

Land Management Focus Group Meeting

Project Name: Waterfront and Economic Development Plan
Project No.: WHI-24-01
Prepared By: Linda Pringle

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Time: 2:00 pm

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Focus Group:

Name	Organization	Contact
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Discussion:

Item Topic

1.0 Introduction

Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC)

- Owns a lot of property within the city limits and working closely with the City of Whittier towards a potential exchange or sale of some of these lands.

United States Forest Service (USFS)

- Not a lot of USFS lands within city limits, but there is +/- 2 million acres of forest land within the surrounding Chugach National Forest.
- Leases three boat slips from the City of Whittier (City), two for the district and one for law enforcement, and use these boat slips to access USFS lands in Prince William Sound (PWS).
- Approximately 30 outfitter guides operating with special use permits that operate tours to the Chugach National Forest out of the Whittier waterfront.

Chenega Regional Development Group

- Whittier is a gateway for transporting personnel, residents, construction workers, etc. back and forth to Chenega as well as private lodges.
- Own two slips in the Cliffside Marina
- Not a land owner within Whittier, but within the surrounding area in PWS.

Huna Totem Corporation

- Operates the new cruise ship terminal at the Head of the Bay (HOB).

2.0 Limitations or Impacts to Quality of Experience

Chris Stewart: the law enforcement boat is long and makes it difficult to operate. Access to a larger slip would be a huge benefit.

Jake Maxwell: More signage, better turnarounds, designated areas for parking. Freight loading area and boat repair stations.

Christy Terry: Extending utilities out to the HOB parcels. Currently, they have access to gas and electric, but water, sewer, fiber, would be a huge benefit. Property values and the attractiveness of development on these parcels would all increase if additional utilities were provided.

Tim Lydon: There has been extensive development of best management practices (BMP) developed with the City, PWS Economic Development District (PWSEDD), and PWS Stewardship Foundation (PWSSF). Keeping these in the periphery to see how they overlap with development would be beneficial. Additionally, security of the City's garbage from bears is a major issue. Better development of infrastructure to improve this situation is needed. Bears will even swim in the harbor to access boats. How can human/bear interactions be improved?

3.0 User Conflicts

Scott Korbe: The uplands parking lot and pedestrian access to Phillips Cruise and Tours interferes with rail and state highway area. There is no designated area for ferry traffic to park to sign in or purchase tickets. This impacts the harbor launching facility and access to commercial properties and the railyard. Tourists are often driving around, RVs trying to access the waterfront. This impacts the ferry and railroad operations.

Tim Lydon: There is also overlap with the USFS trying to provide access for the use of USFS lands beyond Whittier that conflicts with the parking and access to the waterfront. One thing that they have heard from the public is kayaking, with launch access points being limited and difficult to find. Typically, this is focused on Smitty's Cove which has conflicting uses and congestion, making it challenging to use.

Scott Korbe: There are both commercial kayakers running businesses and excursions that are trying to launch tours and rentals and then recreational kayakers launching privately.

Christy Terry: One big conflict in the winter is snow storage and snow removal. This is a constraint that they are continuously needing to work through each year.

4.0 Opportunities

Jake Maxwell: Connex's and pieces of equipment (storage) for running things back and forth. Leasing out smaller parcels or more readily available pads to stage equipment.

Tor Wallen: at least through the winter they are staying on generator, may move down the road to get terminal electrified. Exploring on non-cruise ship weeks that they may open parking facility to non-cruise ship traffic to help alleviate the congestion downtown.

Christy Terry: don't always know what opportunities are out there until you have utilities out at these locations. What electric infrastructure do you need to have in place to have housing and to have a large hotel.

Jake Maxwell: has there been any discussion looking at a boat launch at the Head of the Bay?

Tor Wallen: various partners with cruise lines looking at what they can do at the Head of the Bay. At this point, it is looking at an open slate.

Scott Korbe: City has explored an option for a 3 or 4 lane boat launch and small breakwater. Boat launch seemed small and due to COVID they shelved the project. There is the opportunity to re-size and explore a larger breakwater. They liked the direction. Hoping that with this plan and with new partners that this conversation can be re-opened and re-analyzed for discussion.

5.0 Future Plans

Scott Korbe: What plans does the USFS have at Trinity Point and the Portage Pass Trail?

Chris Stewart:

- Trinity Point – City is currently building the Shotgun Cove Road. There is a small parcel on the water at the end of the road that is on USFS lands. The USFS is currently in the middle of a NEPA process with the idea to create a recreation site on this parcel. When the road is

completed and NEPA process is finished, the intent is to have waterfront beach access for kayaking, picnicking, and a small public use cabin for reservation, with bathroom facilities planned for the site as well.

- Portage Pass Trailhead – closer to the HOB, there is a USFS trailhead for the Portage Pass Trail that takes you over the pass to see the Portage Glacier. This is a heavily used trail and there have been many parking conflicts in the past, with some instances of people parking in the railway corridor. The USFS is about half way done with the development of a new, larger parking area for the trailhead (approximately 100+ stalls). There is other improvement potential here as well. A washed out culvert that may be replaced with a bridge.
- Beyond Portage Valley it is classified as a wilderness study area that has a lot more restrictions for any types of development and access.

Christy Terry: Watching the development happening with Girdwood and the new owner at the Alyeska Ski Resort. The ARRC also has a section house at the confluence with the highway, where they are developing another section house in this area.

End of Meeting