

A conceptual site plan for

THE HOMER LIBRARY'S WESTERN LOT

Prepared by the Friends of the Homer Library + partners

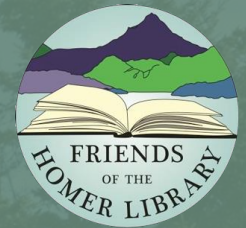


TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2 Acknowledgments
- 3 Introduction
- 5 Site Context
- 8 Community Process
- 9 Conceptual Site Plan
- 12 Design Inspiration
- 14 Prioritization and Next Steps



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PLANNING TEAM

Engaged in ongoing efforts to bring this project to life. They convened for monthly planning meetings (sometimes more!)



Friends of the Homer Library

- Lyn Maslow
- Ann Dixon
- Cheryl Illg



Homer Public Library

- Dave Berry
- Cinda Nofziger
- Sue Fallon

City of Homer

- Matt Steffy



National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

- Lizzy Dean
- Morgan Urquia
- Zach Babb
- Shawn Gardner

DESIGN PROFESSIONALS



Landscape Architects Peter Briggs and Elise Huggins provided *pro bono* assistance to participants in the

design charrette and developed multiple conceptual drawings for the site. Elise Huggins provided support to refine those ideas into a final concept drawing.



A broad range of community members were involved in re-envisioning this space!

ADVISORS

The expertise and guidance of the following people built the vision and goals of this plan:

Adele Person - Bunnell Street Arts Center
Argent Kvasnikoff - Ninilchik Traditional Council
Beth Trowbridge - Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies
Dylan Weiser - Grubstake Avenue neighbor
Jan Keiser - City of Homer Public Works
Janet Klein - local historian
Jennifer Gibbins - Pratt Museum & Park
Julie Engebretson - City of Homer Planning Division
Kim Fine - Homer Outdoor Learning Initiative

Kyra Wagner - Soil & Water Conservation District
Marie McCarty - Kachemak Heritage Land Trust

The FHL would like to thank the City Clerks, City Manager Rob Dumouchel, and Attorney Michael Gatti for their assistance. City Council expressed its support with- Reso. 21-018 and Reso. 23-030. Special thanks to the ADA Advisory Commission, the Library Advisory Board, and the Homer Parks, Art, Recreation and Culture Advisory Commission for their review and approval of the design.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary libraries are important hubs for building knowledge, relationships, and community resilience. The Homer Public Library has long desired to enhance its ability to serve the diverse needs of community members by making its outdoor space more attractive, educational, accessible and just plain fun!

In 2015, the Friends of the Homer Library (FHL) did some preliminary concept planning for the area adjacent to the library with Landscape Architect Peter Briggs. The project was revitalized in 2019 when the FHL applied for a technical assistance grant with the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA).

The Homer Library Western Lot project is a community-driven effort to re-envision the 2.24 acre parcel adjacent to the beloved Library.

In 2019, the planning team convened an advisory group, administered a trail user survey, and met with important stakeholders to understand the site and create a vision for its future state.

A broad range of community members participated in multiple on-site design charrettes. These were facilitated by RTCA and Alaska Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects Peter Briggs and Elise Huggins, who developed three concept ideas for the site.

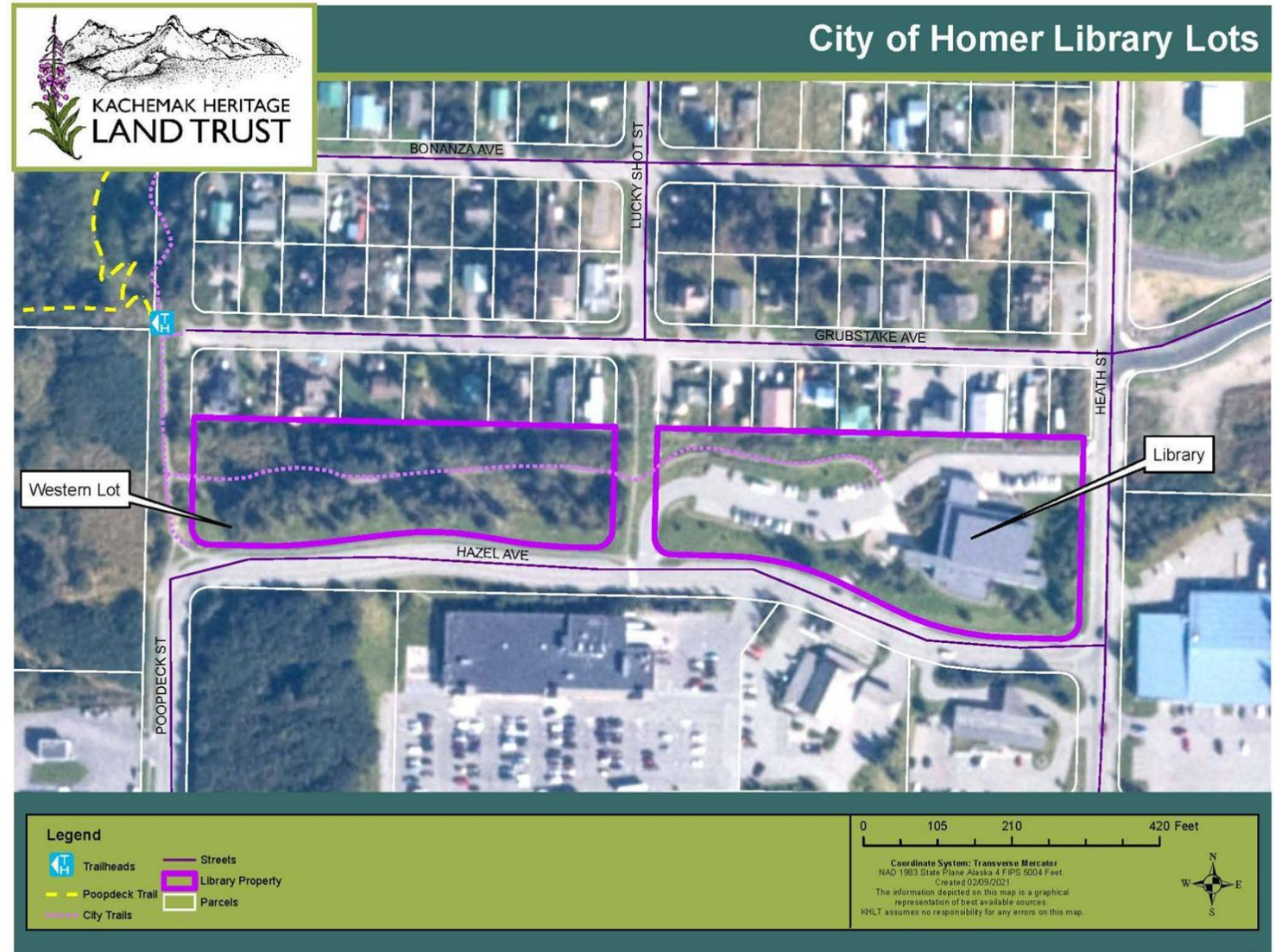
These concepts were presented to the public for feedback during Open House events and an online public survey. The planning team, with the design expertise of Elise Huggins, used this feedback to refine the alternatives into one final concept.



INTRODUCTION

The Western Lot is a 2.24 acre area due west of the Homer Library. It features an 8 foot wide gravel path surrounded by woodland, wetland, and long, grassy areas adjacent to Hazel Avenue. At the eastern end, the path connects to the Homer Library StoryWalk Trail and leads to the library itself. On the western end, the path connects to the Town Center trail system – the Poopdeck Platt Community Park Trail, Beach Trail, and Pioneer Avenue corridors. To the north, the site is bordered by residential houses on Grubstake Avenue.

The Western Lot is an officially managed property of the City of Homer and stewarded by the Friends of the Homer Library.



SITE CONTEXT

ECOSYSTEMS

This area includes wetlands, wooded areas, and grassy areas. The City of Homer's Wetlands map designates the entire area as wetland habitat. The northwest corner and an area east of the elevated knoll in the southeast section are priority areas for wetland conservation. Much of the area is wooded which enhances the natural resilience and provides a visual and



audio
buffer for Grubstake Avenue neighbors. The City has thinned low branches to improve site lines and promote safety for young families with children to enjoy the space. The wooded knoll, in the center of the site, is a favorite place to play.

FLORA & FAUNA

The plants are our “grocery store” and “pharmacy”¹. Common, important flora include alder, cow parsnip or wild celery, mountain ash, spruce, and willow. Perhaps the most important plant to Dena’ina and Alutiiq peoples is the spruce. The most prevalent type of spruce on the Western Lot is Lutz. Spruce trees are plentiful on the site, however they are threatened by spruce bark beetles and aphids. Janet Klein observed numerous bird

species in November of 2021, including the northwestern crow, common raven, bald eagle, and spruce grouse. Moose, porcupines, snowshoe hare, red squirrels, and other mammals can be found in the area.



CLIMATE

While the library is a small piece of Homer's future climate action, there are links between lessening potential climate impacts and attributes of the Western Lot. The forested areas may provide local cooling for projected temperature rise, wetlands may intercept runoff from increasing precipitation, and intact habitat may help species migrate. Changing winter processes may put increased stress on forests.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Sheet grass and reed canary grass are thriving on the site.

1. Exploring Alaska Show. Alexandra M. Lindgren, editor. No date. K'BEQ, “footprints”. Dena’ina knowledge shared by Dena’ina peoples along the Kenai River. Kenaitze Indian Tribe.

SITE CONTEXT

TRAILS

The site is bisected by an 8 foot wide gravel path. The City has plans to upgrade this trail. The site has very little detectable grade, making it accessible to folks of different abilities. Ice accumulates in winter, resulting in slippery conditions. The site's northeastern edge features a popular Story Walk Trail which begins at the library, heads west along the wide gravel path, and ends roughly at the site's center.

BUILT INFRASTRUCTURE

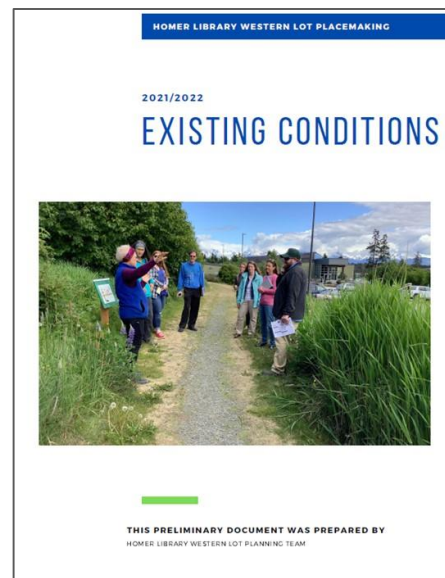
The site currently does not have any other built infrastructure, outside of the gravel path and the displays holding the StoryWalk pages.



ACCESS & CONNECTIVITY

The trail can be reached from the Poopdeck Platt Community Park Trail in the west, the Lucky Shot Trail in the east, or by continuing along the Story Walk Trail from the library building. The Library lot is a small piece of a larger network of trails, parks, and popular corridors for locals and tourists alike. Along either side of the Western Lot are north-south running trails that connect site users to businesses, other trails, parks, and their homes. This project will tie into other wayfinding efforts in town.

A full existing conditions assessment can be found in the report shown below.



PARKING

Library parking is adequate with roughly 50 public spaces and room for about 30 more vehicles to parallel park along Hazel Avenue. There are three designated ADA parking spots on the south side of the main parking lot, with a wheelchair ramp. Larger vehicles, such as RVs, are encouraged to park on the street.

MANAGEMENT

Currently, any tree removal, species management, and mowing are done by the City of Homer Public Works Department.



SITE CONTEXT

A trail user survey was administered in 2021 to better understand current use of the Western Lot and its main trail. Most people enjoyed walking the trail in the summertime. Many respondents gave ideas for the planning group to consider.



OPPORTUNITIES (not exhaustive)

- The Western Lot's central location can play a part to improve local connectivity.
- The existing trail has potential to be upgraded to ADA standards.
- The site's mixture of open, grassy, and wooded areas offers ample opportunity for a range of uses. A favorite spot to play is the central knoll.
- The area has seen a decrease in illicit activity with tree thinning and more positive, active use. More programming is likely to increase the site's welcomingness and safety.
- The northern edge of the site is forested, acting as a noise and visual buffer for Grubstake Avenue neighbors.
- The Library boasts stellar partners who can utilize the site through interpretation and programming.
- Research and monitoring can benefit students and stewardship alike.

USER GROUPS

- Library patrons
- Library program participants
- Commuters
- Walkers, dog walkers, birders, joggers, and other recreationists
- Families with young children
- Grubstake Avenue neighbors
- People experiencing homelessness
- Tourists
- Wildlife
- Youth, some of whom use the trail to go to and from Homer Middle School



CHALLENGES (not exhaustive)

- There is no wayfinding signage on the property
- Some people do not feel safe using the trail at night
- Lack of infrastructure (trash bins, benches)
- New infrastructure may increase vandalism and unintended uses
- Traffic and noise on Hazel Avenue pose challenges for safe programming
- The hydrology is dynamic; wetland areas have changed over time; runoff can cause flooding
- Stress on forest systems from aphids and increased temperatures may threaten spruce
- Volunteer stewardship can quickly lead to burnout

COMMUNITY PROCESS

The Friends of the Homer Library and partners have been working collaboratively to re-imagine this space as a beloved place!

MONTHLY MEETINGS

A core planning team, including Library staff, the FHL, NPS-RTCA, and the City of Homer met monthly online.

SITE AND COMMUNITY SURVEYS

- Over 90 Library patrons and Western Lot neighbors completed surveys in 2021.
- A City trail counter helped us understand use on the Western Lot.
- Site visit and survey findings were consolidated into a report.

LEARNING FROM THE SUMMER READING PROGRAM

Day campers with the 2022 Summer Reading Program gave insight into their favorite places to play and learn on the Western Lot.

PLACEMAKING WORKSHOPS

- ASLA Landscape Architects Peter Briggs and Elise Huggins led a placemaking workshop in the Spring of 2022.
- The FHL hosted another placemaking workshop with project partners in the Spring of 2022 at the Library.

OPEN HOUSES AND PUBLIC FEEDBACK

- Three conceptual drawings were presented to the public during a two-day Open House at the Library for feedback in the Fall of 2022.
- A public survey collected public comment on the concept alternatives. This feedback was summarized and used by the planning team to refine the final concept.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL

- The concept underwent review from Matt Steffy and Jan Keiser from Public Works and Julie Engebretson at the Planning Division.
- The City Clerks provided assistance navigating the process and both City Manager Rob Dumouchel and Attorney Michael Gatti offered advice.
- The ADA Advisory Commission, LAB, and PARCAC reviewed the design and gave it their approval.
- City Council expressed its support with two resolutions - Reso. 21-018 and 23-030.



CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN

Mission

Our mission is to support the vision of the Homer Public Library by enhancing the library's outdoor public land to foster education, cultural connections, and wellbeing in our community.

Vision

We envision a vibrant, accessible community space adjacent to the library where learning and nature give rise to a sense of discovery and delight.

Goals

Accessibility + Connectivity

Connect existing trails within the city, improve accessibility, and establish wayfinding signage.

Community Space

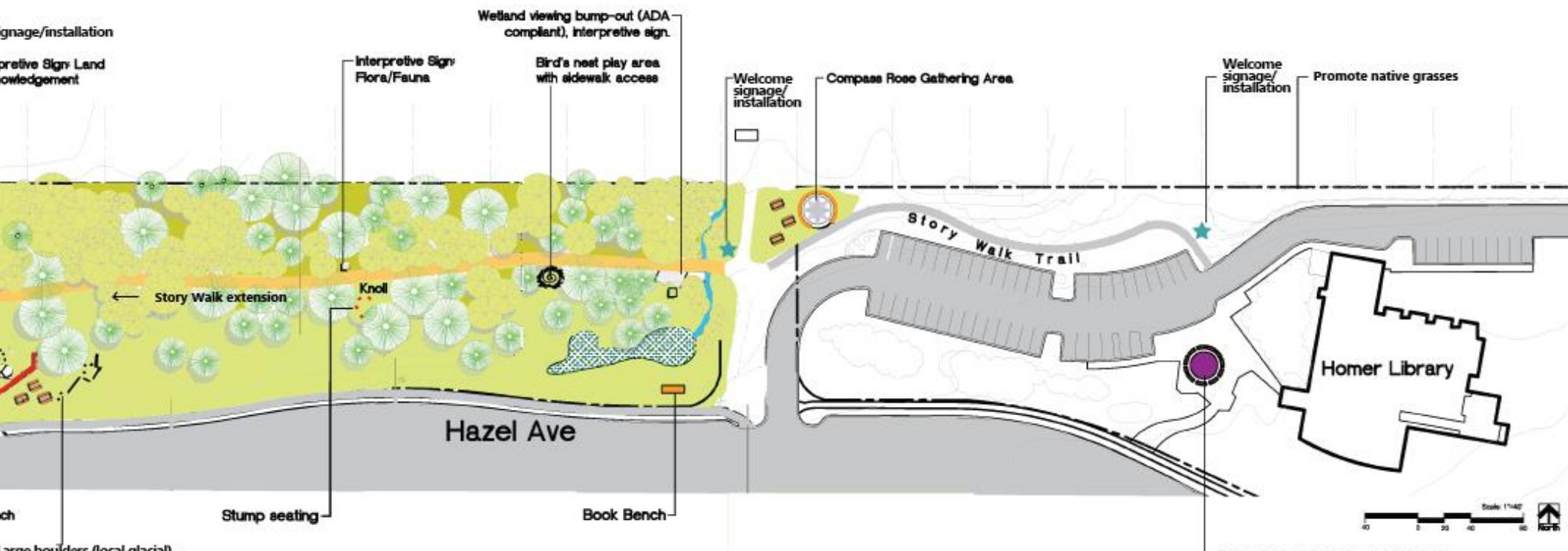
Create an outdoor gathering space that extends the mission of the library and invites people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds and interests.

Interpretation + Education

Educate and inspire curiosity about the cultural and natural history of Homer and the library's service area.

Stewardship + Sustainable Management

Conserve and provide perpetual access to the wetlands, peatlands, and natural areas that exist on the land.



Signage/installation
 Interpretive Sign Land
 Acknowledgement

Interpretive Sign
 Flora/Fauna

Wetland viewing bump-out (ADA
 compliant), interpretive sign.

Bird's nest play area
 with sidewalk access

Welcome signage/
 installation

Compass Rose Gathering Area

Welcome signage/
 installation

Promote native grasses

Story Walk extension

Knoll

Story Walk Trail

Hazel Ave

Homer Library

ch

Stump seating

Book Bench



Large boulders (local glacial),
 suitable animals, other balance activities
 wood, over/under tunnels, hillside
 built for safety, ecosystem protection, and
 science. Final siting and design to be developed.
 picnic tables and stump seating.

 Reading Tree:
 seating around
 tree, location to
 be determined

Future Project: Redesign front plaza to
 include covered outdoor space for
 education, reading and gathering.



Stump Seating



Bird's Nest Play Area



Wetland Viewing Platform



Reading Tree



Book Bench (ADA compliant)



Compass Rose Gathering Area

A vibrant, accessible community space adjacent to the Library where learning and nature give rise to a sense of discovery and delight.

CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN

ACCESSIBILITY

Existing accessibility standards for the City of Homer will be followed wherever possible.

Trail: The City of Homer will complete trail upgrades to improve the accessibility of the trail.

Interpretive signage: Consult with accessibility groups in Homer including the Independent Living Center for consideration of QR codes and auditory cues on interpretive and wayfinding signage

Natural Play Area: Ensure at least some play features are accessible from the ADA-compliant trail and/or sidewalk

MAINTENANCE

The Friends of the Homer Library will raise the required funds to purchase and install design features, with the exception of the accessibility upgrades to the trail. Features will be selected for their longevity and low maintenance.

All maintenance will be completed by the City of Homer.



DESIGN INSPIRATION

All design features will abide by existing City of Homer design and accessibility standards.

NATURAL PLAY AND WONDER



COMPASS ROSE GATHERING AREA



“STORYLAND”



WETLAND VIEWING AREA



AN EXTENSION OF THE LIBRARY

Wherever possible, take inspiration from the forms, shapes, and patterns of the library itself to promote continuity.

DESIGN INSPIRATION - SIGNAGE

WELCOME SIGNAGE OR OTHER INSTALLATION: A welcome feature will be installed to welcome visitors to the Western Lot. Design and final location TBD.

INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE: A working group can be established to develop primary and secondary interpretive themes for the site. Follow KHLT design specifications. See preliminary ideas below.

FLORA & FAUNA

- Significance of spruce trees, medicinal uses, etc.
- Other plants and wildlife

WETLANDS

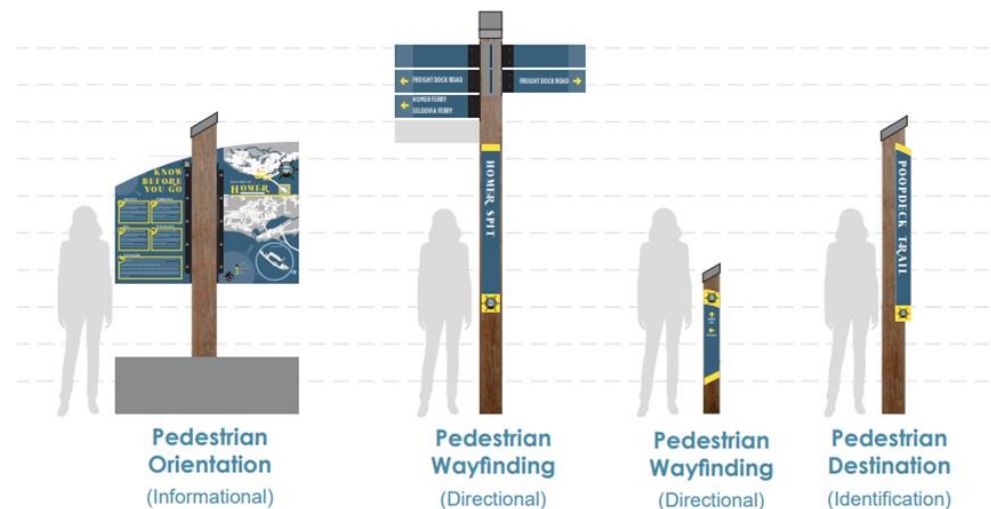
- Something that is cohesive with City of Homer stormwater management signage

CULTURAL HISTORY

- Historical uses of the land, including library history

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT: A group can be formed to guide the process of land acknowledgment for the Library. The intent is to have a physical land acknowledgment on the site that is based in respect, mutual reciprocity, and a commitment by the Library to support Indigenous library patrons and those who wish to learn more!

WAYFINDING: A point-person can be established to coordinate with the City of Homer in its wayfinding efforts to ensure wayfinding signage is included at the site. This will likely be installed where the Lucky Shot trail meets the Western Lot trail. Location TBD. See examples of the City of Homer's Wayfinding & Streetscape Sign Family shown to the right.



PRIORITIZATION & NEXT STEPS

PHASE 1

- Any necessary permissions and/or permitting
- Accessibility improvements to trail
- Installation of smaller, locally-sourced elements such as picnic tables, book benches, stump seating
- Extend the Story Walk Trail
- Establish an Interpretation Working Group
- Begin any needed design, engineering, inspection, and/or fundraising for Phase 2 and 3 projects, including planning and design for interpretive signage.



Stump seating



Reading tree



Library-themed book bench with little library

PHASE 2

- Selection of art proposals for welcome signage/installation
- Installation of Natural Play Area
- Continue any needed design, engineering, and/or fundraising for Phase 3 projects



Bird' nest play area



Natural play features



PHASE 3

- Installation of interpretive signage
- Installation of welcome signage
- Construction of Compass Rose Gathering Area
- Construction of wetland viewing bump-out



Wetland viewing bump-out



Compass rose gathering area



Interpretive signage

Prepared by the Friends of the Homer Library + partners

