



Rabbit Creek Community Council

1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100, Anchorage AK 99503



May 18, 2017

Anchorage Assembly
wwmas@muni.org
c/o Municipal Clerk's Office
632 W. 6th Ave. Suite 250
Anchorage, AK 99501

Re: Proposed amendments to AR 2017-192, Heritage Land Bank Annual Work Program and Five-Year Management Plan

Dear Assembly Members,

Rabbit Creek Community Council I (RCCC) supports the three amendments to the Heritage Land Bank (HLB) 2017 Annual Work Program and 2018-2022 Five Year Management Plan submitted by Assemblyman Assembly members John Weddleton and Suzanne LaFrance.

For the past five years or longer, RCCC has requested the Heritage Land Bank initiate access agreements and land management transfers to MOA Parks in accordance with the Potter Valley Land Use Analysis (adopted in 1999) and the Hillside District Plan.

Most recently, RCCC voted without objection (23-0) at our March 9 general membership meeting to support the three issues covered by this amendment.

Following are excerpts from our Council's comments to the HLB staff regarding the HLB Five-Year Management Program.

Parcels 2-128 through 2-134 on the bluff east of Potter Marsh merit conservation status

These parcels are comprised of the steep bluffs and drainage ways that recharge Potter Marsh. This is the water source for the south end of Potter Marsh—the primary bird habitat for swans, Arctic terns, and other much-viewed species. In the Potter Valley Land Use Analysis (PVLUA; adopted 1999), Alaska Department of Fish and Game conservation staff stated that the HLB tracts support “a minimum of 4 small drainages, as well as several areas of saturated soils...as contributing surface water flow to Potter Marsh...equal to or seceding exceeding that of Little Survival Creek”. (PVLUA Appendix C). These small streams provide all the water for south end of Potter Marsh. Please note that two large streams feed the north end of the marsh, but much of that water runs straight through deep channels into Cook Inlet (Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge Management Plan, 1991, page A-12).

In addition, ADF&G noted the value of these parcels as high quality habitat and travel corridors for wildlife, both for movement along the inlet, and upslope. The municipal Watershed Management map shows an unnamed stream with numerous tributaries that enters the marsh through the HLB parcels. There are also many unmapped streamlets in the same area.

The Potter Valley Land Use Analysis (adopted 1999) recommends these lands be managed as open space to support Potter Marsh. Furthermore, the Municipal Planning Department has designated the parcels as future parkland, most recently in their Land Use Plan Map (posted September 2016). For many years, HLB staff has cited the lack of surveys as the reason for not dedicating these parcels as open space. Surveys for these tracts are proposed by the Weddleton-LaFrance Amendment.

Conservation status for these parcels is the key to future conservation of numerous tributary streams on a large private tract to the east (formerly called Legacy Pointe and proposed for senior-citizen condos). These HLB parcels, if given conservation status, would provide connectivity between the stream-laced private tract and the Marsh, conserving a valuable watershed unit. Currently, the uncommitted status of HLB parcels 2-128 through 2-134 cuts off and fragments the watershed and prevents acquisition of private lands for conservation.

RCCC would like surveys and transfer of these parcels to be accomplished within the next five years. The implementation of the 1999 PVLUA is long overdue.

Parcels 2-139, 2-140, 2-141, and 2-152

These large parcels all abut Chugach State Park in Bear Valley. They offer potential public access to alpine and subalpine areas of Chugach State Park. Properly-designed and managed trailheads are needed to meet the burgeoning citywide demand for recreation and to resolve the persistent problems of neighborhood disruption that occurs at undeveloped or informal access points.

These parcels are large enough to incorporate parking areas on public land. These can be gated and buffered from adjacent residences to reduce the current disruption caused by parking on the shoulders of narrow rural roads.

HLB has expressed some willingness to work with Chugach State Park on recreation access, but HLB's current proposal for land exchanges is a costly and restrictive solution that is not likely to occur in the current state funding situation. The amendment language would support this through a menu of intergovernmental agreements, land exchanges, or easements.

Parcel 2-156

RCCC The Rabbit Creek council area of the south Hillside is deficient in public parks and lacks adequate greenbelt corridors along its major streams (Anchorage Bowl Park, Natural Resources and Recreation Facilities Plan, 2006). Near Parcel 2-156, The nearby Potter Creek Greenbelt includes only the inner parts of the steep creek canyon, leaving some canyon slopes subject to development, and allowing no public access. Upper parts of Potter Creek have no greenbelt, although greenbelt acquisition is called for in several adopted plans, including the 2006 Anchorage Bowl Parks Plan.

Parcel 2-156 has public open space value either *in situ* or in exchange for adjoining parcels for protection of Potter Creek and the Potter Marsh watershed. Numerous tributaries of Potter Marsh adjoin this parcel and are unprotected. The stated objectives of HLB include “acquiring land for municipal use” (AMC 25.40.035) and “assisting implementation and supporting municipal plans”: Work Plan page 6, Land Management Objectives). According to AMC 25.0.035, The HLB Fund is intended for three main purposes, one of which is acquiring land for municipal use.

RCCC would like to ensure that parcel 2-156 is retained and used *in situ* or in exchange or cooperative development, in order to conserve additional greenbelt and or Potter Marsh watershed. The proposed amendment would further this goal.

Sincerely,

Adam S. Lees

Adam Lees, Chair

CC: Mayor Ethan Berkowitz