

March 3, 2023

City and Borough of Juneau Assembly
155 S. Seward Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Assembly Members,

Thank you for your consideration of the iRide Alaska request for a permit/lease to conduct bike tours on the North Douglas Pioneer Road. We listened and heard your concerns, and we propose the follow explanations and concessions:

Why ebike tours:

E-Bike tours are an eco-friendly, quiet, non-polluting, low impact way to give locals and visitors an opportunity to explore the world's most Northern Rainforest. It allows those who are aging or otherwise unable to pedal a regular bike up hills a chance to try new technology that will help them enjoy an activity they may not otherwise be able to do. It levels the playing ground so grandparents and grandchildren, avid bikers and their health-limited partners can all bike together at a pace that works for everyone.

Other Options Considered:

As longtime residents of our community, we have carefully considered where the best location for ebike tours would be with the least impact to other users. Though a bike ride on Perseverance Trail, the Rain Forest Trail, or Under Thunder would be more exciting for the visitors, we recognize the heavy use of those trails, the potential conflicts with passing other users and the potential safety concerns.

Impacts on Other Users:

The benefit of selecting the Pioneer Road is that it is a 20-foot-wide road allowing all types of users to comfortably pass by one another without having to stop their current activity. This road offers long sight distances taking away the surprise factor for users, as they can easily see one another for long distances. In addition, we selected Class 1 ebikes, which only give assistance when a person is pedaling, there is no throttle, making them have a lower maximum speed. The purpose of the tour is not speed but rather an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the rainforest while riding a bike. Tours will not generally travel faster than what non-electric bikes would normally go and will be accompanied by two guides. Ebikes are quiet making no more noise than a regular bike. Our tour size is small with 4-10 people and two guides. We do not see a conflict with dog walkers, hikers, runners, and other bike riders.

CBJ Code:

The CBJ has already defined the question of whether an ebike is considered motorized. Class 1 ebikes are not motorized by CBJ code 72.28.010. Through a lengthy discussion of what was to be allowed on park land, it was concluded that ebikes would be permissible under that definition.

Commercial use of trails:

The intended purpose of the Pioneer Road as defined in City documents is as a road and not as a trail. However, in putting together our request for a lease we looked at and followed the recommendations of the

2004 update of the Trails Working Group regarding commercial use (<https://juneau.org/parksrecreation/commercial-use>). That document recommends only one weekend day and having tours done by 7:00 pm when many locals may want to use trails. We are proposing to be done before 7:00 and no tours on Sundays. We considered only doing tours during the weekdays, but with Monday a light passenger day we were not able to create an economically viable business without having tours on Saturday.

Purpose of the Pioneer Road:

All City documents, grant proposal, and even newspaper articles pertaining to the Pioneer Road explain that its purpose is for economic growth. Choosing to retroactively re-classify this area as primarily recreational does not align with the grant that created it. The funding to build the road came from the State Department of Commerce and Economic Development. The State may have questions regarding the use of the grant, if they learn that the road is being turned into a recreation trail and that economic opportunities are being turned down.

Locally owned Business:

We are two local couples, who have spent most of our lives here and are seeking to share the beauties of our community to a very small number of visitors in a unique way. This is simply a proposal to take a few people at a time on a bike ride down a road.

Reduce Pressure on City Staff to Maintain the Pioneer Road:

Fees generated from tours could be used to remove downed trees, unclog culverts and reduce erosion on the road. One possibility that is used by other agencies is to create an “in lieu of fees maintenance agreement.” The details of value and type of work are negotiated between lessee and the agency. The idea is to simplify processes and get basic maintenance, such as downed trees and ditch clearing completed. Being on the road regularly would allow us to react quickly to downed trees and erosion issues, reducing damage to the road and keeping it open for other users.

Shortened Season:

In order to reduce impacts to those that are currently using the Pioneer Road, we propose shortening our season to May through September, eliminate April and October.

Time for Planning:

We understand the demand and need for further tourism planning in our community. However, the lack of planning should not stop a business from operating. The City is currently using the “Commercial Use of Trails Recommendations” from the Trails Working Group to guide commercial use and that document should continue to be used until it is updated or replaced. We request a three-year lease to allow time for our business to recoup the costs of starting a business and allow the city time to do further tourism planning.

Beneficial to All:

User fees and sales tax will create revenue for the city, which in turn benefits the citizens of Juneau, helping cover the cost for CBJ to maintain the corridor. Our company would employ 15 or more seasonal employees, the majority will be locals. Visitors will have the chance to personally experience some of Juneau’s beauty in a personal way and we as the owners will have an economic opportunity.

Sharing:

Our community has long been open to welcoming visitors. As owners of iRide Alaska, we are providing an opportunity for these visitors and locals to explore the wonders of our area. We all visit places in the world at different times in our lives and are grateful for these kinds of opportunities to explore and experience the place we chose to visit and are thankful for the impacts on others.

Thank you for your time and consideration for our application for our very small business, which is consistent with the purpose of the grant used to build Pioneer Road and enable economic development.

Sincerely,

James and Chris King
Reuben and Erin Willis
Owners