



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Lord and City Council
Date: June 2, 2025
From: Daniel Kort, Public Works Director
Through: Melissa Jacobsen, City Manager
Subject: DCRA Trail Project

Background:

There has been a lot of interest in development of the Diamond Creek Recreation Area (DCRA) trail network and connecting these trails to the Diamond Creek State Recreation Site (DCSRS). The City of Homer (City) hired Kinney Engineering to conduct a feasibility study (Study) of a proposed trail route in 2024. Kinney Engineering partnered with Happy Trails Inc. to complete this study.

Discussion:

The intention of the feasibility study was to lay out a conceptual trail system that would demonstrate to the State of Alaska Department of Transportation (DOT) that the City was serious about connecting the DCRA to the DCSRS. The intention of the Study was to encourage the DOT to include a pedestrian tunnel to their upcoming Sterling Highway construction project to connect the two trail networks that would be separated by the highway. The Sterling Highway design is nearly complete and we estimate we have approximately 6 months or less to get the easements in place.

The City has had several meetings with the DOT about if the trail could be located within the State ROW and what level of commitment would need to be demonstrated by the City to have the pedestrian tunnel included in the project. The State had previously indicated that they were not in favor of the trail being within the ROW, however when we gave them the completed Study showing approximately 150-ft of the trail paralleling the highway in the ROW, they indicate they would work with the City to accommodate this. Further, the State had previously indicated that they would require the City to have easements established for the trail in advance of them including the pedestrian tunnel in the design.

A representative of the Homer Trails Alliance (HTA) had previously met with regional managers of the DOT without the City's presence, and the City was informed that the regional managers were not receptive to the proposal of using the DOT's fish passage maintenance road on the west side of the highway as part of the trail. It has come to our attention that a representative of the HTA has met with the Central Regional Director with the DOT without the City's participation. I have heard third hand that this conversation was fruitful, however it's not clear on what was spoken to and what was agreed to.

If the conversation between the DOT and HTA was fruitful on only allowing the use of the Maintenance Road as the western portion of the trail alignment in the State ROW, that only diverts the trail away from having to cross 1 privately owned property of the 3 privately owned properties, leaving two private properties that will require easements. If the State is allowing the City to use the ROW for the full length needed, then the easement issue is resolved.

Having not been a part of the meeting with the DOT, there still seems to be an unanswered question of whether Phase I of the Happy Trails portion of the study will be sufficient to demonstrate to the State DOT that the City is serious about building a trail through the proposed pedestrian tunnel. I say that because Phase I constructs the Green Timbers Parking Lot and builds a trail leading south and east away from the trailhead through the DCRA property, ending at a "View Point" on the Kenai Peninsula Borough property south of the DCRA. Phase II of the Study builds a new trail from the Phase I trail to a proposed Trailhead on the Kenai Peninsula Borough's property.

Meanwhile, there is not a clear plan for how the City will build the 6,403-ft worth of trail from the Kinney Engineering Study that links the Green Timbers Trailhead to the DCSRS which passes through the pedestrian tunnel. This trail segment would require trail easements across private property, or the DOT to change its position on allowing the trail to be constructed in the ROW for approximately 2,200-feet to avoid private property. Further, Phase I of the Happy Trails Study could be built regardless of the pedestrian tunnel being present or not, and may not demonstrate to the State the City's commitment or ability to construct the trail segment that passes through the pedestrian tunnel.

Summary:

The proposed Phase I trail segment will at minimum meet the intentions of Resolution 13-055 which proposed the goals of building a Trailhead on the western side of the DCRA and beginning to construct trails within the DCRA regardless of whether the City will be able to construct the trail segment crossing the Sterling Highway that connects the proposed Green Timbers Trailhead to the DCSRS through the proposed pedestrian tunnel.