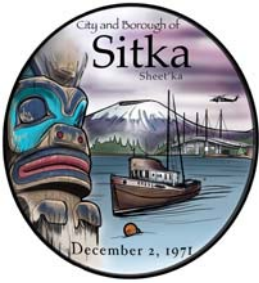


Sponsors: Knox / Himschoot

Should this item be pulled from the Consent Agenda the following motion is suggested:

POSSIBLE MOTION

I MOVE TO approve Resolution 2021-06 on first and final reading authorizing the Municipal Administrator to apply for the National Park Service Planning Assistance Program.




City and Borough of Sitka

PROVIDING FOR TODAY...PREPARING FOR TOMORROW

Coast Guard City, USA

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Eisenbeisz and Assembly Members

Thru: John Leach, Municipal Administrator 

From: Assembly members Kevin Knox and Rebecca Himschoot

Date: February 15, 2021

Subject: Resolution of Support for Parks & Recreation Planning Technical Assistance

Background

The National Park Service - Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program supports community-led conservation and outdoor recreation projects on lands outside of National Parks. Communities that apply for assistance are teamed with planning professionals who can support at any stage in a planning process. Applicants for annual assistance are due on March 1st, 2021.

The Sitka Comprehensive Plan 2030 identified that Sitkans highly value parks, trails, and recreation facilities and opportunities, but no up-to-date plans exist with enough specificity to direct future facility development. Much of the Sitka Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Action Plan, developed primarily in 2010 and 2011, is now out of date as projects have been completed or context has changed.

The Sitka Parks & Recreation Committee would like to seek assistance from RTCA to develop an updated maintenance and development plan for City lands.

Analysis

An updated plan for parks and recreation in Sitka could solicit public input to direct the City and partners in prioritizing among projects to undertake in the future. A priority list will be especially useful should additional federal stimulus funds be made available like the 2020 CARES Act. A portion of the plan would outline strategies for maintenance of existing facilities.

Fiscal Note

There is no City funding requirement or obligation for CBS funds, staff time or match in association with this application.

No monetary grants are made through the RTCA program and no grant reporting is required from entities that receive assistance.

The planning process will be led by volunteer members of the Parks & Recreation Committee.

Recommendation

Approve Resolution 2021 – 06 supporting an application to the National Park Service Planning Assistance program

CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

RESOLUTION NO. 2021 - 06

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA (CBS) AUTHORIZING THE MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATOR TO APPLY FOR THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PLANNING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- WHEREAS,** outdoor recreation is beneficial to Sitka’s public health, quality of life and economy; and
- WHEREAS,** the National Park Service - Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program provides free technical assistance to communities engaged in outdoor recreation planning; and
- WHEREAS,** the Sitka Comprehensive Plan 2030 identifies the need to "Coordinate and Communicate Regularly with Recreation Providers about Funding, Programming and Maintenance" and "Expand and Facilitate Community Use of Parks, Trails and Recreation"; and
- WHEREAS,** prior recreation planning processes in 2002 and 2011 identified shared community goals for specific facilities and led to the successful development of many parks and trails that now benefit Sitkans; and
- WHEREAS,** existing plans for parks and recreation are out of date and no longer provide sufficient direction to city staff and partner organizations; and
- WHEREAS,** the Sitka Parks & Recreation Committee has endorsed the creation of an updated maintenance and development plan for CBS lands; and
- WHEREAS,** there is no financial obligation and no obligation that the CBS implement any recommendations included in any future plans; and
- WHEREAS,** a parks and recreation planning process could gather citizen input and identify shared priorities for maintenance and development; and
- WHEREAS,** a plan for Sitka’s parks and trails will provide the documentation needed for the CBS and partners to guide future work and seek competitive funding.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka hereby authorizes the CBS Municipal Administrator to apply to the National Park Service - Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED by the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka, Alaska on this 23rd day of February 2021.

Steven Eisenbeisz, Mayor

ATTEST:

Sara Peterson, MMC
Municipal Clerk

1st and final reading 2/23/2021

Sponsors: Knox / Himschoot

Project Selection Criteria

Applications for support from the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program are competitively evaluated based on the following criteria:

- The project is expected to accomplish noticeable results that promote natural resource conservation or outdoor recreation in the near future.
- Roles and contributions of project partners are significant and well-defined.
- There is evidence of broad community support for the project.
- The project fits with our focus areas

1. Project Summary

a. Summary of project - Tell us about your project idea and the specific outcomes you would like to achieve:

As identified in the Comprehensive Plan 2030, residents value parks & recreation as one of the principal assets of living in Sitka. Per capita rates of participation in outdoor recreation and sports are estimated to be higher than the national average and many citizens are active in organizing recreational activities and volunteering to maintain facilities. However, for the past decade, Sitkans haven't had an inclusive opportunity to convene and share their specific ideas for how parks could be used, what trails could better connect the town, or what facilities families need to thrive. A planning process would provide the space for the community to consider different development scenarios and outline a pathway to collaboratively implement a shared vision.

The City of Sitka needs a Parks & Recreation Plan. We would like to conduct the following aspects of a planning process to achieve a minimalist, but usable plan for our small community.

1. A brief, but effective, public input process
2. A prioritization process to rank future development ideas
3. An analysis of maintenance and operational needs of City parks and recreation facilities, with a proposal for a volunteer program to ease burden on municipal staff
4. A final plan document with graphic layout and accompanying maps

b. Describe any specific results anticipated within 5 years of project start-up (for example, greenway plan development or implementation, community events, land acquisition, sustainable organization formed, miles of trails developed, acres of land preserved/conserved, etc.).

Within 5 years, the plan will be complete and useful for city staff, elected officials and members of the public. Projects will be identified and prioritized. There will be a way for members of the public to volunteer and support the maintenance of parks and trails. The community will have completed several of the near-term priorities, and begun construction on at least one longer term project, and have clear project plans in place for next steps. All these accomplishments will improve physical health and mental wellness and will strengthen a shared pride of place in the community.

c. Describe any major project accomplishments to date:

In 2003, Sitka Trail Works published the collaboratively developed Sitka Trails Plan, with the support of and a formal MOU between all land management agencies and government stakeholders. The 2003 Plan facilitated an impressive breadth of trail development in the subsequent years and the majority of its goals have been completed.

In 2018, the City & Borough released the Sitka Comprehensive Plan 2030, with a brief chapter on recreation, headlined by the following goal: “Maintain and expand Sitka’s diverse recreational opportunities.” Apart from identifying five general priority needs, the Comp Plan did not specify any individual development priorities or create a vision for the future of recreation.

In 2020, with funding from the CARES Act, the City Public Works department and the Sitka Conservation Society put unemployed locals to work on a number of parks and recreation projects. The projects provided benefit to the community, but were not prioritized according to any shared plan or direction from the community.

In 2021, the Sitka Parks & Recreation Committee identified the need for a more detailed plan that could direct future investments. Committee members have begun assembling all existing plans and creating an outline for a future plan.

d. Describe anticipated benefits to the community (for example, recreational, social, environmental, economic, health, etc.):

The planning process, where Sitkans can co-create the future they want, will itself provide social benefits. After a divisive local and national electoral cycle, now is the time to return to a shared sense of place that will bolster community pride and connectedness. Learning about and grappling with local maintenance challenges will hopefully conjure a sense of civic duty and inspire more citizens to contribute their time to steward the trails and parks they love.

The plan’s implementation will produce even greater social, economic, recreational, and health benefits. By identifying shared priorities for park & trail development, the community can find ways to work together, which will improve social connections.

A better maintained and expanded parks & trail network will provide more opportunities for people to play outdoors, encouraging healthy physical activity and refreshing time in nature.

A trail system that is attractive to visitors can stimulate the local economy by drawing tourists and providing business to local retailers, lodging, and guides.

2. Roles

a. Describe your organization, its role in the project, and the time and resources that will be contributed:

The parks and recreation plan project is being led by the Sitka Parks and Recreation Committee, a group of City Assembly-appointed volunteers. The three-person subcommittee tasked with the project may grow to include other members of the public not on the committee.

City of Sitka Parks and Recreation Committee - Lead. Official liaison with CBS staff and Assembly. Facilitate public input through monthly public-noticed meetings. Will provide project management.

b. In the chart below, describe each partner's role, responsibility, and contribution to the project (please include partners providing letters of commitment):

Organization Name	Partner's Role, Responsibility, and Contribution
City and Borough of Sitka Public Works Department	Agency responsible for maintenance and construction on all municipal lands. Will provide data and information on assets and maintenance needs and describe operational constraints.
Sitka Tribe of Alaska	STA will notify tribal citizens of the opportunity for public comment during the planning process and advise on how to reach citizens without internet access.
Sitka Trail Works	Advocate for maintenance and construction of local trails. Will provide capacity in the planning process and connections to interested parties and experts in the community.
Sitka Cycling Club	Community supporters developing vision for future of mountain biking in Sitka. Will provide connection to stakeholder group.
Sitka Conservation Society	Community supporter that advocates for sustainable economic development and thriving communities. Will help promote and gather participation in the planning process.
Sitka AmeriCorpsProgram	Primary partner that provides volunteer labor and collaborates on service projects. Potential for collaboration with AmeriCorps member input on planning and long term projects.
USDA Forest Service	Land manager for Tongass National Forest, adjacent to city lands. Will provide information and input about facilities connecting with their lands.
Salty Spoke Bike Co-op	Community hub. Will help connect with community members who are active recreation users to provide more public input.
Points North Maps	Consultant. Local cartography and GIS analysis firm, specializing in trail design. Will advise on data availability and provide input on potential expansion.
USDI Park Service - Sitka	Responsible for management of Sitka National Historic Park. Will provide information and input about facilities connecting with their lands.
OTHER POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS	BELOW - NOT CONFIRMED
Fjord Landscape Design	Landscape Architect with experience across the Tongass. Will advise on history of local planning efforts.

Visit Sitka	Promotes and publicizes outdoor recreation in Sitka. Will advise on tourism aspects of recreation infrastructure.
Litter Free Sitka ?	Group of citizens committed to a litter free Sitka. Host outdoor clean ups once a week.

3. Community Support & Engagement

a. Describe project support to date, including support from the general public, organizations, coalitions, government agencies, and elected officials. Share any relevant news media articles, sections of plans that propose the project, and/or government resolutions that illustrate this support:

Prior planning processes in 2003 and 2011 showed strong community engagement in the developing a shared vision for parks and trails.

In the 2030 Sitka Comprehensive Plan, parks and recreation were reaffirmed as important aspects for the quality of life in Sitka

The dozen project contributors listed above are all in support of the planning process.

The City and Borough of Sitka Assembly will consider a resolution in support of the RTCA planning process on February 23rd, 2021.

b. Describe plans for future public outreach and engagement:

To create a plan for the future of recreation in Sitka, the project leaders will need to engage a broad cross-section of the community. The detailed plan for how to conduct that engagement will be developed as a part of this project.

Given the constraints of in-person gatherings during the pandemic, we anticipate arranging, with the support of RTCA, virtual forums of some kind to solicit community feedback online. Online surveys will likely be a component of data collection, but more creative and interactive platforms may provide more robust qualitative data.

4. NPS Support Requested

a. What are the major project challenges your organization faces?

The lack of staff capacity for planning is the greatest challenge our community faces. Although Sitka is surrounded by an exceptional assortment of local, state, and federal public lands, no unified vision exists for their future management and development. Given the unpredictable nature of some sources of funding, it would benefit the community to have a list of shovel-ready, prioritized projects to pursue when opportunities arise.

The City and Borough of Sitka does not have a Parks & Recreation Department, and the Public Works Department has limited staff capacity dedicated to parks and grounds maintenance. Additional capacity is needed for planning, design, and permitting of new recreation facilities.

The City's all-volunteer Parks & Recreation Committee is composed of individuals who are otherwise fully employed and have limited time to dedicate to the work of building a vision and plan for projects.

b. Describe the types of assistance and specific deliverables you are seeking from the NPS staff that would complement your team. For examples, see the description of "Our Services" on page 2.

- **Support in designing and conducting a public engagement process**

To develop a list of community-supported park and recreation projects, we need to solicit ideas and feedback from Sitkans. The COVID-19 pandemic has made standard public meetings infeasible, so we would seek the assistance of RTCA in designing a public engagement process that reached a broad cross-section of the community with alternative methods. We would solicit ideas for new projects, ranking of an existing list of proposals, feedback on maintenance needs, and thoughts on volunteerism.

- **Support in a prioritization process to rank future development ideas**

With the data and input of a public engagement process, we would like to create a prioritized and detailed list of projects. We would like help in collecting and analyzing the public input and translating that into a democratic prioritization of community desires. For the ranked list of projects, we would like to develop more robust proposals, including a map of proposed developments, and any other steps that might advance the projects toward being shovel-ready.

- **Support in analyzing maintenance needs of current and proposed parks & recreation facilities, including a review of existing capacity and an evaluation of the feasibility of volunteer support.**

A complete plan should include a consideration of long-term maintenance needs of existing facilities and of proposed developments. NPS technical assistance could provide us with a clear-eyed assessment of our City's current capacity compared to needs and plans for the future. We hope NPS staff could help us compile examples from other cities that have found ways to fund and support their park and trail maintenance with external grants or local volunteers.

- **Assistance in final plan document development with layout and mapping**

We would like professional help to pull all the above information together, combine with maps, and format into a readable document that illustrates our vision for the future.

5. How Did You Hear About Us?

Have you worked with Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance in the past? If not, how did you hear about our program (for example, from a colleague, online search, NPS website, grants.gov, social media, email, or other)?

While this iteration of the Parks & Recreation Committee has not worked with RTCA in recent history, members of our community have. Lynne Brandon, director of Sitka Trail Works, passed on an email advertising an RTCA webinar that sparked the conversation.

6. Attachments

Please include the following attachments with this completed application: • Site location map • Commitment letters from 3 or more project partners • Optional supplemental information that can help us learn more about your project (background documents, examples of media coverage, additional maps, list of links to resources, project photos, etc.)

- Site location map
 - a. [Sitka Recreation Opportunity Map](#)
- Three support letters secured from:

- a. [AmeriCorps](#)
 - b. [USFS Sitka Ranger District](#)
 - c. [Sitka Trail Works](#)
- Optional supplemental information that can help us learn more about your project (for example, background documents, media coverage, additional maps, list of links to resources, project photos, etc.)
 - a. [2003 Sitka Trails Plan](#)
 - b. [2012 Sitka Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Action Plan](#)
 - c. [Sitka Comprehensive Plan 2030](#)
 - d. [Sitka Trail Works - list of local trails](#)
 - e. [City & Borough of Sitka, Web GIS Maps and Online Property Information](#)