

# PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES

March 05, 2024 at 5:30 PM

Assembly Chambers/Zoom Webinar

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## A. CALL TO ORDER

PRAC Chair Chris Mertl called the meeting to order at 5:31 PM

## B. ROLL CALL

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

**Absent:** Charles Westmoreland, Christina Mounce

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

## C. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

1. March 5th Director's Report

## D. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

## E. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

2. Minutes from February 6, 2024

**MOTION** by Ms. Schirmer to approve the minutes for the February 6, 2024 PRAC meeting. Mr. Mertl stated that the minutes should be amended as the motion to recommend the Director accept the donation of an aquatic weed harvester for Riverside Rotary Park Pond was passed under the condition that the department receives consultation and evaluation from the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game. *No objections were heard, and the minutes were approved as amended.*

## F. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS - None

## G. NEW BUSINESS

### 3. Court Reconfiguration at Adair-Kennedy Memorial Park – Presented by G. Schaaf

Mr. Schaaf presented the PRAC with the department's plans to replace fences, resurface, and reconfigure the existing two tennis courts, and two basketball courts at Adair-Kennedy to be 4-6 pickleball courts, one basketball court, and one tennis court. He explained that this is to improve the condition of the court as issues have arisen with frost heaving of the fence footings, and the existing asphalt requires resurfacing and painting. He explained that the Pickleball community, and the Juneau commission on aging, have approached the department with interest in more outdoor courts to play pickleball. Mr. Schaaf says that this reconfiguration will make the most of the preexisting facilities to meet the needs of as many user groups as possible.

Ms. Schirmer asked if the basketball court should be kept at the facility if it is being used infrequently. Mr. Schaaf answered that the reason for keeping it is because it is the only full court basketball court that Parks & Recreation has in Juneau. He explains that there is a half-court at Cope Park, and covered courts at valley elementary schools but they cannot be accessed by adult users during the school day.

Mr. Mertl asked how many tennis, basketball, and pickleball courts are in Juneau. Mr. Schaaf answered that there are two tennis courts at Cope Park; one of which is striped for pickleball use, and two tennis courts currently at Adair-Kennedy. He added that there is one half-court basketball court at Capital Park and the two courts currently at Adair-Kennedy. Mr. Anderson asked if there are any pickleball courts, to which Mr. Schaaf confirmed there are no dedicated pickleball courts in Juneau.

Mr. Mertl asked if there were plans for the pickleball or basketball courts in the Adair-Kennedy Master Plan from years prior. Mr. Schaaf answered that he does not believe pickleball courts were specified in those plans.

Ms. Hale asked if the school consolidation and potential repurposing has been considered in the planning process of this reconfiguration. Mr. Schaaf answered that the department is aware that Floyd Dryden is slated for closure, and that they are very interested in the gym space for programs. He added that having an outdoor sports space that does not require staffing is of value to the department and user groups in the area.

Ms. Swanson asked what feedback the department has received about shared use of the tennis court that is striped for pickleball in Cope Park, and how often it is in use. Mr. Schaaf answered that after building the tennis courts there were immediate requests for pickleball lines to be added, but some members of the community opposed this, so the decision was made to add the lines to only one court. He added that he is not personally aware of any conflicts among user groups at the park.

Ms. Schirmer shared that she lives in the vicinity of Adair-Kennedy and when the pickleball courts are full she can hear it from her house, leading her to be concerned about noise pollution. She also raised concerns about the 1-hour time limits being ignored and bleachers being placed over the existing lines which prevent people from playing tennis. She then asked if an impact study had been performed to see how the noise from the courts is impacting the neighborhood. Mr. Schaaf answered that a study has not been done but the department has received complaints from residents in the area during football and baseball games. He shared that the department has worked with user groups to help mitigate the impact and manage the hours of activities there as well.

Mr. Mertl noted that since the basketball courts at Adair-Kennedy are used very infrequently, and pickleball has no dedicated space at all, it may be best to find a facility elsewhere to accommodate basketball. He then asked if any full court basketball courts have been included in future proposed parks projects. Mr. Schaaf answered that there are currently no plans to add additional basketball courts to other parks.

Ms. Swanson noted that there are tennis programs in the schools, and asked if there are any pickleball programs. Mr. Schaaf answers that there is no pickleball program to his knowledge.

Ms. Schirmer asked if the proposed Community Center would have a space for indoor pickleball courts. Mr. Schaaf answered that that project would likely include Gym space no larger than approximately two basketball courts in size and would be programmed for multiple uses to optimize the space. He added that should the Community Center be built it could accommodate pickleball inside, but it would be an indoor staffed facility that would be open at set hours.

Ms. Van Nes asked if the department has contacted The Alaska Club to see how often their courts are being used by each group. Mr. Schaaf answered that they have not talked to The Alaska Club directly but are aware that they are now open 24 hours with card access for paying members.

Ms. Pfaff asked how many spots there are for playing pickleball at the Adair-Kennedy courts now. Mr. Schaaf answers that there are two.

Mr. Mertl asked if lines could be added to the full-sized basketball court to convert it into a multiple use full-sized tennis court as well. Mr. Schaaf answered that this cannot be done as the dimensions are not

compatible. Mr. Schaaf followed up by asking what the schedule is for this project. Mr. Schaaf answered that this project will take place this summer along with other small maintenance projects to fix paving and fences will likely take a few weeks to complete. He added that a decision at this meeting would be best so contracts can be issued in April for potential work in May or June when the weather is best.

**MOTION** by Mr. Anderson for the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee to recommend that the department reconfigure courts at Adair-Kennedy Memorial Park to provide four-six pickleball courts, one tennis court, and one basketball court.

**Public Comment**

**Melehoko Maake**, an Auke Bay Resident, expressed her support of the pickleball community in Juneau and how it brings people of all ages together. She shared that her children introduced her to the sport and play it with her. She expressed that pickleball is excellent for improving physical and mental health, and the community is embracing and welcoming for new players. He shared that as the community has grown, they have held tournaments and round robins and trying to find a place to adequately accommodate all the pickleball players has been a challenge. She added that the six additional courts will not be enough, and she hopes more facilities for indoor play will become available.

**Lauren Smoker**, a Thane Resident, shared that she has been playing tennis regularly for the last 12 years which has led to incredible improvements to her health, fitness, and overall emotional wellbeing. She said that the tennis community is not interested in creating conflict and that she is supportive of the creation of more Pickleball courts, but she does not believe they should be created at the expense of tennis and Basketball courts. She acknowledges that pickleball has exploded in popularity but notes that tennis has had a huge growth spurt as well. She shares that the United States Tennis Organization reported that there are 8.9 million pickleball players, and 23.6 million Tennis players in the country in 2022. She added that they also reported a 33% increase of almost 6 million tennis players since 2019 and that this does not reflect a sport that is in decline. She also brought up that the tennis team at the high school needs places to play around town that are free unlike the Alaska Club where you must pay for membership and court privileges. She agrees that the tennis courts are in poor shape, and resurfacing will be greatly appreciated. She stated that CBJ has already removed three outdoor courts when building Treadwell arena, and that the pickleball lines at the cope park courts makes it difficult to call line shots. Mr. Mertl asked if she believes removing the basketball court to maintain two tennis courts would be a better option. Ms. Smoker answered that it is a tough call, and that she attended to represent tennis, and can't act as representative for the basketball community in Juneau as she is not involved in it.

**Steve SueWing**, a downtown Resident, shared that he is testifying on behave of his family of 4 who a have all been avid pickleball payers since 2019. He said in his experience playing pickleball avidly at Cope Park in the summer that the tennis court there without pickleball lines is in use less than half of the time. He acknowledges that removing tennis courts to make pickleball courts is not ideal, but that the best tennis court in town is at Cope Park, and it is frequently going unused. He also shared that during the summer he often meets visitors off the cruise ships who have are interested in playing pickleball in Juneau both at Cope Park and Adair-Kennedy. He concludes by stating that having dedicated pickleball courts would be a benefit to the community, a good use of space, and a great attraction for visitors. Ms. Swanson asked if playing pickleball and tennis next to each other is a problem. Mr. SueWing stated that in his experience tennis players may prefer a quiet atmosphere for their game, but as a pickleball player he has not had any issues.

**Kueni Maake**, a valley Resident, shares that she believes pickleball brings families and communities together. She shares that the sport has allowed her to play with all members of her family and engage in sports in a way that never happened in the past. She expressed that pickleball culture is happy, and

therapy for the soul. She thanks Parks & Rec for considering this reconfiguration and said that she and her family would be willing to show up and lend a hand cleaning, painting, and weeding if they're needed. She closes by reiterating her support for the project, and for bringing Juneau the happiness of pickleball.

**Meliame Veikoso**, a valley Resident, shared that she is here to support pickleball, and that she agrees with the sentiments of the other players who have spoken. She adds that she must pay a lot of money for her family to play pickleball at the Alaska Club and their time playing is limited to two hours. She says that she's the secretary of the Alaska Crimson Bears Pickleball club, and she reached out to Parks & Rec in hopes that they could help provide more spots to play because players are forced to sit around and wait due to how few courts are available. She concludes by sharing that she is thankful for the opportunity to share how much the community loves playing pickleball here with their families.

**Viliami Pongi**, a valley Resident, shared that he moved to Juneau 3 years ago and he showed up to the meeting and brought his newborn baby to support pickleball, and illustrate that it brings families together, and fosters love and support. He closes by thanking everyone and saying that with more pickleball courts comes more fun.

**Feao Veikoso**, a valley Resident, shared that he has lived in Juneau since 1997 and is here to support the pickleball club. He shares his experience going on cruises with his family and seeing how pickleball is a big attraction for travelers. He states that if you build more pickleball courts you will bring more people to Juneau. He shares that the noise that pickleball players create is happy noise, and that it is no reason to stop the sport that so many love. Lastly, he noted that he would be greatly appreciative of an indoor space to play pickleball in the winter.

**Sharon Denton**, a valley Resident, shares that she moved to Juneau in the 1970's and began skiing because she could do it with her kids but found that pickleball was a better fit for her, and for players of any age. She expressed her desire for a place to play pickleball indoors, and for lessons to be offered in Juneau. She notes that the players at The Alaska Club are very advanced, and that it isn't the best place for new players to learn. She feels pickleball has become the biggest sport in town, and other sports like soccer are declining in popularity here. She recounts that during covid the pickleball players in town placed temporary lines of the courts themselves, demonstrating that there is demand for more space and the project should be done. Ms. Swanson asks if the pickleball players also struggle to play on courts with lines for tennis, as the tennis players have shared that it is difficult. Ms. Denton answered that the lines are different colors, and she does not have a problem with it. Ms. Swanson follows up to ask how many Pickleball courts the space in Cope Park accommodates and how many pickleball and tennis players are waiting to play. Ms. Denton answered that there often are still people waiting to play pickleball when all the spots are in use, but not as many waiting to use the tennis court. Ms. Schirmer asked where the pickleball players taped lines. Ms. Denton answered that they added lines at Glacier Valley, Dzantik'i Heeni, and that some other party added lines at Auke Bay.

**Elenoa Lehauli**, a valley Resident, shares that at her position with Alaska Airlines she often introduces Juneau visitors to pickleball and welcomes all her friends to come and play with her. She explains that her husband introduced her to the sport, and she found it to be so fun and great for her health. She recounts visiting different places in the country and finding that there are so many courts available unlike here in Juneau where you must go to The Alaska club and pay membership fees to play. She stressed that the community is also in need of indoor courts to play on when it's cold outside. Ms. Schirmer asks what the membership fees are at The Alaska Club, to which Ms. Lehauli answers that it is \$175 a month for her family of three and they must draw their own lines on the court.

**Jill Lawhorne**, a valley Resident, begins by introducing herself, and disclosing that she is also the director of community development for CBJ but is here in a personal capacity to support pickleball. She shares

that to her understanding the Juneau School District occasionally invites coaches to teach pickleball during gym class but there is no dedicated program at this point. She also brings up the point that membership fees at The Alaska Club are a challenge for people, and the club limits how many single day passes you can buy before they require you to purchase a full membership. She mentions that the covered areas at the schools are also not ideal for pickleball as the floors are concrete and very slick. She notes that High school students will be moving to Juneau Douglas High School (JDHS) next year and the tennis team will be less likely to practice at Adair-Kennedy Park. She emphasizes the welcoming nature of pickleball which contributes to its growth in popularity and wide age range of players. Ms. Swanson shared that she has taken a pickleball class and found that she still needs more lessons. She then asks how much work she will have to do before she can play with the groups at the park. Ms. Lawhorne answers that she thinks anyone can join in and play, and that creating more courts would provide better opportunity for beginners to sharpen their skills playing with people at their level, and she hopes we can move in that direction.

**Jacqueline Tupou**, a valley resident, shares that she has a big pickleball family and her children from age 11 to 21 go to the park to play with their father often. She shares that her 11-year-old son Vance has been able to foster multigeneration friendships with people in his community which fills him with joy. She explains that his pickleball friends come to support him when he is speaking at church and often bump into him at the grocery store. She expresses that pickleball is doing good things for the community. She says that currently the community comes together to provide nets and lines for the courts, and having CBJ support the effort would be an important step forward. She addressed noise complaints by saying that concerns about loud laughter is such an amazing problem to have. Having multigenerational, multiethnic groups together laughing and happy should be the goal of this town and pickleball epitomizes that. She states that it is forward thinking to provide pickleball courts for the city and she is excited because often there are 20-25 people waiting to play at Cope Park

**Dale Kromarek**, a Lemon Creek resident, shares that he grew up in Juneau and is a lifelong product of Parks & Rec sports in the area. He notes that in his experience having a good surface to play sports on is critical for safety and fun, and that resurfacing is an absolute must at the courts. He also shared that the pickleball players have been providing their own removable nets and he believes the area could still be a good spot for tennis since the nets don't have to be permanent. He shares that his 86-year-old father plays with him and so do 7-8-year-old children. He says this is the first time he has been able to play such multigeneration sports activities in Juneau and it is amazing. Ms. Schirmer asked if the lines from 6 pickleball courts would make it difficult for tennis players to share the court space. Mr. Kromarek says that the tennis lines are bright white and pickleball lines are a darker red, blue or brown color so the conflict is usually for the pickleball players who have trouble seeing their lines or misinterpreting the tennis lines which are easier to see because of the high contrast.

Having no more participants for public comment Mr. Mertl asked Mr. Schaaf what the timeline is for needing a decision from PRAC on the reconfiguration, and if they should wait for input from the basketball community and consider the option of reconfiguring the basketball court into a tennis court. Mr. Schaaf answers that they would like to strike a compromise and not eliminate an option for a whole user group when it comes to the basketball court since it is the only full court.

Ms. Swanson asked if everything has been explored in terms of other places that can be reconfigured for tennis. Mr. Schaaf answered that currently there are not any courts that would fit the requirements. She shared that the estimate for constructing an eight court pickleball facility using asphalt paving, and including new fencing was nearly two million dollars.

Mr. Anderson notes the PRAC received approximately sixteen written testimonies in support of tennis and one for pickleball, and the in-person testimonies totaled ten for pickleball and one for tennis. He

stated that he supports the reconfiguration. He says he likes to hear the comments about all the happy laughter and isn't concerned by the noise created by pickleball players.

**VOTE**

**Aye:** Makayla Pfaff, Josh Anderson, Emma Van Nes, Danika Swanson, Portland Highbaugh, Chris Mertl

**No:** - None

**Abstain:** Paulette Schirmer

**The motion carries.**

**4. RED FOLDER - Public Comment on Court Reconfiguration at Adair-Kennedy Memorial Park**

**H. UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None**

**I. STAFF REPORTS**

**5. Christopher Trail Reroute Project Update – Presented by G. Schaaf**

Mr. Schaaf begins by presenting a map illustrating the Christopher Trail reroute project which the PRAC discussed in September of 2022. He explains that the then Deputy Director of Parks & Recreation Michele Elfers, and the Executive Director of Trail Mix Ryan O'Shaughnessy presented this project to the PRAC with the purpose being to reduce conflicts between pedestrians and bicyclists on the Flume Trail. The owners of the Flume AEL&P reached an agreement with the city in 1989 to prohibit bicyclists from being used on the trail due to safety, so this project was intended to provide an alternative route between perseverance trail and the downtown area.

Mr. Mertl asked if there will be a dedicated biking trail and a separate pedestrian trail, and if conflicts are arising because the project is unfinished. Mr. Schaaf explained that the area on the map indicated by the red line is largely completed and that the trails alignment and design is primarily intended for bicycles, but it is not exclusively for bicyclists.

**Public Comment**

**Rob Roy**, a downtown resident, shared that in the past someone fell off the Christopher trail and got hurt leading to the trail being repaired which transformed into this reconfiguration project. He stated that prior to this reconfiguration there were no conflicts because mountain bikes were not on the trail. He says that the trail has been used by pedestrians for a long time, and that he appreciated the effort to repair the trail but does not support the transformation of it into a mountain bike trail. He shared that though hikers and walkers can still use the trail, that it is very dangerous and there is a section that is essentially a 40-foot drop into gold Greek onto rocks. He shares that the crew that is working on the trail has dropped trees onto the path making it unusable for walking people. He wishes that there had been more robust outreach to the community saying that Christopher trail is being transformed into a mountain bike trail. Mr. Mertl asked if cleaning up the section of the trail with the dropped trees would help solve the problem. Mr. Roy answers that that could be a solution, but then the mountain bikers would be confused about which trail to use. He is also concerned about the blind corners on the trail as configured because bikers moving at high speeds could easily hit pedestrians.

Mr. Mertl asked Mr. Schaaf if additional signage could help this situation, or if an alternative parallel trail should be established. Mr. Schaaf answered that the department, and a hired engineering firm, looked into the social trail that ran up the waterline from Cope Park in hopes of rehabilitating and preserving pedestrian access to the water, but a solution could not be reached. He mentions the cast-off snow coming off basin road above was an insurmountable problem. As for signage, he says that is certainly something that can be done and that he and those at Trail Mix have discussed adding elements to the design to slow down bicyclists and improve sightlines.

Mr. Mertl asked Mr. Roy if he had any follow-up to these potential solutions. Mr. Roy said that because of the abandoned roadbed above the flume, mountain bikes are being directed onto the flume. He reiterated that he wished the Christopher trail project had been presented as a transformation into a mountain bike trail and not just an update when it was brought to PRAC in 2022, as he says there would have been more public output if that were the case. He wishes mountain bikers would be more considerate of pedestrians as proper trail etiquette is to dismount and walk past hikers, but that this is not always the case, and he worries it may end in someone getting injured.

Mr. Mertl thanked Mr. Roy for bringing this to the PRAC and said that they will continue to monitor the situation and that he looks forward to Mr. Schaaf's updates as the project approaches completion.

**6. Division Update— Presented by G. Schaaf**

Mr. Schaaf presented the PRAC with an update to the current events and programs for each division and provided some additional information about the Amalga Cabin reservation system.

Mr. Mertl offered his congratulations on the grand reopening of the Augustus Brown swimming pool and acknowledged the good work done on the mechanical upgrades and other improvements.

Ms. Schirmer asked what Floorball is, in response to its inclusion in the update on Treadwell Arena. Ms. Verrelli answered that it is essentially hockey but not on ice and the department is working on offering it at Treadwell in the summer. She shares that it may be a more accessible option as players don't need to be skilled at ice skating.

**J. COMMITTEE MEMBER / LIAISON COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS**

Ms. Hale expressed her interest in the fascinating conversation at the meeting and shared that the Assembly met to approve financing that the school board had requested for the district and that has been the main focus currently.

Mr. Mertl reminded the PRAC that their terms on the committee may be coming due, and that a tour of facilities will likely be scheduled for May. He also updated them on Lands, Housing, and Economic Development's progress toward disposal of unclaimed property on Renninger drive. There was also discussion of Mayflower Island and how the Bureau of Land Management may put it out for sale or give it to CBJ.

Ms. Swanson updated the PRAC on Trail Mix saying that you can still get a passport, and punch cards are still going on. She shares that she received her auctioneer license and is excited for next year's trail mix auction.

Mr. Anderson updated PRAC on the Youth Activities Board's progress toward reviewing and scoring Youth Activities Grant applications. He says they will be meeting next month to discuss and move toward officially awarding the grants.

**K. NEXT MEETING DATE – April 2, 2024**

**L. ADJOURNMENT** Ms. Schirmer motioned to adjourn. No objections were heard, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:18pm

Respectfully submitted by Annie Carroll, Administrative Assistant 02/28/2024.

Approved at the 04/02/2024 PRAC Meeting.