

Correspondence



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



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

Heritage Land Bank Commission
Municipality of Anchorage
PO Box 195560
Anchorage, AK 99519

February 4, 2024

Dear Heritage Land Bank Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Heritage Land Bank 2024 Work Plan and 2025-29 Management Program (Plan/Program). As you know there are many Heritage Land Bank (HLB) parcels within the area covered by the Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) and we have appreciated working with HLB over many years on plans and management for these, and some other parcels as well. The following comments on the Plan/Program were overwhelmingly approved at the RCCC's January 11, 2024, meeting by a vote of 17 ayes, zero nays, and zero abstentions.

Following are specific parcels and HLB plans of concern to RCCC (*italics are quotes from the Plan/Program*):

Update on 2023 Activities:

HLB Parcel 6-011, 6-016, 6-017 – The Assembly postponed the proposed Holtan Hills disposal in Girdwood indefinitely (2/7/23). RCCC had commented (1/26/23) that the proposal did not seem to account for extensive public input nor provide enough affordable resident and worker housing as critically needed and desired by the local community. The Assembly reintroduced the Holtan Hills disposal proposal and approved it with minimal changes at their January 23, 2024, meeting, only a few weeks PRIOR to the expected release of a Girdwood plan that was funded by the Assembly and included extensive public input. To refuse to delay the Holtan Hills disposal until after broader community and Assembly review of the Girdwood plan and consideration of how the two should be coordinated, is irresponsible and could be considered a waste of the taxpayer funds used for the long-needed Girdwood plan. We remain concerned about the lack of public process and input. The Assembly and HLB should have been able to sit down with the community and the developer to openly consider improvements that could best meet community needs on this large tract of municipally owned land, in conjunction with land use planning over the broader Girdwood area.

Mountain Air Estates #2 Subdivision Tract B-1B - *This approximately 8.5-acre parcel was donated to HLB, with a deed restriction stating “that the property be used as a green space for conservation or recreational use” at the end of August and the tract became HLB Parcel 2-159.*

The tract owners had notified RCCC of their plans; we appreciate their generosity and HLB's acceptance of the parcel! We recommend consideration be given to developing a trail to

connect Bear Valley Elementary School with Storck Park on the other side of the parcel. This would allow students and classes safe access to Storck Park for activities (avoiding the need to walk on busy Rabbit Creek Road), and overflow parking when there are large events at Storck Park. Additionally, RCCC recommends that the parcel be added to the Section 36 park and dedicated as park land.

Projects in the 2024 Work Program (page 14):

HLB Parcel 2-125 – Rabbit Creek Community Council is evaluating a connector trail from the elementary school to Bear Valley through HLB Parcel 2-125.

RCCC appreciates inclusion of this potential project in the HLB 2024 Work Program but notes that it should refer to parcels 2-125 and 2-126 as both could be involved in the connector “Schools on Trails” project.

HLB Parcel 2-127 - 2-136 – Potential transfer of management authority to Parks and Recreation Department (P&R) as part of the Potter Valley Watershed Park Project.

RCCC voted to endorse the proposed Potter Marsh Watershed Park at our November 9, 2023, meeting. The proposed Park implements recommendations made by RCCC over many years as we have documented the wetland, wildlife, and watershed values of these lands, and particularly, their importance in protecting Potter Marsh, a State Refuge and Critical Habitat. We have attached our letter of support, resolution, and discussion of neighbor comments and concerns about the proposed Potter Marsh Watershed Park. We look forward to this project coming to fruition.

HLB Parcel 2-156 – Disposal to a non-profit for the purpose of developing a natural burial cemetery.

RCCC voted to endorse development of a natural burial cemetery on HLB Parcel 2-156 at our September 8, 2022, meeting. We are pleased to see that this project will be moving forward in 2024.

Potential Projects (page 16):

Portions of HLB Parcels 6-011, 6-016 and 6-017 – Continue to coordinate with the Anchorage Assembly for the disposal of portions of these parcels, known as Holtan Hills, by public-private partnership development agreement with CY Investments, LLC, including completing the platting action in support of mixed density residential development in Girdwood.

As previously described, RCCC was disappointed that the Assembly approved the disposal of this property prior to release of the Girdwood plan and opportunity for sufficient public input, allowing collaboration and coordination between that plan and the Holtan Hills proposal.

In this section on Potential Projects, there should be a description about how the Municipality and Anchorage Fire Department are beginning work on updating the Community Wildfire Protection Plan in 2024. We encourage HLB to participate in that process and planning for wildfire mitigation projects, including those funded by the federal Wildlife Urban Interface, as further described below.

2024 Land Management (page 17):

Fire Fuels Reduction – HLB will work with the Anchorage Fire Department to address high priority HLB parcels at the wildland-urban interface (page 17).

RCCC supports HLB's involvement in fire fuels reduction and would be happy to coordinate as beneficial in this project. We further recommend that the title and scope of this project include addressing access and egress improvements that HLB land development could address that may be as important to the community as fuel management. Perhaps including a broader "Wildland Urban Interface Hazard Mitigation" title would clarify the broader contribution the HLB could make in reducing the risk of wildfires. Please consider the findings and recommendations of the ISER report on "[Advancing Wildfire Preparedness and Planning in Anchorage](#)" by Dr. Jennifer Schmidt, published in April 2023, and include in the scope HLB participation in updating the Community Wildfire Protection Plan beginning in 2024. RCCC initiated a Resilience Committee several years ago to address the wildfire threat and other emergencies in our area. Committee involvement now includes the larger Hillside and Eagle River areas and has involved the Anchorage Fire Department and Office of Emergency Management as well as other applicable agencies. Projects have included education and outreach, fuels mitigation, and mapping of fire threats, fire spread, and potential egress routes.

Suggested updated project for:

"2024 Land Management

Wildland Urban Interface Hazard Mitigation – HLB will work with the Office of Emergency Management and the Anchorage Fire Department during the update for the Anchorage Community Wildfire Protection Plan. In that planning process, these groups will develop strategies and plans to address high-priority HLB parcels at the wildland-urban interface for fire fuel reduction and opportunities for future parcel development to contribute to improving access and egress to critical and isolated areas that will enhance response and evaluation options."

Potential Disposals, Exchanges & Transfers: 2025 – 2029 (page 20):

HLB Parcel 2-139 – Access needs to be established through a private parcel.

HLB Parcel 2-139 offers a realistic and much-needed opportunity for developing a trailhead to Chugach State Park in Bear Valley. We encourage HLB to resolve the public right-of-way for access to this parcel. The size of Parcel 2-139 could accommodate both parking and an ample buffer from adjoining parcels, as well as a sustainable trail alignment. All of these features are lacking at the current 4-space parking lot for Chugach Park visitors on Honey Bear Lane. Remaining acreage in Parcel 2-139, after trailhead development, would have enhanced residential value from proximity to a well-designed trailhead.

Potential Projects: 2025 – 2029 (page 22):

Chugach State Park Access

RCCC agrees with the HLB's desire to explore the feasibility of exchanging parcels or allowing development of access to Chugach State Park from several HLB parcels.

In closing, we appreciate the opportunity to continue to work with the Heritage Land Bank on planning and management for the many important parcels under their jurisdiction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ann Rappoport". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Ann Rappoport, Co-chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Riley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

John Riley, Co-chair

Attachments

cc: Randy Sulte, Assembly Member
Zac Johnson, Assembly Member