

FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH  
Chena Riverfront Commission  
September 22, 2021  
12:07 p.m.

A regular meeting of the Chena Riverfront Commission was held Wednesday, September 22, 2021, in the Mona Lisa Drexler Assembly Chambers of the Juanita Helms Administration Center, 907 Terminal Street, Fairbanks, Alaska.

**ROLL CALL**

There were present appearing telephonically and in person:

Diana Campbell	Robert Henszey
Julie Jones (Joined at 1:10 p.m.)	Gregory Barker
Lee Wood	Annette Freiburger, Vice-Chairperson
Buki Wright, Chairperson	

Comprising a quorum of the Commission, and

Sharon Wittenkeller, Administrative Assistant III, Clerk  
Kellen Spillman, Acting Community Planning Director  
Melissa Kellner, Acting Community Planning Deputy Director  
Donnie Hayes, Parks and Recreation, Director  
Brian Charlton, Parks and Recreation, Project Coordinator  
Andrew Ackerman, City of Fairbanks, Environmental Manager  
John Netardus, State of Alaska DOT&PF, Engineer/Architect II  
Jackson Fox, FAST Planning, Executive Director  
Ashley Carrick, Tanana Valley Watershed Association, Executive Director

Absent & Excused

Wade Binkley

**MESSAGES**

1. Chair's Comments

Chair Wright reminded everyone to mute their microphones on Zoom when they are not speaking and warned he could possibly experience technical difficulties with his connection on Zoom.

**Messages – continued**

2.a. Citizen’s Comments on agenda items not scheduled for public hearing.

NONE

2.b. Citizen’s Comments on items other than those appearing on the agenda.

NONE

3. Disclosure & Statement of Conflict of Interest

NONE

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND CONSENT AGENDA**

Chair Wright requested to move item H.1. ahead of item G.1. on the agenda.

HENSZEY,  
Seconded by WOOD

moved to approve the agenda as re-ordered and consent agenda as read.

VOTE ON MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS RE-ORDERED AND CONSENT AGENDA AS READ.

Yeses: Barker, Campbell, Henszey, Wood, Freiburger, Wright

Noes: None

MOTION CARRIED 6 Yeses, 0 Noes

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

1. \*Chena Riverfront Commission Meeting Minutes of August 25, 2021.

Without objection this measure was read by title and approved under the consent agenda.

**REPORTS**

1.a. Status updates on Chena Riverfront Commission Project List by Acting Community Planning Director Kellen Spillman.

Kellen Spillman, Acting Community Planning Director, explained the Chena Riverfront Commission Project List was updated and informed the Commission if anyone had updates or additions to include on the project list to let him know. Mr. Spillman noted

## **REPORTS – continued**

Community Planning staff vacancies and a rezone application that was submitted for property along the Chena River in the Smith Ranch neighborhood which will be forwarded to the Chena Riverfront Commission for review.

### 1.b. Status Update of Letter of Support to FAST Planning regarding River Safety Signage.

Chair Wright explained the letter of support was completed and sent.

### 1.c. Status of the State of Alaska Chena River State Recreation Site (Wayside) by Brian Charlton Project Coordinator with the Parks and Recreation Department.

Brian Charlton, Parks and Recreation Project Coordinator, shared the reply he received from State Parks, which noted the Chena River State Recreation Site will remain closed for the time being. They expressed they are currently strategizing on what the future of the site looks like. Unfortunately, they do not know what this means for the 2022 season. Mr. Charlton has the contact information if anyone would like to discuss it with them further.

Mr. Charlton expressed his understanding of the situation, which was, there were issues with partying, homeless frequenting, and difficulty with enforcement because it is a state facility within the city. It was also his understanding that due to staffing issues they are on hold and will not be open for the 2022 summer.

Mr. Charlton further noted from his experience working at the facility, is the rangers experienced challenges dealing with the facility. The facility needs a full-time employee, and it is operated by volunteers.

Commissioner Henszey commented it is worth looking into seeing if there is something the Commission can do. He further explained it is one of the few areas that has native vegetation growing along the Chena River.

Mr. Charlton stated a letter to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Parks Commissioner or Director stating their support for keeping the facility could be useful.

Chair Wright inquired if Commissioner Henszey would draft a letter of support before the next meeting. Commissioner Henszey accepted.

### 1.d Status Update on the Alaska DOT&PF Riverfront Projects by John Netardus.

John Netardus, State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), provided status updates on the following DOT&PF riverfront projects:

## **REPORTS – continued**

University Avenue, Wendell Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Growden Park path, Chena River Walk Phase III, Airport Way West, Cushman Street Bridge, Steese Bridge Redecking, and Cowles Street Reconstruction.

Chair Wright inquired on the following:

- Growden Park Project, status of seeding and who is responsible for the interpretative signs. It was answered dormant seeding is going down this week and the interpretive signs were done by FNSB Parks and Rec, Brian Charlton and team, who conducted the research.
- Cushman Street Bridge Project, projection of the bridge closure and how it would be detoured. It was answered most likely a year bridge closure, and Mr. Netardus stated he would follow up with definitive answers.
- Cowles Street Project, construction year. It was unknown at the time.

Andrew Ackerman, City of Fairbanks, Environmental Manager, inquired about the new ADA ramps in relation to the Cowles Street Project; whether it is due to the project being extended into the 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue intersection or whether it is that the design originally neglected the ramps. It was answered, a little of both, it was neglected, and they did extend it.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

1. Review the Draft Pioneer Park Master Plan and determine if the plan is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Chena Riverfront Plan and make a recommendation to the Borough Mayor.

Kellen Spillman, Acting Community Planning Director, expressed FNSB Mayor Ward officially requested the Chena Riverfront Commission to weigh in on the Draft Pioneer Park Master Plan. They were hoping to receive action from the Commission at the meeting. He noted Donnie Hayes, Parks and Recreation Director, would provide the presentation and Melissa Kellner, Acting Community Planning Deputy Director, analyzed the Draft Pioneer Park Master Plan in terms of consistency with the Chena Riverfront Plan, and would follow up with comments.

It was noted this meeting was the best opportunity to weigh-in and provide action, as the draft plan is also going before the Planning Commission, and Assembly for an official resolution, and they appreciate input on the consistency with the Chena Riverfront Plan.

Donnie Hayes, Parks and Recreation Director, provided a presentation on the Draft Pioneer Park Master Plan and focused on some projects and ideas planned along the river.

## **NEW BUSINESS – continued**

Commissioners and Liaisons questioned and discussed with Mr. Hayes the following:

- Additional details on the Chena Heritage portion of the park; proposed buildings and how Chena River frontage is proposed to change.
  - It was noted the new facility would be relocated along Peger Road. The parking spaces along Peger Road would be increased, making parking more convenient, to be able to pull right up to the facility which would include such attractions as restaurants, gathering space, the Bear Gallery, office space for the Art Association, and a preschool. A new round-a-bout and parking spaces will also be constructed as well as a drive down dock. As the plan is in draft form, these are general ideas and none of the facilities have currently been engineered. Once funding is approved, work may begin on actual planning.
- Whether the plan includes expanding the grass contact with the river from what there is currently, or if it will be kept roughly the same. It was answered the grass area will not be directly moved onto the bank; it is all above, or south of, the actual trail itself where the trail will be added.
- Theater in the Centennial Hall; would there be space available for the theater in the multi-purpose space. It was answered there would not be a theater built in, but there will be the availability as a gathering space that has the option to have temporary staging built and portable seating.
- View deck on structures near the river; whether it is still within the plan. It was answered yes, on several structures.
- Whether the Alaska Railroad is planning to develop homes on the other side of Chena River Walk, and whether natural vegetation along the river will disappear. It was answered the area is zoned GU1 with a multitude of allowable uses within that zone. There are no immediate plans for development.

Melissa Kellner, Acting Community Planning Deputy Director, provided an overview on the consistency of the Draft Pioneer Park Master Plan with the Chena Riverfront Plan. Two similar themes particular to the river within the plans are access to the river and the community's connection to the river. Other similar themes included location, facilities' projects such as viewing platforms, interpretive signs, seating, food vendor near the river, improved parking near the river, a new north entrance and a new north pavilion, public-private partnerships help meet the Chena Riverfront Plan goals.

Ms. Kellner further explained her review of the Regional Comprehensive Plan broader goals, the Chena Riverfront Plan is a component of the Comp Plan, which the Chena Riverfront Commission and Planning Commission will take this into consideration for consistency between the two plans. Broader goals included land use goal 4, environmental goal 3, community and human resources goal 1.

## **NEW BUSINESS – continued**

The Community Planning Department recommended the Chena Riverfront Commission recognize the Draft Pioneer Park Master Plan as being consistent with the Chena Riverfront Plan.

Commissioner Campbell inquired about the native village, and if any of the original components would remain. It was answered yes, there will still be components of the Native Village including the totem poles, and restoration to one of the Kashims will occur. Parks and Recreation is exploring ways to partner with groups such as World Eskimo Indian Olympics (WEIO) to do presentations in the gathering space. One of the members of the advisory committee is a member of Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) and provided great feedback on ways in which the park can connect with Native Alaskan organizations.

Commissioner Campbell pointed out that Kashim comes from the northern Inupiat region, totems come from the southeast region, and there is a vibrant native community of Athabascan, and the Chena Indians in the interior region. Chena is an Athabascan name. Commissioner Campbell would like to see the rich heritage reflected within the park. The masks outside of the Civic Center are traditionally Inupiat or Yupik forms of art. She expressed the important connection of the river. She suggested a tour of Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center and the Doyon, Limited lobby, all of it was designed with the closeness to the seasons, land and rivers in mind.

Commissioner Freiburger supported the comments from Commissioner Campbell and added other groups were more represented. She noted, in the past FNA did have an active role when they had the native village going, presentations, plays, etc., but it was not sustainable. She was excited about the park plan, more access to the river and hopes to have a walkway on the other side of the river. She liked the idea of the parking spots being relocated, things moving away from the river, and opening it up. She expressed there is great compatibility with the goals of the Commission and applauded those who participated in the plan.

FREIBURGER,  
Seconded by CAMPBELL

moved to recommend to the FNSB Mayor and Assembly, per FNSBC 4.32.090(G), that the Draft Pioneer Park Master Plan is consistent with the Chena Riverfront Plan.

Commissioner Campbell asked if it had to be called "Pioneer Park" and expressed a better name would be Chena Park.

Chair Wright replied, yes, it has to be called Pioneer Park, because that is what it is. It is certainly worth talking about in the future, at the moment they don't have the ability to.

**NEW BUSINESS – continued**

Commissioner Jones stated public testimony was available for several months to provide feedback on the plan, but it is now closed.

Mr. Hayes expressed in the draft master plan there is a section which addresses the community’s concerns about the name of the park. The plan does not state they are going to change the name, but it does state it is something that needs to be discussed in a much stronger, more open public comment period. It was too large of a project to focus on specifically in the draft master plan, but it is built into it to address in the future.

VOTE ON MOTION TO RECOMMEND TO THE FNSB MAYOR AND ASSEMBLY, PER FNSBC 4.32.090(G), THAT THE DRAFT PIONEER PARK MASTER PLAN IS CONSISTENT WITH THE CHENA RIVERFRONT PLAN.

Yeses: Henszey, Campbell, Wood, Freiburger, Jones, Barker, Wright

Noes: None

MOTION CARRIED 7 Yeses, 0 Noes

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

- 1. Update and possible recommendation on the maintenance of the Chena Riverwalk Phase III Project by Jackson Fox, FAST Planning and Community Planning.

Mr. Spillman shared an updated from Mr. Fox; no new updates, other than they anticipate opening the right-of-way phase for the federal project in October. Preliminary discussions with the City of Fairbanks, indicate they may be willing to take on summer maintenance if Borough Parks and Recreation assisted with winter maintenance. The maintenance commitment has not been discussed at the council finance committee meeting, both decisions have yet to be made. Mr. Spillman recommended keeping this item on the agenda for the next meeting.

**EXCUSE FUTURE ABSENCES**

NONE

**COMMISSIONER’S COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS**

Commissioner Henszey stated he was pleased with the Draft Pioneer Park Master Plan presentation.

## **COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS – continued**

Mr. Charlton credited Laura Minski for the interpretive signs at Growden Park path.

Mr. Spillman commented on behalf of Mr. Fox, noting Mr. Fox submitted a Borough Capital Improvement Project (CIP) project nomination for the Chena Riverfront safety signage as an official project to be included in the CIP, which included the letter of support from the Chena Riverfront Commission, Borough Parks and Recreation, Fairbanks Paddlers, and the Storm Water District.

Ms. Kellner was pleased to attend the meeting and appreciated Mr. Hayes presentation. She noted Mr. Hayes will also present the Draft Pioneer Park Master Plan to the Historic Preservation Commission at their next meeting on October 6, 2021 and ensuring all the boards and commissions are included in the process.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Chena Riverfront Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 1:33 p.m.

APPROVED: October 27, 2021