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518 E 9th Ave
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September 9, 2023

Rachel Bernhardt
PO Box 220112
Anchorage, AK 99522

Re: Assessment of potential impacts to and opportunities for HLB Parcel #2-156

Dear Ms. Bernhardt,

This letter briefly describes the observations I made during our site visit to the Heritage Land Bank Parcel #2-156 on October 10, 2022. It also provides a general summary of the potential impacts to the site, and the potential opportunities for preservation and enhancement of the ecology, as a result of the development of a natural burial cemetery.

Prior to the visit we texted, emailed, and had discussions about the project. You shared a copy of a simple concept plan; multiple documents showing past investigations into developing the parcel; and photos you had taken on previous visits. Additionally, I looked up the property using the Municipality of Anchorage Parcel Viewer.

We walked existing social trails that meander through the area that you are considering for the first phase of the natural burial cemetery. The vegetation is composed of mature forest/woodland and meadow habitat. There are numerous birch and spruce trees and their associated understory plants such as devil's club, alders, and willows, and grasses and plants typically found in Southcentral Alaskan meadows such as arctic lupine, fireweed, and yarrow.

From an environmental perspective, the project will have numerous positive impacts. The creation of a vegetation management plan, and implementation of regularly scheduled inspections and maintenance of the trees and shrubs will reduce many risks associated with woodland and meadow ecosystems, including, but not limited to the following:

- FIRE
 - Following Firewise prescriptions for limbing and thinning vegetation, removing beetle killed trees, and maintaining defensible distances when building new infrastructure such as fences, buildings, and parking areas
- HAZARD
 - Increasing safety by inventorying the trees, and identifying and mitigating defects in trees that are close to the current "social trails" and any future infrastructure or new trails
- PEST AND DISEASE
 - Reducing risk of pest and disease outbreaks through early identification and control
- INVASIVE SPECIES
 - Monitoring for and preventing the establishment of invasive species

In particular, trees and vegetation are valuable assets, and they perform ecosystem services that meet the objectives of Heritage Land Bank conservation principles. Some of the ecological, functional, aesthetic benefits include:

- Mature forest protects large habitat patches, increasing health and survival of trees and understory plants, and maintaining corridors for the movement of wildlife
- Trees produce food and make shelter for birds and wildlife
- High leaf surface area intercepts thousands of gallons of stormwater, resulting in less surface runoff and recharging the water table, protecting quality of water resources for infiltration, detention, storm water, and habitat
- Roots guard against erosion and improve soil texture and chemistry as they grow, die, and break down
- Trees store carbon and offset by-products of burning fossil fuels and particulate production that is released when they die; they capture air pollution
- Trees provide natural screening and frame scenic views

Your ideas revolve around good stewardship of the land - to support the continual, naturally occurring processes of disturbance and recovery, and to preserve and enhance the existing health, diversity, and sustainability of the plants and wildlife. Based on industry-standard formulas, we can calculate tree protection zones: grave sites, trails and any other infrastructure can be located according to an individual tree's age, size, and tolerance to disturbance in the root zone. We can specify if there should not be any digging, clearing of vegetation, or soil compaction other than hand-tamping within that zone. For large roots (greater than 1" in diameter) encountered while digging outside the zone, work should stop immediately and an arborist should make sure that the health or stability of the tree will not be impacted negatively. Any small roots encountered during construction should be exposed to sound tissue and cut cleanly with a saw.

A phased approach will afford the opportunity to reflect on the results of each development phase before moving on to the next. This project is a unique opportunity to balance the use of the cemetery for natural burials and to provide public access to responsibly managed open space.

Should you have any questions, or if I may be of further assistance, please contact me at maria@communityforestry101.com or at (907) 350-3571.

Sincerely,

Maria D'Agostino, Principal
Community Forestry 101 LLC
International Society of Arboriculture, Certified Arborist/Municipal Specialist
American Society of Consulting Arborists, Registered Consulting Arborist #544
Tree Risk Assessment Qualification