

## Correspondence



### **RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCCC)** A Forum for Respectful Communication & Community Relations



**1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100 / Anchorage, AK 99503**

Ellen Kazary, Executive Director, and David Mitchell, Conservation Director  
Great Land Trust  
PO Box 101272  
Anchorage, AK 99510-1272

November 13, 2023

Dear Ellen and David,

Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) is fortunate to be the nearest neighbor to Potter Marsh, a State Critical Habitat and part of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife. Our Council residents, like many other Anchorage residents and thousands of visiting tourists, are thrilled by the Marsh's wildlife, lured to its recreation opportunities, and appreciative of the panoramic beauty of the Marsh that changes with the weather and the seasons.

Consequently, we were excited to learn about the Great Land Trust's (GLT) successful fund raising to conserve a significant part of the Marsh's watershed by creating the Potter Marsh Watershed Park on 300 acres of open space just uphill of the southern part of the Marsh. We appreciated GLT's about this project at the monthly RCCC meeting on October 12, 2023. We subsequently discussed the project in our Land Use and Transportation Committee and were able to answer questions and concerns. At our November 9, 2023, meeting, RCCC members overwhelmingly approved a resolution in support of the project by a vote of 27 ayes, 0 nays, and 2 abstentions (attached). Further support for this resolution follows.

Conserving the natural hydrology at the south end of the Marsh is essential to the future of the Marsh. There has been a good deal of uphill housing development in the Golden View and Potter Creek areas, with more to come. In addition to individual wells, there are large community wells and subdivisions on municipal sewer connections, both of which create big diversions of water from the natural recharge pattern of the Marsh. Regrettably, development through the permitting process does not always minimize impacts: our Council area has experienced permit violations such as diversion of water from one drainage to another (Prominence Pointe), washouts, (Prominence Pointe and Potter Creek areas), and unauthorized large-scale clearing and fill (multiple instances). Conservation of a large, intact parcel of watershed provides the greatest possible assurance of the water supply for Potter Marsh. This is Anchorage's last remaining open space providing important movement corridors for wildlife from sea level to the tundra.

For over two decades, RCCC has advocated for conservation of Potter Marsh's watershed. In numerous resolutions and letters, RCCC has emphasized the need to conserve the water resources and upland habitat connectivity to the Marsh, and to provide carefully designed access for recreational enjoyment. These requests are supported by the 1999 'Potter Valley Land Use Analysis' (Heritage Land Bank) that concluded that the area should generally be maintained as open space and managed consistently with the adjacent State Coastal Wildlife Refuge, with maintenance of trails, and designation of a neighborhood park. The analysis

emphasized that an open space/greenbelt designation, consistent with other Municipal plans, 'will gain in importance as future residential development expands in the areas uphill' (pg. 44).

Conservation efforts by RCCC include:

- Early identification of hydrology, habitat, and recreation values. RCCC's 1997 letter regarding the Heritage Land Bank's consideration of the land east of Potter Marsh. The Council emphasized:
  - Critical hydrological roles of year-round wetlands and streams;
  - The disruption posed by potential road cuts;
  - Habitat connectivity to upper elevations of the Hillside;
  - Unique geologic features;
  - Current and future value for public recreation; and
  - Regional value for watershed protection, wildlife habitat, recreation and tourism.
  
- Implementation of the Potter Valley Land Use Analysis. RCCC has submitted multiple requests for conservation of these lands to Heritage Land Bank and in response to proposed developments, including in 2000, 2006, and to 2022. RCCC has consistently and strongly advocated for the formal designation of the HLB lands east of Potter Marsh as watershed conservation lands, as recommended by the Potter Valley Land Use Analysis (1999) and subsequently adopted by the Assembly (Ordinance No. AO 99-144, December 7, 1999).
  
- Opposition to disruptive development. RCCC opposed several residential development proposals for lands east of Potter Marsh, in part on the grounds of major disruption to wetlands and streams and stormwater management critical to the Marsh. Those proposals included an attempted re-zone to R-7 half-acre residential (in 2000), and a proposal for a senior citizen condominium complex known as Legacy Point (in 2006).
  
- Implementation of Hillside District Plan. RCCC consistently advocates for implementation of the Hillside District Plan (2010), which has numerous policies and value statements for protection of Potter Marsh through a watershed approach. These include:
  - Policy 5-A, maintain and protect environmental quality at three scales, including the watershed scale. Specific mention is given to the priority of water quality for Potter Marsh
  - Policy 6-B, Parks development:
    - greenbelts along . . . Potter Creek;
    - enhancement of access to Potter Marsh watershed;
    - protection of key drainages to the Potter Marsh watershed; and
    - development of new neighborhood parks to serve Potter Creek area and areas of . . .Rabbit Creek.
  - Policy 7-A Visual quality, maintain and protect views by protecting natural vegetation, drainage corridors, significant natural features and topography at the scale of watersheds.
  
- Advocacy for a recreation and wildlife viewing corridor along the Old Seward Highway.
  - For the past 20 years, RCCC has annually submitted comments to the Municipal Capital Improvement Program (CIP), as well as to the State Department of Transportation and our legislators, requesting re-design of the Old Seward Highway east of Potter Marsh as a slow-speed, low-traffic greenway and

recreation corridor with a non-motorized pathway for enjoyment of the natural setting. In each of the past two years, our state legislators supported our submitting these proposals in their CAPSIS system for state capital projects. Our proposals have not yet been adopted.

- Grant obtained for South Potter Marsh Pull Out Amenities
  - In 2022, Rabbit Creek Community Council successfully applied to the Municipality for a \$780K Economic Recovery Grant from the American Rescue Plan Act for safety and recreation amenities at the South Potter Marsh Pull Out to fully fund a project initiated by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). The complete project, managed by ADFG, will include two vaulted toilets, a cross walk, designated parking, and an interpretive boardwalk, to be installed between 2023 and 2025. This project will greatly enhance neighbor and visitor experiences and access to this part of the Marsh. Additionally, it can serve as a managed parking site for users of the Potter Marsh Watershed Park, thereby avoiding disturbance to local neighbors or increases in traffic on sub-standard neighborhood roads.

And finally, RCCC notes that the Potter Marsh Watershed Park helps to implement the Municipality's Park Plan:

- Anchorage Bowl Park Natural Resource and Recreation Facility Plan (page 90, 2006)
  - Acquire and develop new park at Potter area;
  - Continue to acquire, enhance and develop greenbelts. . . along Potter Creek;
  - Enhance access to Potter Marsh; and
  - Protect key drainages of Potter Marsh Watershed.

Please let us know if you need copies of any of these past letters or plan references.

The RCCC would like to thank the Great Land Trust for the incredible work they have put into pursuing funding and agreements for designation of the Potter Marsh Watershed Park! We are grateful for this project and for so many other significant projects arounds Anchorage such as the Campbell Creek Estuary, access to favorite Chugach State Park sites like Near Point and Rabbit Lake, Audubon Wayside on the Coastal Trail, Little Campbell Creek Greenbelt, and Klatt Bog wetlands to name but a few. These projects have protected intact habitat and wetlands, provided educational opportunities, and ensured public access for so many people now, as well as for future generations. We are thrilled that the Potter Marsh Watershed Park, in our backyards, can be part of this amazing legacy. Thank you to Great Land Trust for the time and energy they have invested in this project!

Sincerely,



Ann Rappoport, Co-chair



John Riley, Co-chair

Attachments

cc: Assembly Members Randy Sulte and Zac Johnson  
Mike Braniff, Director, Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department  
Sue Rodman, Fish & Game Coordinator, ADF&G