

FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH TRAILS ADVISORY COMMISSION

MINUTES
April 14, 2021

A regular meeting of the Fairbanks North Star Borough Trails Advisory Commission was held via Zoom from the Mona Lisa Drexler Assembly Chambers, Juanita Helms Administration Center, 907 Terminal Street, Fairbanks, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. by Leslie Kitchin, Vice-Chair.

A. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Helyn Lefgren	Maxwell Plichta
John Morack	Geoffrey Orth
Leslie Kitchin	Michael Schmetzer
Richard Shideler	Brian Accola

MEMBERS ABSENT: Carol Kaynor (excused), Seth Adams (excused)

OTHERS PRESENT: Bryant Wright, Trails Coordinator
Sharon Wittenkeller, Recording Clerk
Taryn Oleson-Yelle, R & M Consultants

B. MESSAGES

1. Communications to the Trails Advisory Commission – None.
2. Citizen’s Comments – limited to three (3) minutes – None.
3. Disclosure & Statement of Conflict of Interest – None.

C. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND CONSENT AGENDA

Motion to approve the agenda and consent agenda made by Commissioner Lefgren and seconded by Commissioner Morack. Carried without objection or roll call vote.

D. MINUTES

Minutes from April 5, 2021 were approved.

E. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan Update – R&M Consultants
 - a. Draft of vision statement – The TAC discussed goals and priorities to continue to develop a draft vision statement.
 - b. Objectives development exercise – this item was not discussed.
 - c. Action strategies brainstorming – this item was not discussed.

Note: Additional and more specific comments on item E.1.a. are included in the images from the presentation slides where notes were transcribed by the consultants in real time.

Taryn Oleson-Yelle gave a brief update on progress since the prior meeting noting that the public trail use survey went live on the project website. It has not been advertised yet; Ms. Oleson-Yelle will email the survey link to Commissioners. They are encouraged to share the link with the public. Paper copies of the survey are also available. A flyer and email notice will be sent out to those members of the public who have already given comments and whose email addresses were received through the data collection process. The list is currently about 75 people. Post cards with information on the survey will be mailed out to randomly selected borough residents.

The Commission, Mr. Wright and Ms. Oleson-Yelle continued their focus on goals and prioritization from the April 5, 2021 meeting. Commissioners were asked to complete their own lists and rankings of goals for the trail system based on the goals discussed at the April 5th meeting. Commissioners shared their results and discussed with each other and the planning team. Overall, commissioners prioritized similar goals toward the top of their lists.

The discussion of goals centered mostly around the following topics:

- The borough's authorities on trails:
 - Ensure the Borough accepts and asserts the authorities it already has.
 - Protect existing access to public trails by addressing encroachments.
 - Establish access to existing high-priority trails that don't currently have public access.
 - Liability concerns more of a user liability vs. borough liability.
 - Liability of user groups doing the trail maintenance.
 - Establish or enforce deterrents or fines for blocking trails.
 - Publicize private property for trails that cross private property.
 - Establish or exercise other means to protect trails outside of Title 17.
 - Establish and protect new trail corridors that have yet to be built.
 - Go through Parks and Recreation vs. the Assembly for certain actions like changing a trails designation, and to maintain or protect trails.
- Trail maintenance
 - What types of maintenance are important?

- How to maintain trails on easements across private property?
 - How to maintain public sections of trails that have segments that cross private property?
 - Address legality concerns with private property.
 - Make it easier for individuals to do trail volunteer maintenance on their own.
 - Define what "damage" means and what level of maintenance is appropriate for certain trails. For example, a rough or muddy trail might be desirable for some uses like ATV or off-roading but might be undesirable for summer hiking.
 - If there is a lack of maintenance, trails will not be used.
 - Establish "sustainable" standards to reduce maintenance needs.
 - Trail designation can also fall under maintenance category; different use designations will constitute different levels of maintenance.
 - What constitutes a trail "improvement" or "development" (like trail hardening) versus regular "maintenance" (like brushing vegetation or winter grooming).
 - Drainage is a big part of maintenance.
 - Sustainability with maintenance – minimizing damage and degradation.
 - Trail head plowing is a regular maintenance need.
 - Maintain useable conditions to maintain access
 - Reduce cost of maintenance.
 - Facilities at trail heads like trash cans and porta potties reduce some kinds of maintenance, but also need maintained.
- Public use of the trails and involvement:
 - Help residents get out on the trails.
 - Improve signage, wayfinding and online map content to help people know where to go.
 - Educate current trail users.
 - Encourage respectful use of trails.
 - Ensure proper use of trails and etiquette through education and signage.
 - Help trail users know whose land they are crossing by installing signage.
- Trail use designations:
 - Proper trail designation based on terrain
 - Reduce trail damage and seasonal restrictions.
 - Publicize trail use for certain activities during certain seasons
 - Keep public notified with up to date information of trail changes during different seasons.
 - Use website for public to find trails or leave comments
 - Reduce trail damage by establishing proper trail use designations.
 - Reevaluate trail designations based on changing tastes and user groups overtime.
 - Reduce maintenance cost and keep trail damage down.
 - Need ability to change trail designation without requiring an assembly vote.

- Reduce conflicts by having parallel trails for specific uses.
- Trail connectivity and interconnectivity
 - Encourage further work on connectivity.
 - Continue to develop major trail connection concepts like the 100-Mile Loop and the Alaska Long Trail.
 - Trail connectivity will be a desired result of addressing other topics like trail access and development.
- Trail user accessibility for all user groups
 - Make trails that are suitable for diverse user groups.
 - Accessibility for all ages and abilities.
 - Provide trails for a variety of levels of challenges or conditions.
 - Expand uses in different seasons.
 - Establish and develop appropriate trail access at trailheads.
 - Plan for parking, traffic safety, signage, enough room for trailers, etc.
 - Facilitate closer access to points of interest.
 - Address user accessibility as it relates to trail conditions.
 - Plan trailheads to be more strategically located.
 - Facilitate access to trails used for general commuting.
- Development of existing and new trails
 - New trail development could address trail designation shortages.
 - New trails are an opportunity to address clear cut conflicts.
 - An opportunity to provide niche experiences.
 - To address connectivity needs and create trail connections will require new trails.
 - Trails that promote connectivity will be new priority trails
 - New trail development should focus in areas where there is existing demand, but no trails currently.
 - Include trails on state land into trails plan.
 - Development of trails to provide a range of degrees of difficulty.
 - Develop single-use and multi-use trails.

The Commission discussed these above goals and reevaluated their priorities. Priorities mostly stayed the same.

The Commission also discussed the two draft versions of the vision statements:

Draft 1: "The Fairbanks North Star Borough features a network of recreational trails for trail users of all ages, abilities, and activity types to enjoy year-round that are maintained and valued by the community."

Draft 2: "The Fairbanks North Star Borough is a recreation destination with an interconnected, well maintained, year-round system of public trails that feature unique experiences for all trail users, borough residents and visitors now and for generations to come."

The Commission referenced their aspirations regarding trails to continue to develop a draft vision statement. Ms. Oleson-Yelle took notes in an interactive platform on a digital whiteboard during the discussion. The following are some aspirations or ideas expressed:

- Include “for future generations to come” in the draft.
- Appreciate the access to the vast amount of land and trails in Alaska and in the FNSB.
- Appreciate the ease of being able to ski from one front door to another in any part of Fairbanks.
- Preservation of trails for the future.
- Maintain connectivity of trails.
- Building the city around the trails rather than building trails around the city.
- Appreciate Fairbanks’ unique qualities: its surroundings, trail systems, unique winter and summer seasons.
- World class trails in the FNSB.
 - Trails mecca – dog mushing meccas
 - Aurora viewing trail use and winter tourism
 - Extended Nordic skiing season
- Long winter season for winter trail use.
- Summer trail use under the midnight sun.
- Wilderness access near town.
- Easy access to rugged country.
- Unparalleled diversity of users of trails.
- Cherished trails; Fairbanksans really love their trails.
- Some wanted to focus on trails for residents while others liked the concept of becoming a trail destination.

- *Reminder: Additional and more specific comments on item E.1.a. are included in the images from the presentation slides where notes were transcribed by the consultants in real time.*

The next step will be for Ms. Oleson-Yelle to synthesize all the comments about the vision statement and goals and provide a working draft for the May 4, 2021 meeting when they will discuss the goals and vision with the public and receive their comments and feedback.

F. EXCUSE FUTURE ABSENCES – None.

G. COMMISSIONER’S COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

Commissioner Lefgren commented on the productive work session and looked forward to the opportunity to comment on the vision statements.

Commissioner Morack followed up on his absence from the last meeting which was due to road travel and looked forward to community participation at the next meeting.

H. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:46 p.m.