



MEETING MINUTES
PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2021 – 5:30 PM
Zoom Webinar

I. Call to Order at 5:31 p.m. – C. Mertl, Chair

Present: Josh Anderson, Alex Beebe-Giudice, Makayla Chappell, Ron Crenshaw, Kirk Duncan, Emily Haynes, Chris Mertl, Will Muldoon

Absent: Edric Carrillo

Staff Present: Michele Elfers, Deputy Director; Lauren Verrelli, Recreation & Public Services Manager

II. Agenda Changes – None

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes – None

IV. Public Participation on Non-Agenda Items – None

V. New Business –

A. Gunakadeit Park Disposal

M. Elfers: Tonight we have before us the consideration of whether or not to remove Gunakadeit Park from the Juneau Parks & Open Space System. It would be a recommendation that the committee would make to the Assembly on this topic. Franklin Foods has applied to purchase this park. A similar request came a few years back in 2018 from Franklin Foods. They applied, it came to the PRAC and the recommendation from the PRAC was to offer a temporary lease. They have been operating a food court at that space for a few years. Looking back, the property was developed as a park and in 2015; it was demolished when the fire took the Gastineau apartments next door. Before it was a park, it was a parking lot, and before that a building. Staff is recommending the removal from the Juneau Parks & Open Space System and the reason is a threefold analysis as to why. First, we do not make this recommendation lightly; we value parks and the benefit to our community. In our Parks & Rec Master Plan, it is called a Special Use area, does not include retain or disposal recommendation in the plan. In the CBJ Land Management Plan though, it lists this property as “Retain/Dispose” which means the property is appropriate for disposal. Second, when looking at the downtown area and the parks in the area, we have quite a few parks. We have 5-6 parks under CBJ management. They are all within walking distance; the area is well-served area for parks. When looking at the history of the park, the last 6 years it has not been operating as a park. Before the food court, it was fenced off land. We have not had many complaints about this and we have not noticed a big public impact from the space not operating as a park. We think that is because we have other open space in the area that functions as a park. Lastly, the other consideration when this was managed as a park/functioning as a park, it was very difficult to maintain the park as a safe space. We struggled with preventing criminal activity in the area; JPD was in the park more than our own staff due to managing the issues. There was a lot of litter, unsafe behavior and we heard from the public that folks did not feel safe in that park. We do not

take this lightly but we support removing this from the Juneau Parks & Open Space System.

E. Haynes: In 2018, the direction was to look at future development opportunities or disposal. Did the Department look at potential future development or was that up to Blueprint Downtown?

M. Elfers: No, we did not. Blueprint Downtown discussed it and they did not give a clear recommendation of what it should be. Its current use as a food court has brought vitality in the area and it meets the goals of what they are trying to accomplish downtown. There could be other options but the food court is meeting the needs currently.

J. Anderson: How can Parks & Rec benefit from the disposal of this property? In either other lands or monetarily?

W. Muldoon: We add to the proposed motion that if disposed, we recommend that the Department get some kind of recompense for the sale.

E. Haynes: Has Parks & Rec worked with Lands to see if there are any land swap options?

C. Mertl: We could take the financial proceeds from the sale to purchase land. We all know that Lemon Creek has a shortage in parks.

K. Duncan: This is a postage stamp park and has been a problematic park for a long time. I agree, we do not want to give up parkland and we need to be compensated if we do. On the other hand, we are going to spend more resources if we got the park back trying to deal with all the issues. I think the disposal would be in everybody's best interest.

David McCasland (Franklin Food Court): Thanks for taking the time to discuss this. I have financing lined up and a purchase agreement with the owners of Gastineau Apartments. Originally, the park was part of the Gastineau Apartments property and then back in the 50's was disposed of and given to the city. The entrance to the park is important for the plan that I have. It will be a tiered food truck park with multiple levels for seating and more room for food trucks.

C. Mertl: Would you be open for another one-year lease to allow some of these other documents such as Blueprint Downtown and a disposal process to be completed?

David McCasland: This is somewhat time sensitive. The Barrett Family wants to dispose of their land and have offered me a good deal that I would lose if I do not purchase by the New Year. The bank is also waiting on this piece since it is the entrance to the property.

W. Muldoon: We should table this for 30-60 days so we can take a deeper look.

C. Mertl: I think the department has put a lot of thought into the recommendation. 30-60 days for McCasland will not work. We would need to hold a special meeting or make a decision in October since this still needs to go to Lands and then the Assembly.

K. Duncan: The PRAC recognizes the importance of parkland and does not wish to see indiscriminate disposal of parkland but in this particular case, this is a special piece of property that does not fall within the larger scope of parkland and the PRAC recommends disposal.

W. Muldoon: I personally do not support this in its current iteration and I do not know that the public's best interest is best served by it going through this process at this time.

C. Mertl: We can set a special meeting in 14 days and we can get more information. I was going to vote against this motion because I am afraid of the precedents it sets.

M. Elfers: If the committee wanted to add language to the motion, they could say the committee recommends that revenue from the sale of the property is returned or goes to benefit the parks and open space system. It is not clear if there is further information to

gather at this point. You are discussing changing a city process and that will take longer than 14 or 60 days. If we do choose to table it, it would be helpful to have a timeline in place on how we are going to get to where we can make a decision.

K. Duncan: There are several points. First, the PRAC never, ever wants to dispose of parkland unless it is a special situation. This is a commercially viable opportunity and if we do not dispose of the parkland, it is going to make it economically unfeasible for the applicant to move forward. The park has been nothing but a problem for the Department so this is totally outside of a normal situation. I respect your concern about setting a precedent but I think if we word it such as this is as special piece of property, that it is not a traditional park, then we can take care of the precedent issues. Tabling this would not be in the best economic and social issue for downtown.

C. Mertl: We will take a five-minute ease to write up a motion.

K. Duncan: The PRAC's mission is to recommend and assist in developing a well-managed park system, which improves the quality of life for the citizens of Juneau. To that end, it is not in the best interest of the citizens of Juneau to recommend the disposal of any parkland. That notwithstanding, Gunakadeit Park, due to its historic management challenges does not meet the definition of parkland as it is a 'Special Use Area' and the PRAC recommends the disposal of this small, non-conforming parkland with a recommendation that the proceeds of the sale be used to provide improvements to the park system.

*Ayes: E. Haynes, R. Crenshaw, K. Duncan, A. Beebe-Giudice, J. Anderson, M. Chappell
Nays: W. Muldoon, C. Mertl*

Motion passes.

B. Capital School Park Renaming

M. Elfers: Capital School Park reconstruction is now in motion. During the design process, we spoke to the Juneau Community Foundation's Capitol Fund Committee and they recognize this park is very important to the Capitol complex. They have donated \$550,000 for improvements to the park and are asking to change the name from Capital School Park to Capitol Park. "Capital" is a city or town that is a seat of government and "capitol" is the building that houses the legislative branch of government. We don't want to forget the history of Capital School Park so the committee offered to provide content for an interpretive signage for the park about the Capital School.

Wayne Jensen: All capitols have open space associated with the Capitol building and Alaska is one that does not have that.

W. Muldoon: I move the PRAC recommend that the Assembly rename the park located at 521 Seward Street "Capitol Park."

Motion passes unanimously.

VI. Unfinished Business –

A. Auke Bay Easement Update

M. Elfers: This issue previously came before the PRAC and we did go out for public comment. During this time, CDD and Law has been discussing the request and there is some issue with the land use code related to the request. They have advised us to not make a recommendation or move forward at this time.

B. Montana Creek Master Plan

M. Elfers: We put out a survey that closed a couple weeks ago and received over 1,000 responses. We are currently going through the data to present it in a logical, digestible way. We hope to have this out to the public next week. The next steps in the process is meetings with stakeholder groups and user groups and then at some point later this fall we will have a public meeting. As for winter management, I have been talking with staff and DNR. One thing that is new this year is that our Lead Ranger position is now year round which will help us manage this area. We are gearing up for more of a presence out there, more education, signage and coordination with the other land managers.

C. ORV Planning Update

M. Elfers: We have mostly been focusing on the 35-mile site. We have been pulling together mapping resources that will assist with initial concept planning. I hope that we can submit permit applications this fall.

VII. Information Items – None

VIII. Committee, Liaison, and Board Member Reports

A. Chair Report— Many trail projects happening.

B. Liaison to the Assembly Report— None

C. Liaison Reports—

Aquatics – W. Muldoon: Moving forward with commercial use policies. Will come here in the future.

YAB – J. Anderson: None

Eaglecrest – A. Beebe-Giudice: None

Jensen-Olson Arboretum— E. Carrillo: None

Lands, Economic Developing, Housing – C. Mertl: Gunakadeit Park request came through in July; coordinating Title 49 with planning and zoning maps.

Park Foundation— C. Mertl: None

Treadwell Arena Board – K. Duncan: Discussed operational issues.

Trail Mix— R. Crenshaw: None

1% for Art— J. Anderson: None

Other Member Business –

W. Muldoon: The Departments Land Disposal process needs to be looked at.

Adjournment – 7:16 p.m. *Having no other business before the board.*

Respectfully submitted by Lauren Verrelli, Recreation & Public Services Manager 11/25/21