

A Community Proposal for Alaska Mental Health Trust Shoreline
Properties in Ketchikan

Ketchikan Beaches Association
April 2007
Executive Summary

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The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHT) owns 13,300 acres of land within and adjacent to the City of Ketchikan. AMHT lands in Ketchikan include numerous beaches that have been used by the community in various ways for decades, including Coast Guard Beach, and South Point Higgins (aka Driftwood) Beach. The shoreline lands held by AMHT are highly valued by locals and visitors for ecological, historic, cultural, scenic, and recreational attributes. The lands have historically been publicly managed for recreation and have long been recognized as potential park sites. **The community has released this plan to present opportunities to acquire these lands for public management, while providing an economic return to the AMHT.**

For clarification, the beach itself together with the subtidal lands, is State owned land where public use is not restricted. But the upland property boundaries extend down to the “Mean High Water” line, which in the Ketchikan vicinity is about 5 feet vertically below the top of the beach. Without a public access easement on the survey plat an upland owner can prevent public use of that portion of the beach. With the proper permits the owner can place fill or structures right down to that mean high line. The area of unflooded beach available to the public could disappear at an average high tide level. Access to the beach across the uplands is important for the community to use the beach without trespassing over private property. More importantly, uplands have values that enhance the beach experience.

All of the recommendations and options presented in this community plan are supported by adopted Ketchikan Gateway Borough planning documents, resolutions, or are found in the Borough code.

Coast Guard Beach

U.S. Survey No. 3762

Acreage: 69.6 acres with 0.86 miles of shoreline

Zone: Public lands and institutions (PLI).

Community attributes: Coast Guard Beach has long been used by locals and visitors as a prime recreation spot for swimming, fishing, beachcombing, walking, hiking, kayaking, camping, hand logging, outdoor classrooms, overnight “toughies” campout, and for subsistence gathering. The beach is used widely by the school, neighborhood residents and all of Ketchikan.

Supporting planning documents: Formal designation of the Coast Guard Beach as a park has been a community priority in the Ketchikan Gateway Borough 1976 and 1983 Comprehensive Plan and previous Coastal Zone Management plans.

Borough Resolutions: In 1985, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough unanimously voted to pass resolution 607, which stated, “A resolution of the Assembly of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, Alaska, endorsing establishment of a State Park on State Land known as Coast Guard Beach located at Point Higgins, U.S. Survey 3762.”

Community Recommendations

The community has developed feasible and preferred alternatives for this parcel that are consistent with Borough plans and wishes of the community. The recommendations are below.

1. Acquisition by the community

The KBA in partnership with the Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT) filed an application for the purchase of the parcel. Once acquired, the property will be donated to an appropriate government or community organization and managed for public access and low-impact recreation. A conservation easement on the properties will ensure that the property will remain in its natural state in perpetuity. A public access plan will be developed to provide low-impact recreational use of the property.

The TLO has stated its intent to dispose of land at some future date through a competitive bid process and therefore will not enter into a negotiated purchase and sale agreement with KBA and SEALTrust. Without a willing seller, grants awards and other fundraising is extremely difficult, and this option unlikely.

2. Acquisition of the land by Alaska State Parks

The Alaska State Parks advisory board for the Ketchikan region voted to support KBA's acquisition of Coast Guard Beach as a public park. Their letter of intent is attached. (See attachment G).

3. Acquisition and management of the land by the Borough

The Borough can use Park and Recreation powers and work with TLO to create a package that would allow for the acquisition of the land through land exchange, grants, federal and state appropriations and/or outright purchase. The property would be managed for public recreation by the KGB or by a community organization under specific agreement..

4. Hybrid acquisition and management

Acquisition is most likely through a partnership with the land owner, community members, local and state governments, with funding from federal grants and possible appropriations. Management of the land would be for public recreation by an appropriate government or community organization.

Next Steps

- Pursue Community Enhancement Project designation of Coast Guard Beach to allow for time for land use options 1-4. The Community Enhancement Initiatives process has been used in the past to secure funding to reimburse the AMHT.
- Pursue necessary memorandum of agreements for pursuit of land use options 1-4.

South Point Higgins/Driftwood Beach

U.S. Survey No. 3089 LOT 123

Acreage: 4.5 acre lot with 1,260 ft of rocky beach and intertidal habitat

Zoned: Low density residential

Community attributes: South Point Higgins beach is a cornerstone for community recreation. It is used for swimming, fishing, beachcombing, walking, hiking, kayaking, camping, SCUBA, outdoor classrooms, and for beach plant gathering. The beach is used widely by neighborhood residents and all of Ketchikan. South Point Higgins beach has tide pools, and supports key habitat for herring spawn.

Supporting planning documents: formal designation of South Point Higgins beach as a shoreline park has been a community priority in the Ketchikan Gateway Borough 1976 and 1983 Comprehensive Plan and previous Coastal Zone Management plans.

The 1983 Comprehensive plan states, “Two State-owned public beaches located in South Point Higgins provide easy access from Ketchikan’s densest rural settlement to open waterfront, clam beaches, and swimming areas.”

Community Recommendations

The community has developed feasible and preferred alternatives for this parcel that are consistent with Borough plans and wishes of the community. The recommendations are below.

1. Acquisition of the land by Borough

The TLO stated their interest in “working with the Ketchikan Gateway Borough on a negotiated sale of the South Point Higgins parcel, Lot 123, U.S. Survey No. 3157. The details of the transaction will need to be agreed upon between the TLO and the Borough.”

2. Acquisition of the land by the community

KBA in partnership with the Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT) filed an application for the purchase of the parcel. Once acquired, the property will be donated to an appropriate government or community organization and managed for public access and low-impact recreation. A conservation easement on the properties will ensure that the property will remain in its natural state in perpetuity. A public access plan will be developed to provide low-impact recreational use of the property.

The KBA is preparing to pursue federal grants and fundraise for the money to purchase the parcel.

Next Steps

- Complete a purchase and sales agreement. Without a purchase sales agreement the community or Borough could be outbid during the last stages of the negotiated sale. It would also make fundraising difficult.

- Develop and implement a fundraising strategy. Fundraising will pursue local, federal and private sources.
- Complete parcel management plan with community and local government.
- Purchase the land.