

Correspondence



RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCCC) A Forum for Respectful Communication & Community Relations



1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100 / Anchorage, AK 99503

Anchorage Planning and Zoning Commission
Urban Design Commission
MOA Planning Staff
Anchorage School District Transportation Department

July 3, 2023

Re: Mountain Air Drive Extension from Rabbit Creek Road to Sandpiper

MOA project 2023-0059 Transportation Project
Site Plan Review Design Study Report for
DOTPF State/Federal Project No. CFHWY OO&10/0001690

The Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) has been advocating for and following the Mountain Air Drive Extension project for many years. It is a critical link in connecting our neighborhoods, our local school, and in providing essential secondary egress (particularly for emergencies such as wildfires) as new subdivisions have been accelerating a population increase in this area. At our June 8, 2023, meeting, RCCC voted to request several modifications to the preferred alternative design of the Mountain Air Drive Extension to ensure safety and equity for all users and all travel modes, and to provide for future circulation. **RCCC also voted to endorse the Design Study report's recommendation to request a waiver allowing a design speed and posted speed of 25 mph, rather than a faster speed.** The vote was 11 ayes, 2 nays, and 1 abstained.

This vote was informed by the presentation to RCCC by Alex Read, Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities Project Manager, as well as the analysis of the Design Study Report (DSR) by the RCCC Land Use and Transportation Committee. This 35% design phase is an effective time for the Municipal reviewers to request modifications. The Preliminary Design Report (page 2) notes that this review precedes the NEPA environmental review process and allows design flexibility, which is considerably constrained after environmental review.

Our recommendations for specific design modifications are summarized below. These are followed by recommendations and comments for identified sections of the Design Study Report.

SUMMARY

RCCC requests the following specific design modifications, which are supported by adopted local plans and municipal standards (citations follow, correlating to specific enumerated Sections of the DSR).

- 1) Include a posted 20-mph school zone with flashing lights.

- 2) Include separated paths on BOTH sides, one paved path, and one unpaved and narrower path.
- 3) Use Green Infrastructure for drainage rather than curbs and gutters.
- 4) Design safe crossings for non-motorized users at Rabbit Creek Road: high speeds and short sightlines are a safety problem at the intersection with Mountain Air Drive.
- 5) Ensure the location of a new entrance to Bear Valley Elementary School does not impact drainage easements/septic system there.
- 6) Correctly cite the guiding plans and documents for the Mountain Air Drive extension, namely the Hillside District Plan (HDP, 2010), the Non-Motorized Plan (2021), and the Hillside Subarea Transportation Study (2006), as noted below.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Section 3.0 GUIDING DOCUMENTS

3.2, pg. 6

Correct an omission: this section needs to cite the Trails Map of the Hillside District Plan and not just the Road Map from the HDP. Include a reference to HDP Map 4.6, which shows a Primary and Secondary Trail along the proposed Mountain Air Drive Extension, as well as several connecting Secondary Trails to adjoining neighborhoods.

3.4

RCCC requests further elaboration to the statement on page 6 that “No bicycle or pedestrian facilities were identified as priorities in the Mountain Air Drive project area” in the Non-Motorized Plan (November 2021). RCCC requests an additional sentence to the effect: “The Plan was citywide in scope and did not identify priorities for pedestrians outside of the Downtown and Mid-town areas. The Hillside District Plan provides greater detail on pedestrian priorities.” At the time of the draft review of the Non-Motorized Plan, AMATS planners told RCCC that additional pedestrian needs beyond Downtown and Midtown would be incorporated into the next plan, which has not yet been produced.

Under Section 3.11 Reference the Hillside Subarea Transportation Study

This is the most detailed study of connectivity for the area, and this study recommended trail connectivity. Page 39 noted the tradition of unofficial trails to access Bear Valley School and Chugach State Park, and recommends,

“. . . attempting to promote trail connectivity between properties and working to provide recognized connections to area schools and to Chugach State Park (proposed system would be short of CSP but would eventually be continued . . . [to reach the Park].)”

“In locations where those trails parallel a road, they should be separated from the road by a vegetated buffer or drainage swale, where they are installed. This separation provides more safety for the trail users and enhances the recreational values of the trail.”

Include a reference to Figure 13 of this plan on page 40, showing proposed multi-use unpaved trails converging from the east along Jamie Drive and from the west along 155th Avenue. This supports the need for: (1) a pathway on the west side as well as the east side, and (2) crossing

locations, which RCCC proposes near Bear Valley School as well as near the future 155th Avenue alignment.

Section 5.0 DESIGN STANDARDS

5.1.3 Lack of transparency for design standards

RCCC finds it difficult to understand and analyze the design standards because they are provided only by referencing several design manuals that are not part of this DSR.

5.1.4 Support for a design speed of 25 mph

RCCC endorses the recommendation of this report to request a waiver allowing a design speed and posted speed of 25 mph, rather than a faster speed. Vehicle speed is the main factor determining the severity of injuries in case of a crash, with mortality for pedestrians and bicyclists increasing exponentially. This is a relatively short collector, leading into narrow strip-paved neighborhood streets.

5.1.4. Add a 20-mph School Zone

RCCC requests inclusion of a **20-mph School Zone with flashing lights**, consistent with schools across Anchorage. Anchorage should not repeat the tragic lesson of Lake Otis Parkway where a 20-mph zone was belatedly installed adjoining Hanshew Middle School only after a schoolgirl was struck and killed.

Section 6.0 DESIGN ALTERNATIVES

6.1 Do not use curb and gutter: use green infrastructure for drainage

Ditches and natural infiltration are the standard drainage in our council area. Curbs and gutters accelerate run-off to creeks, which is deleterious to the State Critical Habitat wetlands at Potter Marsh. HDP Policy 5-A requires maintaining environmental quality at three scales, including the watershed scale; Policy 5-B calls for integrating built and green infrastructure. A new collector road is a major built infrastructure that should incorporate natural drainage swales and ditches. In addition,

- Curbs are subject to destruction by snowplows.
- Curbs are not necessary for pathway protection if there is a drainage swale and a vegetated separation between road and path.
- Curb and gutter construction is anomalous on Hillside Roads.

6.6.1 Improvements at Rabbit Creek Road Intersection

RCCC requests a **safe crossing of Rabbit Creek Road** be added to this project. A student was previously struck at this intersection some years ago while getting off a school bus. Another person was killed in a vehicle accident while trying to negotiate the curve some decades ago. In addition to school children, neighborhoods west of Rabbit Creek Road need a safe crossing to reach Section 36 Park and Storck Park.

Speed mitigation measures at the intersection are important. RCCC wants to emphasize the current speeds create hazards at the intersection at all times, not just school drop-off and pick-up times. Sightlines and speeds create little time for inattentive through-traffic to stop for turning vehicles or crossing pedestrians.

Location of new entrance drive to Bear Valley Elementary School

Ensure that the proposed relocation of the Bear Valley School driveway onto Mountain Air Drive will avoid impacts to existing drainage easements. Bear Valley School uses a septic system.

6.6.2 Additional Non-motorized Facilities: Pathways are needed on both sides of this municipal collector

Numerous adopted Municipal plans and Title 21 ordinances require pedestrian connectivity, with a special emphasis on safety near schools. The DSR (page 6) notes that walking routes are separately managed by the Municipality and by the Anchorage School District, and were not analyzed. This lack of interagency coordination is not a justification for defaulting to a one-side-only path and no crossings. We are copying our letter to Muni planning agencies and the School District, as well as the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities in an attempt to spur improved coordination on this critical project feature.

Adopted plans show the need for pathways on both sides: both the Hillside District Plan and the Hillside Subarea Transportation Study both show future road and trail connections converging on this collector from both sides of the roadway.

Huffman Road near South High School was constructed with pathways on both sides: one side paved and one unpaved. The path on the west side of the Mountain Air Drive Extension can be an unpaved path, and narrower than the ADA-accessible path on the opposite side.

Bear Valley Elementary is currently one of only two schools in the entire Anchorage School District that has zero safe walking routes. This creates a future hazard (and deterrent) to children and their families; it represents an increased school cost with the need to bus kids less than a quarter mile to school. School traffic adversely affects everyone by contributing to congestion, safety hazards, and greenhouse gases.

Safe Crossing of Mountain Air Drive near Bear Valley School

Children and all residents should be able to walk safely from west-side neighborhoods to the school. There are numerous new and future subdivisions on the west side of Mountain Air Drive. The Hillside District Plan shows several trail connections from the west as well as the east.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. Our community has been awaiting this project for many years and looks forward to continuing to coordinate with all the involved agencies as design and implementation move forward.

Sincerely,



Ann Rappoport, Co-Chair



John Riley, Co-Chair

cc: Elizabeth Appleby, Planning Department, Municipality of Anchorage
Heather Philp, Director, Anchorage School District Transportation Department
Alex Read, Central Region-Highway Design, Alaska Department of Transportation
Stephanie Mormile, HDL