



Belfast Rangeways: Creating Development and Management Plans for the Long-Term Preservation of Public Access to the Shore



“The development of a Rangeway Management Plan for the City of Belfast is a critical component to the consistent care and maintenance of these valuable public access points to the coastal and inland waterways. This will benefit the community for many years.”

Carol Good, Chair of the Belfast Parks and Recreation Commission

PARTNERS

Margot Carpenter, Hartdale Maps, Private consultant to the City. Assisted with rangeway assessments and public process, and designed the brochure and maps.

City of Belfast Parks & Recreation Commission. Attended public hearings, reviewed draft recommendations, and made formal recommendations to the City Council.

Kelly & Associates, LLC. Legal counsel to the City on the project.

Good Deeds, Inc. Land survey services to the City.

Gartley & Dorsky Engineering & Surveying. Prepared all the engineering analyses and designs for the project. Conducted some site surveying to complete engineering work as well. Provided design recommendations and cost estimates.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The City of Belfast reviewed 11 local rangeways and rights-of-way and create development and management plans to preserve long-term public access to the shore. Throughout the project informational materials for the public and formal maps (which include survey data) were created, and an engineering review was completed for four of the rangeways and included formal engineered designs.



APPROACH

The first challenge was understanding how to approach this process as there are 11 locations spread out over the City. The locations are developed differently and offer varying amenities and challenges. Some of the locations are in poor condition and not safe for public access at this time.

An additional challenge was the different perceptions of the neighborhoods about “their” rangeways; what it is today and what they wanted to see it in the future. The Highview Terrace rangeway was a contentious issue; people whose land abutted the right-of-way didn’t want to permit access, however people who had properties away from the shore and had enjoyed access for decades wanted to maintain that access. Some neighborhoods felt it was unfair that their rangeway had been more developed than others and therefore saw much more public use; some saw the increased use as a nuisance to the quiet and enjoyment of their properties.

Some neighborhoods were aging and wanted to ensure the access was safe for those whose mobility was becoming challenged. Some neighborhoods thought things were fine the way they were and didn’t want any changes to occur.

It became clear from the beginning that there would not be a one size fits all approach to this project; the development and management plans would have to be individual to each rangeway. It also became clear early on that the development and management plans really went hand-in-hand as one plan under each rangeway, which is why they are presented as such. This approach allowed the steering committee (Norm Poirier, Parks & Recreation, Sadie Lloyd, Planner, and Margot Carpenter of Hartdale Maps) to assess the individual conditions of each rangeway, make recommendations, review each rangeway separately with each separate neighborhood, and review the unique plans of each rangeway with the Council effectively. This approach allowed us to have productive conversations with neighbors, which ultimately led to open communication with them throughout the process.

Throughout the process it became clear that some of the tasks we originally intended to do through this grant didn’t make sense once we had started. We also realized that some of the work we really needed to do was not included in the grant. Thankfully we were able to make some changes to the scope of work so that we could accomplish what we wanted and need to do.

RESULTS

The end result is individual plans for each rangeway that address particular site and neighborhood needs. Through this grant we were able to go a step further even and obtain engineered plans for the rangeways that are currently unsafe so that the City can hire a contractor and repair the rangeways and provide safe access again; this should greatly improve the timing of the projects and the likelihood that they will be completed. The ultimate result is that this work truly guarantees long-term access for the public to the shore, something that was established in the 1700s. The City is proud of its commitment to continue this tradition today, over 300 years later.



NEXT STEPS

The next step is for Parks & Recreation and the Council to authorize and implement the recommendations over time. The biggest challenge will, admittedly, be funding through the City budget. The Council will need to decide each year which projects they are able to fund. This will be the driving factor in whether projects get done, and when. Additionally, the City will be working in the next year with neighbors who have encroachments to address such, and ensure that City land and public rights-of-way are not threatened.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the biggest lessons we learned was that it is important not to back yourself into a corner in the application. It's important to allow for flexibility for the work to shape the process. It can be easy to overcommit in a grant application, but ultimately you want the best outcome for the project. Thankfully we were able to make amendments, but I would consider this in future grant applications.

It's important to be reasonable about project management and time. It turned out to be a more extensive process than some anticipated. It would have been very difficult

Prior to the public meetings we sent all rangeway abutters a packet reflecting the rangeway in their neighborhood that included the draft recommendations, an aerial photograph of the rangeway and a recorded survey of the rangeway. We prioritized information sharing with the public, and provided them the same materials we were working from. For this type of project success is directly tied to meeting with the different neighborhoods individually and having open, regular communication with the public. One of the best parts of this project was seeing small neighborhoods come together at a public meeting, something that rarely happens for an individual neighborhood on this small of a scale. It was unique to hear neighbors speak about what is meaningful to them and their way of life on their street.

It is important that the plans reflect the community that surrounds the public ways. It was eye opening to find out about certain issues that pertained to one rangeway but none of the others. This process and the resulting plans would have been less impactful if it wasn't able to address the unique features, conditions, and challenges of the different rangeways. Ultimately, doing so allowed us to come up with long-term plans that together represent vibrant, varied locations throughout the entire City where people can access the water and enjoy different experiences. Having an extensive public process was key and helped avoid any feelings of being blindsided. It was also important that the public feel heard by the Council. At the public hearing with the Council the Council didn't speak or respond and only heard comment. This is in part why the process went smoothly. It wasn't rushed and there was significant public input; every step of the project was public.

Lastly, it is important that the plans are reflective of the community or they won't be valued and implemented. It is also important to have a plan for who will manage them, and who is responsible for the management long-term. In Belfast we have Parks & Recreation staff, but in other locations with fewer resources, having a plan for who is responsible for managing the trails as well as implementing the projects would be key to the success of the project.



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**COASTAL COMMUNITY GRANTS:
Water Access**

APPLICABILITY FOR OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

The plans and public materials that were created in Belfast for this project would provide a good jumping off point or model for other communities to follow, and then they could create plans that reflect their neighborhoods and values. Our experience can help inform others if and when they encounter road blocks. It may be more difficult in places with less political support or places that value public access less and private ownership more.

For additional information

Sadie Lloyd, Planner
City of Belfast
slloyd@cityofbelfast.org
207-338-1417 x125

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