



AGENDA ITEM REPORT

Ordinance 24-06, An Ordinance of the City Council of Homer, Alaska, Amending the FY24 Capital Budget by Appropriating \$25,000 from the Homer Accelerated Roads and Trails (HART) Trails Fund to Contract Engineering Services for Preliminary Design of Non-motorized Trails and Trailhead Connecting City of Homer Diamond Creek Property to the Proposed Highway Underpass. Davis.

Item Type: Backup Memorandum
Prepared For: Mayor Castner and Homer City Council
Date: 08 January 2024
From: Council Member Davis

Summary Statement:

The State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT-PF) is preparing to begin construction this spring (2024) on a major rehabilitation of the Sterling Highway from Anchor Point to Baycrest (MP 157-169).

The highway rehabilitation will include “new roadway pavement, additional shoulder width and the addition of passing/climbing lanes, **replacement of bridges and culverts and stabilization of stream banks.**”

In a series of meetings with the Homer Trails Alliance (HTA) and Homer city staff, DOT-PF personnel have expressed willingness to consider including as part of the project a pedestrian underpass at the Diamond Creek culvert that would provide a connection between existing trail systems: the city’s Diamond Creek Recreation Area and Rogers Loop Trailhead on the east side of the Sterling Highway, and the Diamond Creek State Recreation Site trail system (“Diamond Gulch”) on the west side of the highway.

However, DOT-PF regulations preclude the department from expending funds on a trail underpass absent a commitment by municipal or other authorities to extend existing trails up to the proposed underpass.

In meetings with DOT-PF, city staff have indicated general support by the city for eventually connecting existing trails to a future pedestrian underpass, but they have been unable to point to any specific plans or funding for such work.

The Homer Trails Alliance has up to 60 volunteers, many highly experienced, who are willing to do much of the trail-building work that would be required – but before beginning any work (in coordination with city staff, of course) a detailed, professional design is required.

This ordinance aims to address DOT-PF concerns about the city's lack of a formal commitment to providing the connecting infrastructure for an underpass. By appropriating this relatively modest amount now for engineering services for a Preliminary Design, the city will be demonstrating in a tangible way its commitment to proceed with the work.

If this tangible commitment does secure agreement from DOT-PF to proceed with the underpass, the funds can then be expended on the design -- and once the design is completed and approved, HTA volunteers, in close coordination with City Staff, will be able to begin work on connecting trails.

Because DOT-PF will begin work on this project in a matter of months, time is of the essence.

Recommendation:

Introduce the ordinance today, so that a public hearing can be held in two weeks. Request that PARCAC review expeditiously, ideally at its next meeting in January, prior to expenditure of funds, to confirm whether HART Funds are available for the full amount, given other needs in the areas of trail construction and maintenance.

Attachments:

1. West Homer HTA Map
2. Area Map with Trail Distances