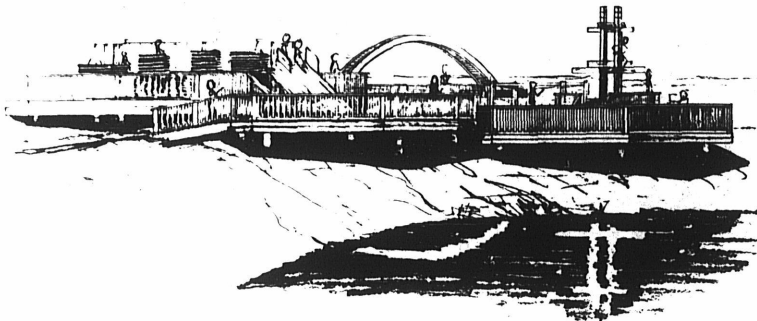


BETHEL COMMUNITY PARK BETHEL, ALASKA



Bethel plan gets award

Landscape architecture is a little recognized thing. The point of the art is to be so natural that no one will notice.

So, we get into a scheme where the best is recognized as mere competence and the worst is recognized as a "break-through".

In Bethel, Alaska, some landscape architects were given the money and the time to design something for the community and the people in it.

They were given a sketch a program and then left to their own devices. A year later, with the bene-

fit of advice from very patient city officials, a park design was created. A wood plank bicycle trail is now being built as the first increment of construction. Much more is to follow.

Group Three Design, a landscape architecture and planning firm of Anchorage in collaboration with CCC/HOK, Architects, was recently presented with a merit award for design excellence by the American Society of Landscape Architects for the park. Burdeth Lent and Bill Evans, landscape architects of Group Three, reported that the design is an expression of considerable research, hard lessons on local building limitations, innovation, and hard work.

Bethel immediately presented its problems - how do you create a park

where trees have never grown and where they probably never will - where there are frequent, damaging high winds - where disturbance is prohibitive due to deep, active permafrost - where gravel is difficult to obtain - where shipping is difficult - and where the warm season is so short, people probably don't want to be in a park anyway?? Undaunted, and armed with assistance from the Bethel Veterans of Foreign Wars, State and Federal Grants, the landscape designers forged ahead, Quixote style.

Lyman Hoffman, City Manager and Nancy Kraning, Assistant City Manager and other City Officials advised the firm's designers. The final plans were greatly improved with additional play equipment as a result of their participation. Architects, soils engineers and structural engineers consulted on the park as well.

A major ratification of the park Master Plan by landscape architect Marcia Christofferson consolidated the recreation facilities, which were spread throughout the site onto less than half of the site. This was accomplished by incorporating multi-use type facilities and resulted in drastic reduction in expense and disturbance to the natural tundra.

The master plan provides for a baseball diamond, ice hockey units, field sports area, tennis and basketball courts, bicycle trails, restrooms and parking, picnic and childrens play area, all grouped around a lake in the middle of the park. Research into landscaping with agriculture extension advisors has resulted in the expression of interest by the local Community College in per-

forming experimental tree and shrub plantings to enhance the facilities.

Special highlights of the design, influenced by local conditions include:

- an all-wood bike trail with flexible couplings to "ride" directly on the moving tundra.
- wood-sculpture tot lot play equipment mounted to platforms - on piles for stability and located to reflect in the lake from the park entrance (see rendering).
- a multi-purpose, lighted play court for year-round use which is constructed on a styrofoam "sandwich fill" pad.
- picnic shelters with wind screen baffles.
- passive solar park benches with wind screens and sun reflection panels to extend comfort hours for users.
- wood bleachers, instead of metal, on mounds for better spectator comfort.
- location for native art in public places in park entrance area.

"The project was a tough one, but an exciting challenge. My partner of the time, Jon Houk, the other landscape architects and I used to go into huddles often to help solve design problems. The Bethel officials deserve a lot of credit for this co-operative effort," Lent reported.