



Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska
Parks & Recreation Department

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MEMORANDUM

Date: May 4, 2016

To: Parks & Recreation Commission

From: Josh Durand, Parks Superintendent

Subject: PRC 2016-16: Anchorage Trails Wayfinding

OVERVIEW

The project being presented before the Commission addresses a wayfinding project currently being conducted for Anchorage trails, within the Anchorage Bowl. The project is funded through the Anchorage Park Foundation and has been coordinated with the Department of Parks and Recreation.

“Wayfinding” enables people to orient themselves and navigate from place to place with ease. Wayfinding is more than signs. Working together with other elements of the public realm such as neighborhoods, it includes place names, landmarks, maps and new media. It contributes to making a city more “legible” for residents, commuters, and tourists.

The effort is part of the larger Trails Initiative that is part of the Live-Work-Play campaign of the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation (AEDC). The effort arises from the following findings:

1) Trails Boost Economic Development

Greenbelts and trails bring economic vitality to communities. Trails attract tourists and new residents. Trails enhance quality of life, a critical factor in attracting and retaining businesses and a talented workforce to Anchorage. Trails revitalize neighborhoods through increased property values. However, these visitors and new residents need to be able to find their way to the trails, and need to find their way to destinations once on the trail.

2) Well Designed Trails That Are Easy To Navigate Increase Community Health

Anchorage is rich with parks and trails. However, the mere presence of parks and trails does not guarantee a healthier population (Trust for Public Land). Strong evidence shows that when people have access to parks, they exercise more. The creation of, or enhanced access to, places for physical activity led to a 25.6 percent increase in the percentage of people exercising on three or more days per week (CDC, “Increasing Physical Activity,” p. 11.).

The American Journal of Preventive Medicine reviewed studies that showed that “creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach” produced a 48.4 percent increase in frequency of physical activity. Thus, wayfinding is extremely important to enticing people to use trails.

This signage and wayfinding plan is one element of the larger Anchorage Trails Initiative, one of the seven areas of focus of the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation's Live.Work.Play Campaign. Overarching goals include:

- To create a consistent signage and wayfinding system across a range of media platforms including physical signs, mobile and web-based technologies. This work is intended to integrate the wayfinding plan with existing marketing initiatives of the Anchorage Park Foundation.
- To promote Anchorage's identity as the number one place to Live, Work, and Play. Develop identity signage for trails, neighborhoods, districts and/or parks that establish a strong sense of place and community pride.
- To create a signage and wayfinding system that focuses on directing residents and visitors to parks, trails, landmarks, employment centers, community facilities, schools and other major destinations. Provide information at key locations within neighborhoods, districts and/or parks that increase use of facilities and improve user experience and safety.
- To create a signage and wayfinding plan that improves connections between parks, districts, neighborhoods, trails, and other community facilities.
- Develop a wayfinding system that meets user needs, discourages vandalism, simplifies maintenance, and establishes a cohesive message.

PLANNING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

In 2015 the Anchorage Park Foundation hired a team of artists and design professionals who created an identity for the Anchorage Trail System; a brand. The results of this work included a primary logo, a style-guide including acceptable colors and fonts with directions on how to use the logo, place-based neighborhood icons that help create a stronger identity and sense of place for "their" neighborhood trails along the trail system, and finally a palette of trail use icons.

The next step in this process was to develop a physical wayfinding system to create consistency in our message and capitalization of the work done to date. To accomplish this, the Anchorage Park Foundation partnered with the Anchorage Department of Parks and Recreation to hire a consultant to provide an initial effort to address the physical wayfinding system for the Anchorage trails system. This initial effort would be expanded in the future to provide an interactive mobile web-based system to facilitate trail use, which would be a following step.

The Anchorage Park Foundation hired local landscape architecture firm Earthscape LLC, with sub-consultant Merje from the Philadelphia area, to develop standard signage that would be used for the physical wayfinding system. That process included meeting in Anchorage with the public, with the Department, and with key stakeholders, to gather an understanding of Anchorage's character and needs.

After collection of information, the sub-consultants developed three options for consideration by the public. Those three options provided a range of ideas that each focused on different aspects of presentation, some stronger in their architectural appearance, some less so. Each used a combination of wood, metal, color, and various components to achieve wayfinding products that addressed the following specific signage types:

- Gateways
- Kiosks with mapping and user information
- On-road wayfinding signage
- On-trail wayfinding signage
- Mileage/kilometer markers
- Interpretive signage

Each of these signage types incorporated the following key features to one degree or another:

- “Anchorage Trails” logo
- Trail “color”
- Trail name
- Directional information
- Neighborhood logos/icons
- Activity icons (playground/rec facilities/ballfields, etc.)
- Cultural reference in words and patterns

The three options were presented to the public both in local meetings, and in a poll with 353 people responding. In summary, the input yielded the following:

- Surfaces should be provided that are resistant to vandalism and graffiti. They should be easily cleaned.
- Emphasis should be on wayfinding, not overly executed structures.
- Large monolithic pours of concrete should be used discreetly. The surface should not include textured surfaces. Inclusion of Native patterns suggesting beadwork or other Native art is appropriate but should be carefully executed so that it can be placed into concrete or other wayfinding elements at low cost.
- Steel should be used where necessary to affix vertical or horizontal features. In general, it should not be a dominant design element.
- The “Anchorage Trails” logo should be a minor part of the wayfinding signage. It was confusing to some and detracted from the wayfinding for many.
- There was strong attraction to cultural themes. However, the language should be secondary to the wayfinding. It is appropriate to include it at culturally important locations and to recognize it on trails where Native use is recognized by Native place names. All major creeks qualify as well as many other locations (Pt. Woronzof, Pt. Campbell, etc.)
- Wood is an important material that was preferred as a construction material and should be included in most structures.
- Color is important but should be used judiciously. It should not be a dominant element, but should be used to ensure that trail users can identify the wayfinding elements at a distance and stand out from the background forest.

Concerns for vandalism, and ease of maintenance were key considerations in the determination of a “preferred option” referred to as Option #4. Key design considerations were as follows:

- The chosen design should allow fabrication to the maximum extent by Municipal staff.
- Signage features not easily fabricated by “in-house” forces should be easily fabricated by local sign shops.
- Surfaces should be easily cleaned with solvent, acetone, or other cleaner.
- Mass structures should use smooth concrete that can be easily cleaned or painted over quickly. Textures should be avoided.

Another concern that surfaced during discussions was that there needs to be some consistency between current park standards that are used at park entrances and the proposed wayfinding. The Municipality of Anchorage is the landowner and has maintenance responsibility for both parks and trails, and there needs to be some consistency between the different “gateways” that are used for each. They do not need to be identical, but there should be some indication of common ownership and stewardship.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

From these considerations, the consultant team prepared Option 4 with direction from parks planning and parks maintenance. Option 4 provides the following elements:

Gateway: Concrete base with metal primary panel. Inclusion of trail name with reference to Dena'ina word for the creek/location. Wood uprights with Anchorage Trails Logo. Municipality of Anchorage Parks and Recreation represented on concrete base. Trail color as a design element.

Neighborhood Gateways: Wood post and panel arrangement that depicts neighborhood logos and has trail color incorporated. Also includes a sleeve of Native art patterns.

Kiosk: Offset roof sections with "mountain" structure reference. Map and user information on graphic surface. Trail color represented in text on sign.

Roadway direction signage: Meets Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices requirements that govern roadways. Anchorage Trails Logo with direction information in color. Upright is Telespar or wood.

Trail direction signage: Two types, 1-post and panel, and 2-totem. Post and panel has more verbiage and is appropriate for major trail intersections. Upright is wood and matches Neighborhood gateway design. Totem is for simpler applications and uses logos and smaller panels for messages.

Mile markers: Simple wood post that could be either supported by metal footing or imbedded directly in the ground. Includes both the trail name and trail color, with mile/kilometer marker and emergency locator information.

All applications would use emergency locator plaques to denote location for first responders.

NEXT STEPS: APPROVAL AND PILOT PROJECT

The schedule of the project is as follows:

Parks Commission Approval:	May 12, 2016
Completion of Design Documents:	June 15, 2016
Pilot Project:	July 1 - October 2016

The pilot project is proposed to connect from the northern termination of the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail (near downtown) to the Ship Creek Trail, through Mountain View, connecting to both the Glenn Highway Trail and to Russian Jack Springs Park. That work is being done in concert with the Anchorage Community Land Trust which is funding the pilot project. That pilot project will "test" the different applications of the sign types, which will allow us to define in "final" form the signage that will be applied throughout the Anchorage trails system.

The next step of the process is the development of mapping and an interactive application that will be usable on a mobile phone.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Department of Parks and Recreation believes that Option 4 as presented represents a combination of community input, maintenance concerns, and design "aesthetic" appropriate for Anchorage trails and recommends approval by the Parks and Recreation Commission.



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PRC RESOLUTION NO. 2016-14

**A Resolution Of The Anchorage Parks And Recreation Commission Addressing
Wayfinding For The Anchorage Trails System**

WHEREAS, the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission serves in an advisory capacity to both the Mayor and the Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission has the responsibility and duty to provide for the long-term vision of our park system by ensuring that a balance of parks, natural resources, and recreation facilities provides for the health, welfare, and safety of all residents of the Anchorage Bowl; and,

WHEREAS, Anchorage has a very large visitor population that has become aware of the expansive nature of the Anchorage trail system and that population is in need of wayfinding that directs them to locations of interest and prevents them from becoming lost;

WHEREAS, public surveys indicate that numbers of Anchorage residents are confused within the Anchorage trail system and are not familiar with where Anchorage trails are located;

WHEREAS, numbers of Anchorage residents indicate that they would use trails more often if they knew where Anchorage trails were and where they took trail users;

WHEREAS, many people feel unsafe on the trails because they fear becoming lost;

WHEREAS, on May 12, representatives of the Parks and Recreation Department provided a presentation of the Draft standards for the Anchorage trail system wayfinding that would address Anchorage's needs to address safety and wayfinding needs;

WHEREAS, the representatives summarized the public process that included public meetings, stakeholder meetings, and a public opinion poll;

WHEREAS, the public provided review of three options with comments concerning these options;

WHEREAS, staff and consultants developed an Option 4 to address community input and Anchorage Parks operations concerns;

and WHEREAS, staff's presentation presented an aesthetic and logical solution to providing a wayfinding system that would address wayfinding, maintenance, and safety concerns;

NOW, THEREFORE, ANCHORAGE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION RESOLVES:

The ANCHORAGE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION approves staff's recommendation for Option 4 as a preferred option for Anchorage's trails wayfinding system.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Commission this 12th day of May, 2016.

Chair
Parks and Recreation Commission

ATTEST:

John Rodda, Director
Parks & Recreation Department