



MEMORANDUM

New Lot Above Hornaday Park: Create a Path by Walking It

Item Type: Information Memorandum
Prepared For: Mayor Lord and City Council
Date: May 25, 2025
From: Councilmembers Davis and Erickson

Summary:

We would like to propose a simple way to open up the city's new property above Hornaday Park for public recreation without waiting until we are able to invest large amounts on a wide, formal trail. The idea would be to have city staff mark a loop trail utilizing existing footpaths and game trails, along with signs to guide people and warn of risks.

Approach:

The new loop trail would start with the switchbacks leading up the old road at the east end of Hornaday Park. Then, at the top (north) edge of the new city property, it would head west, along fairly well-defined footpaths, across the adjacent city-owned lot. At the west end of that property it would follow game trails down a ridge and through a meadow to loop back to Hornaday Park via the west end of the campground. Staff would mark the desired route—existing paths and game trails linked by new routes across meadows—with posts or flags, and add signs at the start and along the way. Signs could say something along the lines of “Undeveloped Trail – Use at Own Risk” and urge walkers to stick to the marked path to protect vegetation.

Other places have done this effectively. The American Trails' *Guidance for Managing Informal Trails* (2019) describes marking existing paths, like in Great Falls Park, Virginia, which features several unimproved dirt trails, such as the River Trail and Old Carriage Road, winding through woodlands and along the Potomac River. These trails follow existing human-created or game paths, formalized with minimal intervention, as described in *Guidance for Managing Informal Trails* (American Trails, 2019). Signage and maps warn of hazards like slippery rocks and steep drops, and emphasize personal responsibility for navigating uneven terrain or wildlife encounters. The park leverages Virginia's recreational use statute (similar to Alaska's AS 09.65.202) to limit liability.

This approach would keep costs low while getting people outdoors recreating on the newly purchased city land above Hornaday Park. Some portions of the informal trail on the west portions of the area, especially as it heads down a game trail toward the campground, would be steeper than other city trails – more similar to Grace Ridge, or the informal trail along the ridge above the hospital (which,

coincidentally, also now belongs to the city) – and we may eventually decide that switchbacks like those on Reber Trail are more appropriate. Whether or not such switchbacks, or footbridges over small water courses, would be necessary, would no doubt become clearer as the trail started getting daily use by folks who would be contributing to the establishment of the loop trail by walking it.