



Meals Hill Master Plan – Public Meeting #2

MEETING QUESTION AND ANSWER

Monday, February 8, 2021

6:30 – 8:00 PM

Virtual via Zoom Webinar Platform (a video of the presentation is provided on the project website <https://mealshillmasterplan.com/>)

Project Team Attendees & Webinar Panelists

City of Valdez

- Nicholas Farline, Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services Department Director

Consultant Team

- Huddle AK - Holly Spoth-Torres and Bri Keifer
- Parks & People – Dr. Hunter Holland
- Interior Trails – Christine Byl and Gabe Travis
- ECI – Brian Meissner

Additional Panelists

- Great Land Trust - Amanda Hults

Questions and Answers

The questions (Q), answers (A), and comments (C) below are grouped by topic.

TRAILS

Q: How does this plan enhance mountain/fat biking opportunities?

A: Trail Concept 1 allows for winter biking on most trails and summer biking on the main multi-use trail. Trail Concept 2 will have two purpose-built mountain bike trails.

Q: When you say biking trails: is that single track style or a wide ‘walking’ trail?

A: There are two types of trails proposed that bikes could use: the multi-use trails would be wider, and the purpose-built mountain bike trails will be a narrower single-track design. The dotted orange purpose-built trails will be - 2' wide. The multi-use trails are wider, the main multi-use path is 16 feet, and the secondary multi-use path is 6 feet wide, biking will be allowed on multi-use trails.

Q: Is there any way to get a groomed skiable trail in from the Egan Drive side?

A: Yes, but not with a piston bully because the slopes required to accommodate the piston bully would require too much grading and tree removal. These trails will need to be groomed with a snow machine.

Q: Are any of these trails being created with wheelchair accessibility in mind?

A: Yes, all the trails labeled universal access will be designed as flat trails (<5% slope) with compact gravel surfaces.

Q: Would you be utilizing volunteers for Trail Concept 2 single track development?

A: The City will consider using volunteers! It is encouraged.

Q: Is the main multi-use trail meant to be a paved path or a grated gravel/dirt road?

A: It would be a highly compacted gravel trail. The team is not looking at asphalt but want to provide a surface as compact and smooth as possible for accessibility.

Q: What are the trail distances?

A: The concepts have a scale in the bottom right corner that can be used to measure trail distances. Generally, the main multi-use trail is about 2 miles and the loops off the main path range from ¼ of a mile to 1-1/2 miles depending on the sections.

Q: What are the thoughts behind the wet environment and slick conditions for the bike skills course?

There is a wet area near the proposed skill course that is very slippery, and studs are needed.

A: Any designed course would account for the environment. Generally, dirt courses are high maintenance and are more likely to be muddy. This course would utilize wood and rocks to be lower maintenance and account for the wet environment.

Q: What impact to the habitat area and wildlife does the increase in bike trails have?

A: The team met with the Bear Working Group to talk about the natural areas and where it would be best to build trails. The trails are concentrated in areas where less wildlife is anticipated. A period of attenuation with new trails is also anticipated where humans and animals will learn the patterns and habits of one another to avoid each other.

ACCESS & PARKING

Q: Could there be parking developed for the west-side entrance where there is a proposed trail?

A: This connection is intended to be for non-motorized access, particularly for people who live in the adjacent neighborhood. The terrain limits the ability to add parking at that location.

Q: Would the parking be located at the 'lot' across from the Old Town Museum?

A: The team has a few different options proposed. All options do include some form of parking in the existing public parking lot near Ruth Pond. The public comments during this state of the project will inform the next steps.

C: Before the pandemic the parking lot has been used for events and now the lot is also used for the museum and tour busses.

Q: The conservation easement dictates a parking lot is permitted at the property entrance, not near the entrance. How is concept B acceptable within the limits of the conservation easement?

A: The team will be working with the other partners on the conservation easement, so any issues will be addressed. The reason for the upper parking is to use existing areas of impact; while it is farther into the site, the development impact is less than locating the parking near the entrance because there is existing disturbance at the upper location.

Q: The section of the Conservation Easement that prohibits vehicles allows city maintenance vehicles or protection of public safety but says nothing about parking. What section is parking allowed in?

A: III a. vii.

Q: Is that access road to the parking in Access B a one lane road?

A: It will be a two-lane road.

Q: Would it be possible to provide bike racks?

A: Yes, this is something the team can consider.

Q: The Conservation Easement section III(a)[vi] says no vehicles.

A: The Conservation Easement has language that allows for parking to facilitate public recreational use.

Q: Access concepts A and C are very similar. If concept B gathers the most votes, can we have a runoff between the two biggest vote getters?

A: We're gathering input to determine the level of development the public desires; the feedback allows for more in-depth comments and feedback about what aspects of a concept you would like to see or not see. Feedback at this point of the project is not a "vote"; substantive feedback at this phase allows the project team to understand the preferences and priorities of the community.

Q: What did you have in mind for parking areas on the north side access by the water tower road?

A: The intent with the north access is for it to be non-motorized and utilized by the neighborhood. Other visitors will be encouraged to use the Hazelet Avenue access.

Q: Why is another parking lot and covered area needed at all?

A: From the survey, people expressed a desire for the park to be accessed by users of all abilities. The existing grades of the road present a challenge. The best way to achieve an accessible trail is to bypass that steep grade at the entrance of the site by providing 3-4 accessible parking spaces above the steep grades. The covered shelter is presented as an option for which we want input.

Q: People are going to use the water tower access if you do not provide parking there. They will make their own.

A: Thank you. The team will take that into consideration.

Q: Why do we need parking, restrooms, and all other unnatural placements? I can see trails, but shouldn't we keep it as natural as possible. There is a large parking lot across from the entry and bathrooms.

A: The concepts presented are based on the results of the public survey. The public comments that the design team receives on these concepts will help inform what improvements are included in the final master plan.

Q: All three of the access options include motorized vehicle travel within the property. Why is there no option without a parking lot that uses the existing gate with key access for ADA compliance?

A: The survey results indicated that inclusive access was important. The parking lot allows access for someone who wants to use the accessible trail. The parking area is very small – three to four spaces. The grading needed to create universal access at that spot is substantial (the grade is currently ranging from 9% to 18%).

C: III a vii technically says you can use a vehicle to build a road or parking lot but not that you can drive or park.

Q: The parking lot access roads displace pedestrians, and non-motorized traffic. Will the access road to the parking lot accommodate the conflict between these groups? Could we consider a separate non-motorized access from Hazelet Street?

A: A separate access was considered and due to property boundaries, steep terrain, and existing utilities conflicts it was not easily achievable. The design will accommodate those separate uses safely.

C: Users coming from the neighborhoods will access the water tour access. If we do not provide parking users will find their own.

INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE/PLACE MAKING

Q: How does the Port Valdez Company proposal for a historical display fit in?

A: With any of the concepts, there are opportunities to incorporate interpretive signage or other types of displays about the history of the land.

Q: Will the Port Valdez proposal be addressed?

A: Yes, the city will work with the Port Valdez Company to see if the proposal is viable with this project.

Q: Are you working with John Clark of Port Valdez to realize their potential funding contribution?

A: Yes, the project team continues to be in touch with John Clark and the Port Valdez Company.

Q: Are there any plans in place to honor the Indigenous history of the area?

A: Yes, the foraging and natural areas could be a great place to incorporate the Indigenous history or medicinal uses of the plants on site.

Q: Are you considering the Port Valdez Company proposal?

A: Right now, the plans state that there are opportunities to incorporate historic or interpretive information along the initial boardwalk and overlook area. In Concept B, that type of information could be part of the covered shelter area. Specific sign content will be developed later.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Q: What is the plan for the foliage and wet areas in between these spots?

A: Structures would be used to get across any wet areas and keeping in mind the climate to prevent slips. Wetlands and wetland plants will be protected to the greatest extent feasible. Boardwalk and plank structures will be used to cross wetlands. Sustainability is key.

Q: Will any of the old growth spruce be cut down for the trail building effort?

A: Preserving the old growth is a priority! Trail design will reflect that priority.

OTHER COMMENTS

Q: Is W. Pioneer Street mislabeled? Shouldn't it be labeled "Whalen Avenue?"

A: The correct label will be confirmed.

Q: Is there a time limit for each person?

A: If you have a question, please type away. There will not be a time limit for public testimony.

Q: Is the project going to be rolled out in phases?

A: Yes, there will be phases.

Q: Raising funds was mentioned, is this being funded by the city? Will taxes be going up?

A: This project will go in front of the City Council, like any other city project. The City Council will make the decision on how to allocate funds, based on community priorities.

C: If you do not provide controlled sanitation you will have each user doing their own thing.

C: The more the panelists cover different areas, the more excited I get. The concept for the parcel looks amazing and am grateful for this upcoming benefit for Valdez residents. Your team did a wonderful job.

C: Concept 2 is AMAZING!

C: This conceptual report is awesome as looks great. Thank you for your hard work. I look forward to this park.

C: You got one volunteer right here [for mountain bike trail building].

C: Thank you! It looks great so far-- many options, I am sure we can make it work.

C: Thanks! Great job!

C: Thank you all for your hard work and patience in these meetings.

C: Very constructive feedback from everyone tonight. My family and I look forward to the development of Meals Hill for multi-use recreation activities. Especially single track for enduro/downhill/mountain biking.

C: Great job all! These proposals look amazing! Super excited about the future of this hill! Thank you!

C: Thank you. Very Exciting.

C: You all have done a beautiful job so far! Very exciting! Nice work! Look forward to spending lots of time there.