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TO: Jeff Wilson, PRAC, Chair
Brent Fischer, Parks & Recreation Director

DATE: 11/27/13

FROM: Rorie Watt, Engineering Department Director 

SUBJECT: OHV Recreation

With regard to the OHV question, I can appreciate that PRAC has a difficult task in front of it. If the CBJ is to provide recreational opportunities to OHV users, a decision must be made which balances a myriad of issues including OHV user satisfaction, capital costs, management costs, management issues, neighborhood impacts, validity of mitigation approaches to those impacts, land use decisions and prioritization of OHV recreational in context with other City needs and goals.

I do NOT believe that the PRAC can answer all of these questions, some are duties of the Planning Commission, some of the Assembly. Things that the PRAC can do include the following:

- A. Comment on the likelihood of a site being able to satisfy OHV recreational desires
- B. Comment on the potential conflict between OHV and non-OHV recreational uses
- C. Comment on ideas to improve any of the potential sites
- D. Comment on possible management approaches

I believe the best process is for the PRAC to make the recommendations it can to the Assembly, for staff to work with the Assembly to formulate a draft plan, and for the PRAC and Planning Commission to make comments on that plan to the Assembly.

I also want to point out that there appears to be a belief amongst some community members that City Staff has been surreptitiously planning with national OHV advocates (NOHVCC) to resurrect the Fish Creek Quarry option. This is not the case. NOHVCC was hired to help layout and design a trail system at the 35 Mile site. When they came to town, they looked at the 35 Mile site and effectively said – Really? You must have better options. Subsequently, NOHVCC wrote the draft site report dated 7/1/13 which recommended that the CBJ take a step back and re-evaluate its options.

35 Mile Site:

Based upon the narrative in the NOVHCC report I have advised the PRAC to not select this site without fully understanding the likely consequences of the decision. Those consequences include limited satisfaction by OHV users, very high trail construction costs (>\$250K/mile), relatively high management costs, difficult rule enforcement, likely OHV use of Glacier Highway and increased OHV use in the Echo Cove tidelands and on Goldbelt property on both sides of the road.

If developed, the 35 Mile site would only accommodate OHV trail riding which appears to be least supported recreation activity amongst OHV users. Based on my understanding, the great majority of OHV users would prefer a motocross track or an open play area that could be used by a variety of OHVs. While the different OHV user groups get lumped together, it is important to highlight the fact that they have different desires and are not likely to be satisfied by the same recreational opportunity, and do not necessarily need to recreate in the same location.

Recommendation:

For the time being, I recommend that you set this option aside.

Goldbelt Property:

There are very clear advantages and disadvantages to this site. Not least of which are the lack of residential neighbors (though it is adjacent to the Héen Latinee Experimental Forest aka Alaska Coastal Rainforest Center), low capital cost, and a high likelihood of satisfying OHV users. On the downside are two large issues – the land is not controlled by the City and the remote location which is outside of the range of Police and Fire personnel and cell phones makes management challenging.

Recommendation:

I recommend that you ask the Assembly to prioritize negotiations with Goldbelt to see if an arrangement for OHV recreation is possible or impossible.

Fish Creek Lower Quarry

This site is the subject of a failed OHV planning effort in 2008. At the PRAC meeting on 11/5 I stated that while the 2008 proposal was a failure that it was my opinion that a thorough vetting of the site had not been completed. The NOHVCC report recommends that it may be possible to:

Develop a beginner and advanced motocross track in the existing Fish Creek quarry..... Motocross is also a popular spectator sport, and motocross tracks are usually close to urban centers to allow quick access by participants and spectators. To reduce noise impacts, all activity would be limited to the quarry floor.....In looking at the project file for the previous North Douglas OHV Park, it appears that a different approach in the project design, project planning, and public process could lead to improved project acceptance and approval. There is also a potential to bring in other stakeholder groups to increase the acceptance of OHV use on this site.

At the public meeting, citizens voiced three types of criticisms:

1. Negative affect to other recreational uses of Fish Creek Road/Quarry/Meadows
2. City shouldn't have OHV Recreation as a priority
3. Potential for unacceptable noise at Homeowner's properties

The PRAC should comment on the effect on existing recreational uses, but the two other types of criticism are best left for the Assembly and for analysis (by the PRAC, the Planning Commission and the Assembly) when and if there is an actual detailed proposal.

In short, we have received comments from the North Douglas neighborhood to the effect that the Fish Creek quarry option should be definitively taken off of the table. I do not recommend eliminating the Fish Creek Quarry at this time. In my opinion, we should thoroughly evaluate the potential of using the quarry to meet the Assembly goal. Whether a plan can be developed that is sufficiently acceptable will ultimately be the decision of the Assembly and the Planning Commission.

In order to allow the PRAC, the Planning Commission and the Assembly to decide if there is merit to a limited Fish Creek quarry proposal, there needs to be an actual proposal and a process needs to be proposed to thoroughly vet that idea. I've attached a draft approach to demonstrate the way I would approach the issue. I'm sure it can be improved upon, I would welcome any suggestions.

Recommendation:

I recommend that you leave the Fish Creek site under consideration, comment upon the attached draft approach.

S&S Pond Property in Lemon Creek

At the public meeting on November 5th, a member of the public suggested that the property behind the police station in Lemon Creek could be an appropriate location for OHV recreation. At first glance, the property is conveniently located and amply sized. At about a total of 28 acres, the parcel includes substantial ponds, wetlands and up lands. The site has been historically used as a borrow pond and a waste disposal site, and a section was subdivided off in the late 1990's and sold to the CBJ for the Police Station. The land is currently zoned Rural Reserve and the owner has applied to change the zoning to Industrial. The parcel is bounded by Lemon Creek, Egan Drive, the Police Station and Switzer Creek.

The Parks Superintendent and I met on site with one of the property owners to discuss the potential availability of the land. Essentially the property owner is not terribly excited about a temporary use, but would consider a lease or sale to the City. Long term, the property has significant development potential. Commercial property is currently valued around \$10-15/sf, around \$500K/acre. Generally the assembly is averse to removing private land from the tax roles and with the Planning Commission has been protective of Industrial and Commercial lands. In the short term (~5 years), it seems unlikely that the land will be developed.

Recommendation:

I recommend that you leave consideration of this site to the Assembly for the time being.

Final Summary:

If the goal of providing for OHV recreation is going to be met, then I strongly advise that the site options be considered in context with each other. Past efforts have identified a specific site and then have focused efforts on making that specific site workable. The general conclusion at the end of each of these efforts has been that (hopefully) a different and better site may become available.

Realistically, we have very limited options. I recommend continued development of all of the remaining options until the Assembly is satisfied that it has enough information to make a decision.

Fish Creek Lower Quarry – OHV Concept Proposal Ideas

But for neighborhood issues, the Fish Creek quarry appears to be the best option for the City to provide for some OHV recreation. Site positives included the location, low construction cost, ability to satisfy OHV recreational needs and land ownership. I'm not minimizing any of the criticisms, but in my opinion, the only question with this site is - Can the neighborhood issues be solved?

Noise is a difficult and subjective issue. All people hear sound differently and care more and less about what they can hear. Additionally, environmental factors can dramatically change the way that noise is transmitted from day to day. Wind, rain, temperature, snow and clouds can all significantly change noise transmission.

Particularly for the Fish Creek Quarry site, I strongly recommend that decision makers visit the quarry and the neighborhood as part of their decision making process.

Noise Minimization Methods:

Restrict vehicle use – Per the Motorcycle Industry Council, consider a requirement of a Stationary Sound test for all OHVs using the facility. Disallow vehicles if they can't meet the MIC Stationary Sound test for a maximum of 96 dB(A). (See: Motorcycle Industry Council: <http://www.mic.org/> Stationary Sound Test Manual for Off-Highway Motorcycles and All-Terrain Vehicles.)

Time Limitations – Restrict hours of operation, days of week, length of season. Maybe it is worth trying a Motocross track for something like April to September, Saturdays 10-5 and Tuesday evenings 4-8.

Noise Barriers – Noise barriers similar to those used on highway projects through out much of the country might be appropriate to this site. (See: Federal Highway Administration guidance on highway noise barriers http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/noise_barriers/design_construction/design/). Construction of about 1,000 feet of noise barrier could be an appropriate measure. A very rough cost estimate is \$500K.

Estimating, Quantifying and Qualifying Noise:

In 2008, City staff tried to do a representative noise simulation of OHV use in the quarry. While I think it was a good faith effort, the simulation was roundly criticized by the neighborhood. The public would not benefit from speculative noise estimations, from testimony from dueling noise experts. To properly understand the noise that would be generated from OHV use, I would suggest a singular event in which a specified number of OHV's would be invited to use the quarry (if they could pass the Stationary Sound Test) and that the Assembly appoint a "Sound Panel" (maybe of Assembly and/or Planning Commission members) that would go to nearby homes and listen to the actual sounds of OHVs as they can be heard at those residences. To the extent possible, this would eliminate the subjectivity and translation problems of one person trying to verbally convey to another what they could or couldn't hear.

Pursue Multiple Use:

BMX/Mountain Bike use – Members of the public commented that a motocross track could be used on some days by BMX or mountain bike riders. With regards to neighborhood issues, programming in multiple use would do two things – limit the number of days of noise producing activity and increase community support from non-motorized users.

Enhance the Quarry with BBQ Pits, Picnic Tables, Disc Golf, etc.

Management:

Security Cameras – Unlike at the out the road sites, security cameras could be used to monitor quarry usage and to document non compliant use for action.

Police/Fire – Unlike at the out the road sites, Police and Fire Department personnel could be called on in the event of an accident or emergency need.

Parks Maintenance Supervision – Unlike at the out the road sites, cell phones work in Fish Creek and Parks staff could call for assistance if needed.

A final note about the Fish Creek Quarry. As a rock source, the quarry is essentially played out and the land will shortly be available for other use(s). The contractor rebuilding roads in Bayview will complete their work in the summer of 2014. Now that power has been extended to Eaglecrest and there is a nearby cell tower, development of the quarry into residential housing subdivision could also be considered as a long term land use.