

Correspondence



RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCCC)
A Forum for Respectful Communication & Community Relations



1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100 / Anchorage, AK 99503

March 11, 2021

Comments on SB74 – Request to Include Potter Marsh Improvements, from RCCC

Honorable Senate Transportation Committee:

These comments are being provided on behalf of the Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) related to Senate Bill No. 74 (SB74), providing for and relating to the issuance of bonds for state infrastructure projects. Specifically, we ask that the Legislature include \$620,000 in SB74 to complete upgrades to the parking and visitor facilities at the south end pullout at Potter Marsh, including addition of a viewing deck to the north end boardwalk.

We understand that the Governor has proposed about \$356 million in bonds, subject to voter approval. These bonds would leverage over \$1 billion in federal matching funds, and would be expended for a wide variety of projects with the goal of stimulating our state economy. In light of the challenges that have faced Alaska residents and our economy as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating our continued lack of diversity in state revenue sources, this bill would provide immense benefits to our state and our people. If passed and signed into law, SB74 would result in tremendous benefits and gains in terms of jobs, public safety, transportation, communication, and infrastructure maintenance as the involved state and federal funds are expended.

The RCCC is one of 38 Community Councils in Anchorage. We provide a critical connection for neighbors to participate in government and local affairs. Our area in southeast Anchorage encompasses Potter Marsh, a significant component of the State's Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge. The RCCC has gone on the record on numerous occasions in support of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge, and specifically, Potter Marsh. Potter Marsh is a crown jewel in our area. Potter Marsh, and the Old Seward Highway comprising its eastern boundary, are a vital source of outdoor recreation from bird watching and photography to ice skating, skiing, walking, running, and roller skiing. Potter Marsh supports an abundance of avian, fish, and other natural resources that fuel the use and enjoyment people derive from the area. These all add to the quality of life for our area, and in this past pandemic year, the outdoor opportunities presented by Potter Marsh have been even more important – not only to Rabbit Creek residents, but to many, many other Anchorage residents and visitors as well. Additionally, Potter Marsh's many desirable features make it a prime destination in Anchorage for the tourism economy.

Unfortunately, one crucial partner in the Potter Marsh improvements project was unable to provide their full match, project cost estimates have proven higher than originally projected, and recent changes in Federal Highways Administration rules mean that one project feature needs another funding source. This leaves the previously fully funded \$1.4 million project (Potter Marsh Site Improvements Project No. 74150-1) with a \$620,000 shortfall (see attached concept plan and 38% design plans). The project is shovel-ready, and would deliver a number of valuable construction jobs, meeting SB74 goals to provide jobs. Moreover, it represents a positive enhancement to a neighborhood which lacks parking for access to outdoor open spaces and trails/walkways. It also

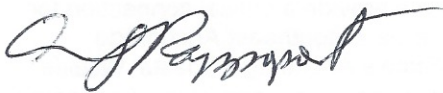
enhances a key local tourist destination – over 150,000 people annually visit the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge – this includes people from our neighborhood, as well as those from elsewhere in our state, nation, and the world. So the project will also be an economic benefit to our city and state.

This project is a public-private partnership, where the private funds have already been contributed. It is an extremely popular facility where people engage in a wide variety of activities both in and immediately adjacent to Potter Marsh. Both a neighborhood and community asset, Potter Marsh enjoys both neighborhood and broader community support. The project includes the addition of restrooms; highway restrooms are a limited commodity in our state. Their addition in this area will make it an even better destination for tourists, and better ensure the area does not become degraded or contaminated with trash and worse.

Our August, 9 2018, comments on the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions FY 2019-2022 Transportation Improvement Program are but one document identifying RCCC support for a plan to improve the Potter Marsh boardwalk and southern parking facility. Prior to that, the RCCC wrote the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities in support of the conceptual design prepared by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for improving pullouts along Potter Marsh, and maintaining access for wildlife viewing and recreation along Potter Marsh (June 4, 2017). Additionally, we have for over a decade advocated for improvements to the Old Seward Highway, which runs behind (to the east) of Potter Marsh. The adjacent Old Seward Highway is part of our overall support for the marsh because so many people use its inadequate and unsafe infrastructure and it is directly tied to the use and enjoyment of Potter Marsh. Improvements to this section of the Old Seward Highway have been at the top or near the top of the RCCC's recommendations on the Capital Improvement Program.

In summary, the Potter Marsh Site Improvements, with the \$620,000 needed for completion, will provide jobs and economic benefits; it will enhance opportunities to diversify our economy; and it is a source of significant recreational, outdoor, and physical, mental, and emotional benefits for neighbors and others. We ask for your support in including these funds in SB74.

Sincerely,



Ann Rappoport, Co-chair
Rabbit Creek Community Council



Carl Johnson, Co-chair
Rabbit Creek Community Council

Enclosures

cc: Senator Roger Holland
Representative James Kaufman