

FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH
Chena Riverfront Commission
October 27, 2021
12:02 p.m.

A regular meeting of the Chena Riverfront Commission was held Wednesday, October 27, 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	Gregory Barker (Joined at 12:20/Left at 1:10)
Lee Wood	Wade Binkley
Annette Freiburger, Vice-Chair	Buki Wright, Chair

Comprising a quorum of the Commission, and

Sharon Wittenkeller, Administrative Assistant III, Clerk
Kellen Spillman, Acting Community Planning 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
Ivet Hall, State of Alaska DOT&PF, Engineering Manager
Bill Rogers, City of Fairbanks, Engineer Assistant II

Absent & Excused

NONE

MESSAGES

1. Chair's Comments

Chair Wright reminded commissioners with expiring terms, if they would like to be reappointed to the commission, to submit an application by November 22, 2021 for appointment at the Borough Assembly Meeting in December. Chair Wright also commented on current commission vacancies and an upcoming meeting he scheduled with Mayor Ward to discuss the vacancies of the commission. Chair Wright will provide a report on the discussion with Mayor Ward at the next meeting.

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.

Kellen Spillman, Acting Community Planning Director, thanked Chair Wright for reminding the commission of vacancies and expiring terms. Mr. Spillman stated his concerns of obtaining quorum at meetings in the next year if seats are not filled and encouraged commissioners to reapply even if temporarily while they fill vacancies. Mr. Spillman provided updates on Community Planning new hires, State Law changes that allow all-terrain vehicles (ATV) on public roadways lesser than 45 miles per hour, and departure of Sharon Wittenkeller as Clerk of the Commission. Mr. Spillman provided information on the Smith Ranch neighborhood rezone adjacent to the Chena River to go before the Planning Commission, focusing on the waterway setback overlay, and requested this be a discussion item at the next meeting.

The Commission questioned Mr. Spillman of the status of lots sold on Fouts Avenue, the timeline of a future discussion on the Smith Ranch rezone, whether there are any applications on hold for appointment to the commission, the applicant of the Smith Ranch rezone, and an overview of the Smith Ranch rezone overlay and special limitation.

3. Disclosure & Statement of Conflict of Interest

NONE

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND CONSENT AGENDA

HENSZEY,
Seconded by BINKLEY

moved to approve the agenda and consent
agenda as read.

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

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

Noes: None

MOTION CARRIED 7 Yeses, 0 Noes

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. *Chena Riverfront Commission Meeting Minutes from September 22, 2021.

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

REPORTS

1. Update on CIP, Chena River Safety Signage Project Nomination, by Brian Charlton, Parks and Recreation.

Brian Charlton, Parks and Recreation Department Project Coordinator, provided a status update on the Chena River Safety Signage Project, noting it did not make the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) list. Mr. Charlton explained Mayor Ward is interested in supporting the project, however, by means other than CIP program, such as direct appropriation from the general fund by creating an ordinance to support the project or a small dollar grant from the borough.

Kellen Spillman, Acting Community Planning Director, added the Community Planning Department may be able to assist with the project after review of the department's budget in January.

Mr. Charlton added they are moving forward with the Graehl Park revitalization project design this winter, which includes signage.

2. Update on FAST Planning Bloomberg Philanthropies 'Asphalt Initiative Grant' by Jackson Fox, FAST Planning.

Jackson Fox, FAST Planning Executive Director, provided an update on FAST Planning's \$25,000 grant award through the Bloomberg Philanthropies Asphalt Art Initiative to artistically paint design concepts on 5th Avenue and Lacey Street summer 2022. Artistic designs on 5th Avenue, between Barnette and Cushman Street, would show a one-way one-lane concept with widened sidewalks and green stripes at the back of sidewalks. On Lacey Street between the 10th and 12th Avenue blocks, they will be painting the full width of the roadway, minus the center stripe, to demonstrate both a linear park concept and blended corridor. Mr. Fox stated this winter they will call for proposals from artists and artist teams to submit their concepts and in March or April they will select up to four artists or teams to complete the project summer 2022. Mr. Fox added he will provide updates as the project progresses.

REPORTS - continued

Commissioners questioned and discussed with Mr. Fox the following:

- Which part of the road would turn from two lanes to one; it was answered, 5th Avenue between Cushman Street and Barnette Street is currently two travel lanes wide going in one direction. The current design concept for 5th Avenue is to narrow the travel lane to one travel lane on 5th Avenue, from Barnette Street to Noble Street.
- Whether this is a temporary project, being implemented and removed in one or two years; it was answered, that is correct.
- After removal, whether 5th Avenue will remain a one lane road; it was answered, that is correct, currently it is two lanes and planned to be reconstructed as a one lane road in 2023. This project allows the public to see what this will look and feel like and provide feedback one year in advance of construction.

Ashley Carrick, Tanana Valley Watershed Association (TVWA) Executive Director, congratulated FAST Planning and explained their project in combination with TVWAs smaller annual storm drain art will bring something to look forward to next summer.

3. Status Update on the Cowles Street Reconstruction Project by Ivet Hall, AK DOT&PF.

Ivet Hall, State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) Engineering Manager, provided an overview of the project which is designed to improve Cowles Street from the intersection at East Cowles Street on the south end near the hospital, and from Airport Way to 1st Avenue. The project will include re-pavement of the roadway, rebuild of current sidewalks, and construction of new sidewalks on the west side of Cowles Street where there currently are none. Ms. Hall provided information of the existing conditions at 1st Avenue and Cowles Street, including a curb ramp which does not currently meet the American Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

Bill Rogers, City of Fairbanks, Engineer Assistant II, expanded on Ms. Hall's presentation noting consideration will need to be given to pedestrian safety regarding placement of signage or rapid flash beacons at the curb ramp.

Commissioner Wood inquired if there will be improvements to traffic flow at the 1st Avenue and Cowles Street intersection; it was answered, it is not in the plan currently, but they could possibly look into it.

John Netardus, DOT&PF representative, inquired if the north portion of the project is scheduled for 2025; Ms. Hall answered, the project will be advertised in two phases, one north of Airport Way and the other south of Airport Way.

REPORTS – continued

Mr. Fox explained the project is phased due to size, north being funded in 2025 and south hopefully in 2026.

Commissioners questioned and discussed with Ms. Hall and Mr. Rogers the following:

- A need for bicycle ramps on the pathway located near 10th Avenue and Cowles Street. Ms. Hall responded; when construction is complete, there will be 10-foot striped lanes with 4-foot shoulders for bicycles. She added it was a good comment and they will look into it. Mr. Rogers stated he would speak to City of Fairbanks, City Engineer, Bob Pristash to see what they can do to improve safety.
- Pedestrian safety concerns and lack of designated pedestrian crossing on the 1st Avenue and Cowles Street intersection.
- Suggestion of traffic study at 1st Avenue and Cowles Street intersection.
- Whether there would be a dedicated and marked bike lane along the shoulders on Cowles Street; it was answered by Ms. Hall, that is for the City of Fairbanks to determine because they will be maintaining the facility. The DOT&PF does not mark bike lanes, they build shoulders that meet the requirements of bike lanes. Mr. Rogers further explained, they are hesitant to mark anything as a bike lane, because it would have to be maintained as a bike lane during winter months when often the shoulders are used as snow storage spaces.

Andrew Ackerman, City of Fairbanks, Environmental Manager, commented the lack of connection at the Wien Park crossing is included in the 2021 Approved FAST Planning Non-Motorized Transportation Plan as medium priority project #2, page 27 of their plan.

4. Status Updates on the Alaska DOT&PF Riverfront Projects by John Netardus, AK DOT&PF.

John Netardus, State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) representative, provided status updates on Chena Riverwalk Phase III, Airway Way West Improvements, Cushman Street Bridge Replacement, University Avenue Rehab and Widening, Wendell Avenue Bridge, Third Street widening and reopening delays, Steese Bridge Redecking project, Growden Area Accessibility Improvements and the Cowles Street Reconstruction projects.

REPORTS – continued

The Commission, staff and Liaisons questioned and discussed with Mr. Netardus the following:

- Reasons for the delay of opening the east to west portion of Third Street at the roundabout; it was answered, the delays are stemmed from the delay in getting the traffic signals up.
- Reasons for the delays on traffic signals at Hamilton Avenue and Old Steese Highway; it was answered, all traffic signal lights are on back order.
- Whether the new pedestrian paths underneath the bridge abutments at the Wendell Avenue Bridge will be open this winter; it was answered, it was unknown and will be looked into. Mr. Charlton added the path on the north side will not be completed until summer 2022.
- University Avenue Bridge is open, Chena Riverfront Commission spent a lot time picking out the railings, but DOT&PF put up 8-foot fences for 150 feet on either side of the river before you get to the railings.
- Further discussion ensued on the material of the 8-foot fences and their location. Further explanation will be included in Mr. Netardus' report at the next meeting.
- Reasons for not being able to have decorative railings for the Steese Highway Bridge, and why it is safe enough for the University Avenue Bridge and not the Steese Highway Bridge; it was answered, it was a higher speed and they are working with the wood they have, and they are not redecking it. They may not have the real estate on the bridge deck to be able to fit the rails and have room for pedestrians, cars and safety measures. Mr. Netardus will look further into it.

5. Status Updates on Chena Riverfront Commission Project List by Kellen Spillman, Acting Community Planning Director.

Kellen Spillman, Acting Community Planning Director, did not have any updates on the projects and noted he amended the documents for any small updates and record keeping purposes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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

Jackson Fox, FAST Planning Executive Director, noted there are no maintenance updates and explained at their FAST Policy Board meeting, they authorized \$224,000 to open up the right-of-way phase of the project for DOT&PF to begin negotiations with the Alaska Railroad Corporation for a long-term land lease for the placement of the path.

NEW BUSINESS

- 1. Review and Approve Letter of Support to FNSB Mayor Ward or Ricky Gease, Alaska State Parks Director, on the Chena River State Recreation Site (Wayside) by Commissioner Henszey, Chena Riverfront Commission.

Commissioner Henszey provided an overview of the letter of support. Further discussion ensued on who to address the letter too.

HENSZEY,
Seconded by WOOD

moved to approve the letter of support that the FNSB works with State Parks to ensure that the Chena River State Recreation Site (Wayside) remain open in the future, as presented, to Mayor Ward, Mayor Matherly, State Parks and Recreation Director and copy the FNSB Parks and Recreation Commission.

VOTE ON MOTION TO APPROVE THE LETTER OF SUPPORT THAT THE FNSB WORKS WITH STATE PARKS TO ENSURE THAT THE CHENA RIVER STATE RECREATION SITE (WAYSIDE) REMAIN OPEN IN THE FUTURE, AS PRESENTED, TO MAYOR WARD, MAYOR MATHERLY, STATE PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR AND COPY THE FNSB PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION.

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

Noes: None

MOTION CARRIED 7 Yeses, 0 Noes

EXCUSE FUTURE ABSENCES

NONE

COMMISSIONER’S COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

Commissioner Binkley thanked Clerk Wittenkeller and wished her luck.

Commissioner Campbell thanked Clerk Wittenkeller and stated it was nice to see everyone again.

Commissioner Freiburger thanked Clerk Wittenkeller for her outstanding support and best wishes in her new position.

COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS – continued

Commissioner Henszey echoed Commissioner Freiburger's comments and expressed support for the opening of the University Avenue Bridge and opposition to the blinds placed at the edge of the bridge.

Commissioner Jones congratulated Clerk Wittenkeller on her promotion and hoped everyone would tune in to a documentary to honor veterans being aired the evening of November 11 on channels 11 and 13.

Chair Wright reminded commissioners whose terms are expiring to submit an application to renew their appointment and expressed his gratitude and well wishes to Clerk Wittenkeller.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Chena Riverfront Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 1:31 p.m.