

# PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES

April 02, 2024 at 5:30 PM

Assembly Chambers/Zoom Webinar

---



<https://juneau.zoom.us/j/94184441385> or +1 669 444 9171 US Webinar ID: 941 8444 1385

## A. CALL TO ORDER

PRAC Chair Chris Mertl called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

## B. ROLL CALL

**Present:** Chris Mertl, Makayla Pfaff, Josh Anderson, Charles Westmoreland, Portland Highbaugh, Emma Van Nes, Danika Swanson, Paulette Schirmer

**Absent:** Christina Mounce

**Staff Present:** George Schaaf, Parks & Recreation Director; Lauren Verrelli, Parks & Recreation Deputy Director; Ginger Hudson, Arboretum Manager; Michelle Hale, Assembly Liaison; Annie Carroll, Parks & Recreation Staff Liaison

## C. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

**MOTION** by Ms. Highbaugh to approve the agenda. *No objections were heard, and the agenda was approved.*

## D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Minutes from March 5, 2024

**MOTION** by Mr. Anderson to approve the agenda. *No objections were heard, and the agenda was approved.*

## E. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

### Public Comment

**Lauren Smoker** a Thane resident, expressed to the committee that she does not believe the Adair-Kennedy pickleball and tennis court reconfiguration solution the PRAC voted on in March is going to work. She explained that the measurements of the existing basketball court are too short to build a tennis court on. She calls attention to the option for reconfiguration that fellow tennis player Colleen McKenna provided to the PRAC which proposed 3 dedicated pickleball courts and 2 multiuse tennis courts. She expressed that she thinks McKenna's proposal is a great option, and recounts presenting and discussing it with Mr. Schaaf and Parks Maintenance Supervisor Colby Shibler for consideration. She emphasizes that removing a tennis court in the valley would be a great loss, and that this option will still allow for dedicated pickleball courts, and a basketball court for Adair-Kennedy. She adds that it would be beneficial for Parks & Recreation staff to implement an online reservation system for court usage at Adair-Kennedy and Cope Park to minimize conflict due to complications with multiuse courts. She concludes by stating that you can play pickleball on tennis courts, but you cannot play tennis on pickleball courts.

Mr. Westmoreland asked when tennis ball players typically use the courts, to which Ms. Smoker answered that there is a large group of women that play there on Sunday mornings, and due to pickleballs popularity it has been difficult for tennis players to find time to play there. Ms. Swanson asked how the discussion with Parks & Recreation staff went regarding the viability of an online reservation system. Ms. Smoker answered that she believes it was well received, and that Mr. Schaaf and Mr. Shibler said that Parks & Recreation already has an online reservation system utilized for other

purposes, so this addition is definitely feasible but that it would have to be discussed further. Ms. Swanson asked Mr. Schaaf for his input and an update on the reservation system. Mr. Schaaf explained that the reservation system is a possible solution staff can implement to allow for free basketball, pickleball, and tennis reservations to be made, and to prevent one user from booking more than their fair share of time at the courts.

Mr. Mertl notes that if this proposal works it will likely quell a lot of people's concerns and asked both Ms. Smoker and Mr. Schaaf if everyone is happy with this proposal for reconfiguration. Mr. Schaaf answered that he is waiting to hear back from Mr. Shibler for final confirmed measurements and his assessment of whether the plan will work. Ms. Smoker answers that the tennis community has been discussing this new proposal since the last meeting, and many of them are in attendance to show support. Ms. Schirmer noted that this new proposal indicated that the 3 dedicated pickleball courts will be a foot shy of minimum length and suggested that 2 full size dedicated courts could be made instead to prevent this issue. Mr. Mertl added that from what he has read, he does not believe 1 foot is a critical oversight. Ms. Smoker shared that the plan presented by the tennis players was drafted to maximize the amount of dedicated pickleball courts and tennis courts.

**Colleen McKenna**, a valley resident, shares that the court reconfiguration approved at the March PRAC meeting was flawed and the space dedicated to the tennis court was 14 feet too short. She shared that once she reached out to the department with this concern Mr. Schaaf responded with the solution to overlap the basketball and tennis court which would give tennis one full court and one shared court which she believes would result in lack of access. She surveyed tennis players, then went with Ms. Smoker and met with Mr. Schaaf and Mr. Shibler to share input from the user group. She shares that the previously discussed solution was presented to Parks & Recreation and that they are currently looking into the possibility of implementing it. She addressed the issue of not meeting minimum space standards and brings up that both groups will need to be willing to give up a small amount of space, and that the courts at the Alaska club are even smaller which has not prevented either group from playing there. She notes that in her discussions with Mr. Schaaf they discussed the master plan for a dedicated facility space for pickleball with will allow this Adair-Kennedy plan to act as a temporary solution. She asks that Parks & Recreation implement this new plan which is in line with the PRAC's decision in March to offer 4-6 dedicated pickleball courts and preserve the full-sized basketball court. She concludes by stating that the implementation of this plan, an online reservation system, and clear signage will give each group equitable access, and help prevent conflicts between user groups.

Ms. Swanson acknowledged Ms. McKenna's work drafting the layout plans for this proposal and thanks her for her efforts facilitating the tennis player survey. Mr. Mertl adds that he appreciates the hard work that went into her proposal.

**Dave McKenna**, a valley resident, shares that he has lived in Juneau for 25 years and has been teaching for 17 years including 6 years as a hockey coach at JDHS. He expresses that his main concern with the reconfiguration is managing the 3 user groups involved. He explains that during his time as hockey coach they were often requesting more ice time at Treadwell arena, and that the managers there always stressed that open thorough communication must be maintained amongst all user groups. He expressed that these lines of communication are crucial to prevent disruptions to other user groups without warning. He presents the solution of receiving input from each user group to create clear rules and signage.

**Bill Kramer**, an Auke Bay resident, expressed his support for the new reconfiguration presented by Ms. McKenna. He adds that there are over 30 kids on the high school tennis team and local junior groups that coaches support in town which all need a place to play that does not require a paid Membership. He concludes by sharing his support for dedicated tennis, pickleball, and basketball courts, and thanks everyone for their hard work.

**Jodi Arnold**, a mountainside resident, agrees with her fellow tennis players, and stressed that a reservation system would be important. She also notes that she has not been playing at Adair-Kennedy because of the condition of the courts and is happy to hear they are being resurfaced. She states that she plays at Cope Park in the morning as she won't have to worry about court space because the pickleball players are not there. She expresses that it is unfair and unequitable that community members must pay membership fees at The Alaksa Club just to find space to play. She concludes by sharing that she encourages the creation of dedicated spaces for all sports but does not believe one should come at the expense of another.

**Anne Sutton**, a downtown resident, shares that a facility for pickleball is likely at least 5 years away, so her hope is that the plan to preserve 2 courts in the valley and 2 downtown is kept in consideration. She says it is only fair that they share these courts and try to minimize conflict by not selling the tennis players short.

**Abby O'Brien**, a valley resident, introduced herself sharing that she lives in Mendenhaven and has been in Juneau since 2002. She adds that she has volunteered all over town for the last 15 years including at The Alaska Department of Fish and Game where fundraisers have given to the Arboretum, Zach Gordon youth center, and the Spruce Root House. She states that she is here to request a reconsideration of the motion made at the March fifth meeting, due to the following concerns. The prior PRAC meeting was publicized with short notice on the CBJ Facebook page and wasn't on the Parks & Rec page at all, which is a potential violation of the Open Meetings Act. She adds that the Landscape plan was not debuted until the meeting. Before introducing the proposal, the committee said that no impact study had been done yet regarding the noise on the courts. The director's report said, "given the proximity of indoor tennis courts at the Alaska Club nearby staff believe one tennis court at this location is adequate" which is a recommendation of a private business from a public entity; and after doing so, the committee later stated that the Alaska Club had not yet been contacted regarding court usage. She adds that the recommendation was a part of the motion, which is an opinion presented before testimony was made available and should have been stricken.

Ms. O'Brien expresses concerns that during the meeting committee members engaged in small talk with pickleball players, and these members should have abstained from voting. She continues by stating that during testimony pickleball players offered groundskeeping services to see the motion through. She says that as a direct result of the lack of meeting notice emails from the tennis community were relegated to Red Folder items. Proceeding the vote these emails were written off as "not in my backyard" by a member who said that they've been through this a hundred times. She asks why tennis concerns are not valid. She states that a committee member counted bystanders in the hallway as people who "appear to be in favor of pickleball" based on their appearance before testimony, and that this should not be considered. She concludes by asking for a reconsideration of the motion made.

Mr. Mertl asks if she wants the committee to go back to square one and reconsider the reconfiguration in the case that the new proposal by Ms. McKenna is possible for the court space. Ms. O'Brien says that if McKenna's plan works with the reservation system, then she is personally okay with it, but that she felt uninformed prior to the last meeting and lacked access to the plans. She expressed that she felt the deck was stacked against the tennis community at the last meeting. Mr. Mertl shares that the committee did receive the tennis players' letters and had time to read and consider them before the meeting but was then surprised by the number of pickleball players that arrived to testify. He says that he does not believe the deck was stacked against anybody at the meeting, but that people mobilized in different ways.

**Susan Haymes**, a downtown resident, states that she supports the new configuration and thanks Ms. McKenna and Ms. Smoker for the hard work they've done. She shares that she's lived in Juneau for 35 years and has been playing tennis for 15 years. She expresses how much she loves playing tennis

outdoors which is why she feels the resurfacing at Adair-Kennedy will be a great improvement. She says it will be wonderful to have access to 2 courts, and that she appreciates the consideration.

**Austin Stefanich**, a downtown resident, introduces himself as a certified tennis instructor and the head tennis coach for JDHS. He shares that player numbers have increased drastically at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, especially in this past year. He stresses that initial tennis interest is only going to come from a free and public court. He states that many adults and youth live in the valley, and 2 courts remaining in the valley is a necessity for the growing tennis community in Juneau. He concludes by saying that he is thankful for the new configuration, and thanks the committee for their time.

Mr. Westmoreland asks where the JDHS team currently practices, to which Mr. Stefanich answers that the team gets to practice at The Alaska Club during season. Mr. Westmoreland inquires about the participation levels at the high school and the team's growth over the years. Mr. Stefanich answers that the team has grown by over 15 players in the last 3 years, making a total of 30 players last year, and that they got second place at the ASAA Alaska State Tennis Championship. Mr. Westmoreland concludes by asking if the new proposed configuration from Ms. McKenna would work for the players to which Mr. Stefanich says it absolutely will, especially with a reservation system.

Mr. Mertl closes public testimony on non-agenda items and thanks everyone for their testimony.

## **F. NEW BUSINESS**

### **3. PRAC Annual Report**

Mr. Mertl presented the PRAC with his annual report summarizing the PRAC's activity and progress for the last year and asks the committee for comments. Ms. Van Nes notes that the spelling of her last name needs to be corrected, but that she has no other additions. Ms. Pfaff noted that her last name has changed and should be updated as well.

*With no other edits to be made the Annual report was approved to be passed on to the Assembly Human Resources Committee.*

## **G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

## **H. STAFF REPORTS**

### **4. Jensen-Olson Arboretum Update – Presented by G. Hudson**

Ms. Hudson presented the committee with a brief history of The Jensen-Olson Arboretum and informed them of recent updates and programs. Mr. Hudson explained that the budget for the arboretum comes from endowment funds, and CBJ general revenue funds. She further explained that they have used these funds, in addition to help from The Friends of Jensen-Olson Arboretum (FJOA) to install Starlink internet, a permanent bathroom on the property, and updates to their water filter system. Donations and grants have also been received by FJOA which will help pay for the upcoming installation of an accessible walkway on the grounds. She explains that outreach, and educational horticulture programs are a large part of managing the arboretum and are often aided and organized by FJOA's Education Coordinator. Ms. Hudson concludes by sharing how promotion and partnerships with organizations like Travel Juneau, and The American Public Gardens Association have also helped get the word out about the arboretum and their award-winning Primula collection.

Ms. Highbaugh asked if the arboretum event list could be shared with PRAC members so that they can plan to attend and show support for the community. Ms. Verrelli said that she will send the list to committee members and added that all events will be promoted on social media and to the Parks & Recreation website.

Ms. Swanson noted that she was intrigued by the fact that certain Primula varieties may be more fungus resistant, and better suited to the climate in Juneau. She asked how things are going in terms of finding better suited varieties and adding them to the collection. Ms. Hudson answered that Juneau is getting wetter

and warmer. She says that she has been trading seeds with people from other parts of the country to find varieties that are better suited to a wetter environment. She shares that varieties originating in the wet cloudy forests of Central Asia, and high mountain areas in Japan have great potential.

Ms. Swanson asked what the difference was between a botanical garden and an arboretum. Ms. Hudson answered that an Arboretum is dedicated to woody plants like trees and shrubs that come back year after year. The Jensen-Olson Arboretum is classified as a level 2 arboretum with over 100 varieties of woody plants. A botanical garden can include a collection of any combination of plant types for display and educational purposes.

**I. COMMITTEE MEMBER / LIAISON COMMENTS AND QUESTION**

Ms. Hale updated the PRAC on the most recent assembly meeting which discussed the homeless shelter among other topics, and shared that she doesn't have any specific news for the PRAC.

Mr. Anderson shared that the Youth Activities Board is currently working to score grant applications, and they plan to inform applicants of the results next month.

Ms. Swanson shared that Trail Mix has named their new Executive Director Meghan Tabacek, and that she has updates for PRAC. Field crews will begin on May 14, and their 2024 field projects include work on Mt. Jumbo, Perseverance Trail, Eagle Glacier Trail, Peterson Trail, and the Christopher Trail. She also mentions a 52-foot bridge that will be put in on the Treadwell Ditch Trail, and a plan to make Lena Point Trail completely graveled. She concludes with an update that Trail Mix is recruiting for Trail stewards.

Ms. Van Nes shared that Eaglecrest hosted their terrain park series and are currently preparing for their closing weekend. She shared that the annual Slush Cup will be held on the upcoming weekend. She concluded by sharing that they are soliciting a gondola construction contractor, and plan to hold summer camps starting up soon.

Mr. Mertl shared that the Lands, Housing, and Economic Development committee met at the beginning of the month and discussed an application to purchase some landlocked property, adopting the Juneau Affordable Housing Fund Guidelines, and Patterson Hill Development Updates. He concluded that they plan to meet on the upcoming Monday.

Mr. Schaaf informed the PRAC that the Assembly approved an ordinance that will require a permit for large events, and that the department is working to get the regulations through the law department. He briefly updated the PRAC on the Mill Creek Campground for people experiencing homelessness. The location of the campground has a lot of bad attributes from an environmental design standpoint and has been difficult for Parks & Recreation to manage. He shares that AEL&P approached the department with an offer to relocate to a better suited location in their storage yard near the cold weather shelter. The proposal is currently being considered by the assembly, as well as an alternative location near the rock dump.

Mr. Mertl asked if there was a position at Parks & Recreation that is specifically responsible for monitoring, maintaining, and managing the campground as it seems to be a huge effort and resource drag on the department. Mr. Schaaf answered that there is not a specific staff person to manage the campground, but that parks maintenance workers empty trash and Park rangers do their best to manage the registration of guests, and deal with issues that arise. Mr. Mertl asked if the department needs another staff member to maintain the facility. Mr. Schaaf answered that he does not think that is necessary as Parks & Recreation is not a social services agency and is therefore not best equipped to manage the population using the facility. He says that the staff do their best to provide support for the needs of the camp from a resource standpoint but that this department is not the best fit for a job closely managing safety and day-to-day happenings at the camp.

**J. NEXT MEETING DATE – May 7, 2024**

**K. ADJOURNMENT** With no further business to discuss the committee meeting adjourned at 6:43pm.

Respectfully submitted by Annie Carroll on 5/31/2024. Minutes approved at the June 4<sup>th</sup> PRAC meeting.