

Proposal to Anchorage Park Foundation

Johns Park Stairs Project

Organization Description

This project is organized, supported by, and managed by the Old Seward Oceanview Community Council (OSOVCC). This organization is a recognized Community Council within whose bounds the Johns Park project area is located. OSOVCC is actively engaged in monitoring and advising on issues impacting the quality of life of residents of the community council, holding regular meetings open to everyone, resident or not. OSOVCC has been involved with several Park improvement project in the past, organizing the Oceanview Park enhancements and upgrades project and the Stephenson Park upgrades, both in 2014; we also supported and participated in the Johns Park revitalization project in 2010. Project lead Stanton Moll is an officer with the OSOVCC, and this project has been endorsed by the community council. Formal letters of support from the OSOVCC require an official motion from the council; this will be provided but must observe the by-laws of the Council.

Project Description

Johns Park is a popular park, and therefore it is subject to substantial, at times intense, use pressure. The original transferal to City ownership stipulated that the property remain free of motorized vehicles, buildings, and diversion of Furrow Creek, and as well as an express desire to preserve the park as green space for wildlife. It has a multi-use connector trail popular with pedestrians, dog walkers, bikers, and other recreationalists. The undeveloped nature of the park gives it a “wild” aspect which is attractive to many casual users; it is this very attraction which poses a threat to the park. Furthermore, its location on the bluff above the Anchorage Coastal Refuge provides wonderful unobstructed views of the Refuge, Turnagain Arm, The Aleutian Range, and the Kenai Peninsula. The trails atop the bluff are used by various skiers, bikers, walkers, dog-walkers, bird watchers, wildlife enthusiasts, and so on. For a while people used the park for paintball battles, but that seems now to have ceased.

Moreover, Johns Park, and the mouth of Furrow Creek in particular, is the only access point to the Anchorage Coastal Refuge between Oceanview Bluff Park and Carr-Gottstein Park, and therefore receives a lot of foot, paw, hoof, bicycle, and ski traffic up and down the bluff at these locations. Popular trails run out from the mouth of Furrow Creek south onto the Refuge, from the “Eagle Aerie” at the westernmost edge of Johns Park (also south), and along the bottom of the bluff. Some of these trails are most popular during the winter, when access to the Refuge is easier, and others, especially at the top of the bluff, are more popular in the summer when the Refuge is too wet to enjoy.

The popularity of this park, and the people’s natural desire to enjoy the natural environment, is the focus of this grant application. Over time we have seen the trails widen during the muddy season; spread as deadfall blocks an established trail; trees harmed by exposing and damaging roots from foot traffic; casual vandalism from unwitting acts (carving initials into trees, stripping needles from twigs, dogs tugging at exposed roots and limbs, etc.), animal waste being, umm, deposited but not collected, etc.

The most concerning, however, is the traffic up and down the bluff on social trails that have developed on the bluff overlooking the mouth of Furrow Creek. These trails are treacherous due to mud, snow, ice, roots, and so on, and the act of avoiding these hazards has caused significant erosion and damage to tree trunks, branches, and roots. A concerned neighbor, identity unknown at this time, has fixed a climbing rope to the eastern approach as a handrail, with the intent of avoiding sliding and lessening erosion. The purpose of this grant would be to create an engineered solution to the problem on the west and east sides, to armor and protect these most at-risk trails and access points with the intent of mitigating and preventing further damage. This particular project does not address the access point at the Aerie on the westernmost edge of Johns Park. The following image from Google Maps shows the approximate vicinity of the area of concern:



The vision for this project is to design stairs, ramps, handrails, etc. to armor select areas of the trails and direct users onto them. The specific mode will be determined during the design phase, but for cost estimating purposes we assumed that timbers would be installed to create steps backfilled with gravel. Again, the primary purpose of this project will be to alleviate erosional stress and vegetation damage caused by traffic up and down the bluff at these points. Design work may determine that some of the approaches to the slopes may need protection as well. We see root damage on the north side of the eastern approach which might require special attention.

Public Support

As describe above, the OSOVCC has successfully promoted and navigated previous Parks projects. The community is engaged and involved, and so although we have not had a concerted outreach effort for this project to date, we anticipate easy passage of a Community Council resolution supporting this

project. Experience with the social networking app Nextdoor shows an active community willing to participate in community affairs, and therefore we expect to mount a campaign there. We also anticipate public outreach through local advertising mailers and free publications such as the Anchorage Press; announcements at the monthly community council meetings during the participation phase; bulletin board announcements at the local coffee shops, grocery stores, cafes, and other community gathering places. Our success with past Anchorage Parks projects gives us confidence that the many users of Johns Park, and concerned and involved citizens, will participate amply and gladly.