

Seeking Our Legislators' Support: Rabbit Creek Community Council Projects

The 2010 [Hillside District Plan](#) (HDP) is the framework for development within the Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) area. RCCC comments to the Planning and Zoning Commission and Assembly typically reference tenets established in the HDP such as neighborhood connectivity, providing trails as neighborhoods are developed, ensuring RCCC drainages are protected, and addressing secondary access as housing and transportation are developed and improved in our area – particularly with regards to concerns about wildfire and other disaster preparedness.

The Rabbit Creek Community Council's (RCCC) two major committees develop proactive projects and respond to development proposals and other activities in our area, bringing recommendations to the full RCCC for approval and action: **Resilience and Firewise** (Resilience); and **Land Use and Transportation** (LUT). The work you do and your responsibilities as our State Legislators are complimented by the work of these committees to improve community safety, maintain and enhance the wonderful quality of life we enjoy in our area, and enhance economic diversity and thus economic development.

Of particular note are the annual recommendations and priorities the RCCC provides to the Municipality (Muni)N regarding the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for Muni Parks and Recreation, State, and Muni projects (RCCC 2022 CIP Survey Response attached). Our top three priorities in each of these categories are listed below, followed by other major activities and issues of our Resilience and LUT committees, several of which emphasize those priorities. We are herein seeking your support in pursuing needed funding and policy implementation for our work.

RCCC 2022 Capital Improvement Program – top three Priorities by category (see attached (1) list for all project priorities, and (2) full project descriptions). These funding priorities are results of a May survey of RCCC members and were provided to the Municipality for their use and posting (<https://www.muni.org/communitycouncilsurveys/homepage/>).

Parks and Recreation Projects:

- 1) Chugach State Park Access
- 2) Identify, Survey, Plat, Signage for Existing but Undeveloped Pedestrian Easements
- 3) Coastal Trail Erosion

State Projects:

- 1) Old Seward Highway Upgrade – Rabbit Ck to Potter Valley Dr
- 2) Left Turn Pocket Rabbit Creek Rd to Old Seward Hwy
- 3) Trails – Abbott Rd/Hillside, Rabbit Creek Rd to Old Seward Highway

Municipal Projects:

- 1) Hillside Fire Prevention and Mitigation, Disaster Evacuation Routes – Cow Cost Connections

- 2) (tie) Chugach State Park Access Improvements (categorized as P&R by RCCC)
(tie) Golden View Pedestrian/bike Path – Rabbit Ck Road to Romania Dr.
- 3) (tie) Mountain Air Drive Extension/Connection
(tie) Golden View Dr Connection (west) – Romania Dr to Potter Valley Rd

Resilience and Firewise - the RCCC works to share information and provide resources to ensure neighbors know each other, look out for each other, maintain our homes so as to protect them and our neighborhoods from wildfires, and so we can all be safe, healthy, and resilient in the face of disasters such as fires, earthquakes, and even pandemics. This committee now includes people from other Hillside Community Councils and has organized several training events and Firewise Assessments over the last 3 years.

Firewise events are scheduled for July 30-31. The Saturday, July 31st public event at Trinity Church (corner of Huffman and Lorraine) will include Firewise work by Team Rubicon and mini-seminars for Hillside residents on a do-it-yourself Firewise Prescription for your own home, spruce bark beetles, tree care, and more. Team Rubicon will work July 30th at a private home on Elmore identified as a critical hot spot. See the attached list of current Resilience Committee goals and critical projects for immediate funding to prevent or reduce the cost of future fires, or clean up after any that do occur.

Land Use and Transportation – works to promote several proactive projects, as well as review and comment on proposed subdivision plats and rezones, other zoning issues, and road and trail developments and improvements. Imminent and future developments anticipated by the HDP and Anchorage 2040 are constrained by existing major intersections, transportation options (including lack of public transportation and pedestrian/bike paths), and legacy roads. Limited and Rural Road Service Areas do not have the capacity to deal with substandard roads; incremental development does not keep up with increased road demands, nor provide the broader and coordinated connectivity needed by our community. We continue to be frustrated when the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) ignores current neighborhood interests and refuses to look for flexible solutions (see below).

Many projects we support are not only assets to our RCCC neighborhoods but should be seen and promoted as an investment and asset to our Muni and even State economic and civic future. Diversifying and building our economy means ensuring a healthy, vibrant community to attract and retain employees and their families. Such projects include Chugach State Park Access; Potter Marsh boardwalk, parking, and bathroom enhancements; and trails – those that connect our schools with new and existing subdivisions, connect our neighbors, and provide access to a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities for RCCC neighbors, other Muni residents, and visitors.

Four specific **proactive projects** prioritized by RCCC are:

Schools on Trails - Bear Valley Elementary School is one of only two schools in the Municipality with zero walkable access to it. RCCC is exploring options to connect Bear

Valley Elementary and Golden View Middle Schools with pedestrian/bike paths along existing easements and 156th Avenue.

Old Seward Highway between Rabbit Creek and Potter Valley Roads - RCCC has asked ADOT&PF to lower the speed limit and add signage alerting motorists to wildlife and wildlife watchers here, adjacent to the popular Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge and State Critical Habitat area.

Bike/pedestrian path along Golden View – Golden View Drive from Rabbit Creek Road south to Romania Drive was recently repaved. RCCC and neighbors had repeatedly requested that this project include a pedestrian/bike path along this road which passes by Golden View Middle School and is relatively flat compared to most roads in our hillside area. Unfortunately, this was not possible with the available funds and federal requirements that such a path be built to the highest standards, including accessibility. There is a tremendous safety issue here with hundreds of school kids unable to easily or safely walk or bike to their school, not to mention that keeping all those cars on the road works against the 2019 Anchorage Climate Action Plan (https://www.muni.org/departments/mayor/aware/resilientanchorage/documents/2019%20anchorage%20climate%20action%20plan_adopted.pdf).

Neighborhood Gateway! In response to RCCC's request, the Municipality has asked the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to provide a long-term, no-cost lease for the BLM 1-acre lot at the SE corner of Rabbit Creek Road and Old Seward Highway. Our vision is that this lot would serve as our neighborhood gateway, with a welcoming sign. It could be a potential community gathering spot for a number of neighborhood uses. We are looking for neighbors who could donate their time to engineer, design, and construct the sign.

Other RCCC activities where Legislative knowledge and support are useful include:

Repeated frustration with ADOT&PF as mentioned above, this includes intransigence regarding:

- (1) Highway plans developed years ago when current conditions no longer support them, e.g., planned Scooter Ave underpass of the Seward Highway, neighborhood concerns around DeArmoun Phase II.
- (2) Road and trails standards that are expensive or unnecessary. For example, ADOT&PF standards include pursuit of a road 'design speed' around the speed that 85% of people drive when lower speeds are safer and more realistic, e.g., Old Seward Highway between Rabbit Creek and Potter Valley Roads (see our proactive project there, above). Other standards that work against neighborhood safety and connections are limiting trails development to a 'gold' standard with curbs and cutouts when a simple soft path may be fine, e.g., providing a pedestrian/bike path along Golden View to access Golden View Middle School.
- (3) Voter approved bonds for road connectivity (e.g., Mountain Air Drive).

How can you help us push ADOT&PF to be more efficient and responsive to current neighborhood needs?

Major land use and transportation planning and requested changes – These include Title 21, Municipality's Long-range Transportation Plan, Metropolitan Transportation Plan 2040, Non-motorized plan, Hillside District Plan, and others.

Capital Improvement Program – As noted above, RCCC provides comments on State of Alaska projects (where most of the funding will be federal); Municipality projects; and Parks and Recreation (and Trails) projects included in the Municipality's annual CIP, focusing on projects in our area and commonly used major transportation corridors. We also recommend important projects not included in the CIP.

Management of Heritage Land Bank lands - In our area these include Section 36 development; RCCC provides comments on the HLB annual program and 5-year Management Plan.

Golden View and Rabbit Creek intersection redesign - This intersection has safety and traffic issues, particularly during the morning rush hour and when parents are dropping off and picking up their kids from Golden View Middle School.