



MEMORANDUM

CC-26-112

Ordinance 26-29 An Ordinance of the City Council of Homer, Alaska Amending the FY26 Capital Budget by Appropriating \$378,000 from the Homer Accelerated Roads and Trails (HART) Trails Fund for the planning and design of the Woodard Canyon Trail above Karen Hornaday Park.

Item Type: Backup Memorandum
Prepared For: Mayor Lord and Homer City Council
Date: April 29, 2026
From: Daniel Kort, Public Works Director
Through: Melissa Jacobsen, City Manager

SUMMARY:

This ordinance requests an appropriation of \$378,000 from the HART Trails Fund to support planning and design for the Woodard Canyon Trail.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Homer purchased 20 acres above Karen Hornaday Park for open space, recreation, stormwater protection, steep slope preservation, and wildlife corridor conservation. The parcel is adjacent to a 10-acre parcel owned by the City, and together with Karen Hornaday Park, these lands present a significant opportunity to develop a trail offering scenic views of the City, Homer Spit, and Kachemak Bay. Shortly after the purchase was completed the following actions occurred-

- Memorandum CC-25-166 proposed a low-cost walking loop using existing roads and informal trails with minimal improvements.
- Memorandum CC-25-167 followed addressing Homer City Code (HCC) 21.44 requirements of geotechnical evaluation by a licensed engineer for development on slopes exceeding 15%, including trails.
- The Parks, Arts, Recreation and Culture Advisory Commission (PARCAC) considered the information in both memorandums and supported the more formal approach based on HCC and the City's Trail Design Criteria Manual (adopted February 2009).
- City Council adopted Resolution 26-010 directing staff to procure professional trail planning and design services for a loop trail.
- An RFP was issued and two proposals were received. Proposers included R&M Consulting and RESPEC.

DISCUSSION:

A six-member review team made up of staff from Public Works, Planning, and the City Clerk's office reviewed and scored the proposals in accordance with the criteria defined in the RFP that included similar projects,

project manager, project team, and cost. The team determined that R&M Consultants submitted the most responsive proposal based on their qualifications and ability to deliver the required services.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt an ordinance appropriating HART Trails funds in the amount of \$378,000 for the purpose of engineering and design of the Woodard Canyon Trail project.



MEMORANDUM

To: Parks, Arts, Recreation and Culture Advisory Commission (PARCAC)
Through: Mike Ilg, Recreation Manager/PARCAC Staff Liaison
From: Daniel Kort, Public Works Director
Date: July 8, 2025
Subject: Karen Hornaday Park Trail

Background:

The City of Homer purchased 20 acres of land above Karen Hornaday Park with the intention of constructing a trail and preserving the steep slope property from development.

Discussion:

Draft Trails Financial Plan

The FY26/FY27 Capital Budget was passed via Ordinance 25-39(S)(A). The budget included \$250,000 of Homer Accelerated Roads and Trails (HART) Trails funds towards the construction of the Green Timbers Trailhead and Phase I of the Diamond Creek Trail Area (DCRA) trail. This \$250,000 will be used as matching funds for a potential Rasmussen Grant. There are anticipated to be five (5) phases on the project, and Phase I of the project has an anticipated cost of approximately \$500,000. The current HART Trails fund balance is approximately \$1,100,000, and therefore the request of \$250,000 of HART Trails funds for Phase I of the DCRA project represents approximately 25% of the HART Trails fund balance.

In response to the request for \$250,000 of HART Trails funds, the Public Works Department presented the City Council the draft of the Trails Financial Plan in an effort to layout the other planned trail projects within the City, so the City Council could see all of the other planned projects that are in the planning queue which are competing for the HART Trails funds. The intention of expediting the Draft Trails Financial Plan was so the City Council could weigh options and make the best decisions among the competing projects over the limited funding that is available within the HART Trails fund and prioritize projects.

Unfortunately, due to the rushed nature of the DCRA Trail project legislation, the draft Trails Financial Plan did not have the opportunity to be presented to PARCAC before being presented to the City Council. Therefore, we are using this opportunity to present this draft plan to PARCAC for review and comment.

Karen Hornaday Park Trail

As everyone is aware, the City of Homer has recently completed the purchase of the 20-acre parcel of property above the Karen Hornaday Park, with the intention to of constructing a trail on the property.

The Public Works Department has taken the position of reaching out to trail design professionals and engineers to conduct a formal design of this proposed trail due to the properties steep slopes. The following citations support the position of the Public Works Department:

- Homer City Code (HCC) section 21.44: This is the code section relating to construction near steep slopes and costal bluffs. This section is applicable to any construction on properties with an average slope of 15% or greater. This property has an average slope of approximately 25%, so it falls well within the jurisdiction of this code section. This Code section further states it's applicability "in any other location where the City Engineer determines that adverse conditions associated with slope stability, erosion, or sedimentation are present". The road that was built on this property is intended to be used for part of this trail. The construction of this road had historically caused slope instability, slope failure, and erosion which impeded the development plans for this property and had caused issues with Woodard Creek. This previous slope instability due to disturbance further justifies the application of this code to the development of this trail.
- Trail Design Criteria Manual: On February 9, 2009, the City of Homer adopted the Trail Design Criteria Manual. This manual references following the previously mentioned steep slopes code (HCC 21.44). The Manual further calls out "*required preliminary engineering and design drawings required to develop a trail as well as evaluation of subsoils the trail will be constructed upon*".

Memorandum CC-25-166 was drafted by Councilmembers Davis and Erickson and presented to the City Council in consideration of the establishment of a Low Cost Walking Trail Loop. The concept was presented as utilizing the existing, previously constructed road and game trails, and allowing the hikers to "wear in a trail", and to facilitate this effort, the City would flag the trail and provide navigational signs and warning signs for uneven terrain and wildlife. This Memorandum to the City Council is attached as a reference.

Memorandum CC-25-167 was drafted by the Public Works Department and presented to the City Council in support of the Departments' position of taking an approach of a formal design and construction of this trail system. Councilor Davis requested that a statement made suggesting the public would be used to remove alders from this trail be removed from Memorandum CC-25-166 before being presented to PARCAC because Memorandum CC-25-166 did not suggest using members of the public to remove alders from the trail. The Public Works Department acknowledged this and has struck out the statement because it this was not stated in the Memorandum, but was rather stated during verbal testimony prior to development of Memorandum CC-25-166. The revised version of Memorandum CC-25-167 is attached as well.

It was pointed out that the proposed trail alignment figure attached to Memorandum CC-25-166 had approximately 520-ft of trail that was not on City owned property. Councilor Davis acknowledged this, and submitted an alternative trail route which is additionally attached. Councilor Davis also reached out to the adjacent property owner (that owns the property the original proposed trail went across) and inquired on their willingness to grant the City of Homer a trail easement to build a trail upon their property. It was reported by Councilor Davis that the property owner was receptive to this idea. This area where the trail would be on an easement is just north of the area where the Karen Hornaday Campground encroaches onto this same private property.

Existing Conditions

The following identifies existing conditions on the property that concern the Public Works Department and further support the concept of hiring a trail consultant and civil engineering consultant in the process of designing a robust and sustainable trail.

1. The Road – The existing road was poorly designed and constructed which lead to the previous slope failures that were experienced. There are some existing slope stabilization features that were installed in locations where slope instability was observed. These are two photo's taken of retaining walls and one photo of mid-slope features that were intended to retain the slopes.



PHOTO 1: There are several locations where rebar was pounded into the soil and “roadway guardrail” was used at the toe of the upgradient cut slope along the roadway going up the hill to retain the slumping hillside from falling onto the road. This is not a generally accepted method of constructing a retaining wall (materials used or construction method).

- In some locations, the hillside has tipped the retaining structure over;
- Some locations have been engulfed by the retaining structure; and
- Other locations look like the photo above and are able to be photographed as constructed.



PHOTO 2: The photo above shows the same retaining wall shown in the previous photo that has been tipped over (leaning away from the slope) by the sloughing hillside and partially buried as well.



PHOTO 3: The above photo shows some mid-slope features, where pipe was driven into the downhill slope. These were installed below the road on the downhill slope where slope stability issues occurred. You can see the same guardrail materials were used in construction, however the rebar was not sufficient to retain the soils in this location, so pipe was used instead. While not totally apparent in this photo, these mature alders on this steep slope are leaning downhill due to the weight of the leaves at the crown of the trees. There is a distinct possibility that the weight of the alder crown, or in combination with an early snowstorm, will weigh these alders over, uproot them and allow them to move in a small landslide towards Woodard Creek. Other concerns are a poorly designed trail will allow stormwater to exasperate the hillsides natural tendency to move towards Woodard Creek.



PHOTO 4: The photo above was taken above the first abrupt switchback in the road. This is the location of a larger historical landslide and made a good location to turn the road when it was originally built. At this location there is a wonderful “tunnel” created by leaning alders. However, when you look closer, this tunnel of leaning alder was created by a recent landslide **(in the last year)** where these alders were relocated from the hillside above and fell onto the toe of the road. This “tunnel” feature did not exist last summer when reconnaissance was done on this property prior to City purchase. At this time, the Public Works Department was trying to determine how to access the City owned 10-acre parcel adjacent to the 20-acre parcel the City just purchased.



PHOTO 5: The photo above shows the uphill side of this landslide and the “tunnel” of alders. As stated earlier, these alders were not in this location during the Public Works Departments reconnaissance hike of this property a year ago when researching a potential trail route to reach the City’s landlocked 10-acre parcel above Karen Hornaday Park that adjoins to the newly acquired 20-acre parcel.

2. **The Trail along the road** – The trail currently being worn into the ground surface is fairly decent in dry conditions, however becomes soft and muddy during wet conditions. Refer to the following photos 6 and 7.



PHOTO 6: The photo of the trail above is well worn with very limited use since this is not currently a publicly advertised or signed trail by the City. Trail advocates have taken to hiking this trail during the time the City was working on purchasing this parcel. You can visually observe that very limited hiking has clearly defined a walking path in the former road bed without any intervention.



PHOTO 7: While difficult to make out in this photo above, you can see evidence on the right side of the road where a historical erosional channel had formed in the road bed. The photo does not capture it well, but this erosional channel is about 1-foot wide and 1-foot deep. This sort of erosion will continue to develop in locations where the defined trail from the previous photo is allowed to form on the road bed without engineered erosion control measures in place. Eventually this gully will become so deep that we lose the functionality of this road bed and we either have to repair the road bed, or relocate the trail. Further, if allowed to develop unchecked, this gully erosion will compromise the top of the slope above Woodard Creek and possibly encourage a larger sloughing event into Woodard Creek.

By taking an engineered approach to designing and building a trail, the City can avoid duplicating a scenario that is playing out at the Diamond Creek State Recreation Site where the trail down to the beach had experienced substantial erosion and ground subsidence where soil has eroded or fallen away from the hillside over time and into Diamond Creek causing the trail to be re-routed in response after a brief trail closure. If we take a more thoughtful approach to this new trail by “formally designing it”, the City stands the chance of having a more robust trail that sticks around longer. This is not to say that erosion and landslides will not eventually impact this trail, but rather taking a more thoughtful approach and minimize the human impact of trail development by “walking it into the land surface”.

From my understanding, the origin of the Trail Design Criteria Manual was because of the City's previous experiences with inherited "walked in trails" or trails that were constructed without any design criteria. This manual gave definition to what was expected in the development of trails within the City of Homer.

3. **Trail through Forest** – It has been proposed that the Public Works Department flag a path through the woods defining the return loop portion of the trail using existing game trails as much as possible, using signage and flagging to define the trail.

Memorandum CC-25-166 referenced the publication "Guidance for Managing Informal Trails" by American Trails (2019). I searched the internet for this reference in order to read it, and I was unable to locate this paper. However, I was able to find several other similar sources relating to the subject published by PhD researchers for the US Geological Service (USGS) and National Park Service (NPS) as well as several hiking and backpacking blogs and magazine articles.

The article that most closely aligns with the subject matter was the document written by a USGS Research Scientist entitled "Guidance for Managing Informal Trails" which was published by the same "American Trails" organization that was cited in the memorandum. This paper related more to hikers creating informal trails to special features that go off the designed formal trail. While not totally aligned with the proposal of intentionally developing informal trails, it speaks to the positive and negative impacts of these trails.

This paper states *"Unfortunately management experience reveals that informal trail systems are frequently poorly designed, including "shortest distance" routing with steep grades and alignments parallel to the slope. Such routes are rarely sustainable under heavy traffic and subsequent resource degradation is often severe."* It goes on to further state that *"informal trails that directly ascend steep slopes will easily erode and less acceptable than trails with a side-hill design, and informal trails that are prone to muddiness and widening are less acceptable, as are trails that may contribute soils to water resources"*. The currently proposed portion of the trail route that does not use the road, is routed directly downhill according to slope information from the Borough's GIS.

Memorandum CC-25-166 also suggests *"using existing paths, game trails, and new connectors across meadows – with posts or flags and installing signage."* While using game trails may be cost effective, papers and blogs in the Public Works Departments research suggest caution when utilizing game trails for the development of hiking trails. One consideration is the game trails have been developed over generations of animals transiting in the easiest and shortest pathway from one desirable location to another. The shortest pathway may be easily the route that is most susceptible to erosion.

Another consideration is these paths were created by generations of wildlife transiting from one location to another. Using these game trails will place hikers in direct conflict with wildlife (moose and bears). The paper cited in Memorandum CC-25-166 speaks about trails in Virginia where it's most likely they are using game trails made by whitetail deer, not moose and bears. While hiking moose and bear trails may be an acceptable risk for the seasoned Alaskan's who are "moose and bear aware",

it may not be as safe for tourists who are less familiar with the hazards. Signage stating “Moose in Area” or “Bear in Area” does not adequately make the trails safe for the “uninitiated”. Sight lines should be improved by clearing some vegetation so the hiker (seasoned Alaskan and tourist alike) can see the moose or bear before getting to close, as well as allow the moose or bear to see the approaching hiker and avoid them.

Summary:

The Public Works Department has taken the position that the Department is required to follow the same rules laid out in City Code and the Trail Design Criteria Manual, both which apply to any other property development or trail. The Public Works Department was concerned about the optics of exempting itself from following the Trail Design Criteria Manual and Steep Slope Code requirements while requiring other developments and proposed trails to follow the Manual and Code.

The Public Works Department will move forward with the proposed footpath trail as defined in Memorandum CC-25-166 if directed to do so by PARCAC and the City Council. Alternatively, the Public Works Department is prepared to research the costs and bring forward an Ordinance to design the Karen Hornaday Park Trail as either one large effort, or a phased approach of two phases, the first phase being the trail on the existing road and the second phase being the return loop of the trail network if directed to by the City Council. Immediately following the design would be an Ordinance in advance of issuing a construction ITB to build the new trail.

Attachment:

Memorandum CC-25-166

Trail Design Criteria Manual

<https://www.cityofhomer-ak.gov/planning/trail-design-criteria-manual>

