for the PRAC.

C. Mertl: Does Parks & Rec allow recreational shooting on parkland?

M. Elfers: There would need to be special use allowance in the area.

VIII. Committee, Liaison, and Board Member Reports

A. Chair Report— None.

B. Liaison to the Assembly Report— Next year's construction environment will look different.

C. Liaison Reports—

Aquatics – W. Muldoon: AGB reopening talks; talking about management side of things.

YAB – T. Rutecki: None.

Eaglecrest – E. Palmer: Received CCC funding, busy with trail development & maintenance.

Jensen-Olson Arboretum— E. Carrillo: None.

Lands – C. Mertl: None.

Park Foundation— C. Mertl: Cabin is moving along; discussing bond.

Treadwell Arena Board – K. Duncan: Open on a limited basis for user groups + private rentals.

TrailMix— R. Crenshaw: None.

1% for Art— J. Anderson: None.

Other Member Business – None.

Adjournment – 7:41 p.m. *Having no other business before the board.*

Respectfully submitted by Lauren Verrelli, Recreation & Public Services Manager, 9/20/2020