

# Land Trust would negotiate on beach

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The Alaska Mental Health Trust Land Office acting executive director told a work group Wednesday that the trust is willing to negotiate a sale of South Point Higgins Beach with the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, but still needs time to gather information on Coast Guard Beach.

“We have had a buyer interested for South Point Higgins but decided to do a negotiated sale,” said Wendy Woolf, TLO acting executive director.

She said the trust is waiting to hear from the borough on whether and how the borough would purchase the beach off South Point Higgins Road.

Kathleen Wiechelman, Ketchikan Beaches Association co-chair, said the organization is confident it can raise the necessary funds for but needed time.

Woolf said the trust was not tied to a time frame for South Point Higgins Beach, but told the group a negotiated sale was not always a guarantee because of the trust’s fiduciary responsibility to its beneficiaries.

A negotiated sale with the borough would be at the appraised fair market value. But if someone else offered a significant amount, she said she would have to entertain that offer.

She said the trust has not done any significant work on Coast Guard Beach and still needs to do an analysis on the property compared with all its other properties across the state.

“It is a prime piece of property for the trust,” she said. “It has some intrinsic values that make it more valuable to us.”

The reason the Coast Guard Beach came to the front burner was because of anticipated trail construction on the property, she said. Because of that, the trust requested a rezone for Coast Guard Beach to help guard against a misconception that the property was open public land whenever the trust decides to go forward with whatever **it** plans for the property.

“Everyone remembers the trail, but no one remembers that we were going to develop (the property),” Woolf said. “All we wanted was the zoning.”

She said the rezone was more of a paperwork exercise and the trust was not going to develop the property this year.

“The beach will always be public, she said. “It’s the upland that we own.”

Diane Mayer, executive director of Southeast Alaska Land Trust, a Juneau- based nonprofit organization, said a rezone of the property makes **it** more vulnerable for an outside interest to buy the property. Alethea Johnson, Ketchikan Outdoor Recreation and Trails Coalition member, said there was no development on the trail and nothing formal done on the rezone, then that would give the community more time develop a proposal for the trust.

Borough Manager Roy Eckert said he was concerned about renewing the revocable license with the trust for continued access to the beach and trail construction. The license is set to expire in May.

He said the license renewal was needed so improvements could be made to the trail.

Woolf said one option that would give everyone time would involve the trust issuing a “closure order,” meaning the uplands would be closed but access to the trail and beach would remain open.

Eckert said all the borough had to offer was a land exchange but that would require the borough to give up too many acres. Coast Guard Beach is 70.6 acres. Woolf said a land exchange was highly unlikely to be acceptable to the trust because exchanges often take years in a laborious process.

Woolf said one reason she came to Ketchikan was to hear from the community whether it was the whole piece of land the community wanted or just beach access, with the trust being able to subdivide the uplands.

She said she could not make a good case right now for a negotiated sale of the whole Coast Guard Beach property. She said it did make sense for the trust to have open space on the property and access to the beach, because it increases the property’s value.

“How do we get the benefit for the trust and have the public value?” Woolf asked.

Eric Muench, KBA member, asked whether the trust could renew the license and hold off on a rezone to give the community time to determine whether it really was the whole parcel the community wanted.

“The community at this time is not willing to start the subdivision process,” he said.

Muench asked whether the community would be notified of the trust’s plans for the property. Woolf said the trust would make sure the borough knew of the plans for Coast Guard Beach. Assembly Member John Harrington suggested that information first be

included in the borough manager's report before it came before the Assembly as an action item.

Woolf also said people could join the trust's mailing lists to keep informed of land sales. For more information on joining the mailing list, go to the Trust's Web site at [www.mhtrustland.org](http://www.mhtrustland.org).

KBA also released "A Community Proposal for Alaska Mental Health Trust Shoreline Properties in Ketchikan," which outlines the association's recommendations to acquire Coast Guard Beach, South Point Higgins Beach, Mountain Point boat launch and beach and Whipple Creek Beach.

Carrie Dolwick, KBA coordinator, was not present at Wednesday's meeting, but told the Daily News Tuesday that Coast Guard Beach is the association's first priority. She said the recommendations to acquire the property are to work with Southeast Alaska Land Trust to purchase the parcel and then donate it to the borough or other community agency to manage. The second option is to have the property be acquired as a state park; the third option is to have the borough acquire and manage the property; and the fourth is a combination of all three.

The proposal is expected to be on the organization's Web site, [www.ketchikanbeaches.org](http://www.ketchikanbeaches.org), by Friday.

"We believe the community can protect the core recreation areas and beaches they're interested in and that the trust can be reimbursed for their properties," Dolwick said. "We believe it's a win-win for everybody. All we're asking for is time to work toward these recommendations."

Woolf said Wednesday the trust has no plans to develop Mountain Point at any time in the near future. She said she and Marcie Menefee, trust resource officer, were going to look at mental health properties Thursday to learn more about the properties.

Other attendees Wednesday included Assembly Members Dave Kiffer and Glen Thompson, who each participated for half the meeting; Lynn Kolund and Vern Keller with the U.S. Forest Service; Mary Kowalczyk and Jim Shoemaker with Alaska State Parks; Jim Mitchell from the trails coalition; and Leslie Real from the borough planning department.

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