

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH SPECIAL MEETING
ASSEMBLY/PLANNING COMMISSION OCTOBER 23, 2001

I. CALL TO ORDER

The special meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on October 23, 2001 at the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly Chambers, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m. by Mayor Timothy L. Anderson. The purpose of the special meeting was a joint assembly/planning commission meeting.

II. ROLL CALL

Assembly members present and establishing a quorum were:

Mr. J. Bruce Bush, Assembly District No. 1
Ms. Sara Jansen, Assembly District No. 2 (Deputy Mayor)
Mr. Talis J. Colberg, Assembly District No. 3
Mr. Dan Kelly, Assembly District No. 4
Ms. Jody Simpson, Assembly District No. 5
Mr. Jim Colver, Assembly District No. 6 (entered at 6:15 p.m.)
Ms. Kelly Lankford Ladere, Assembly District No. 7

Planning Commission members present and establishing a quorum were:

Mr. Chris Rose, District 1
Mr. Lee Sharp, District 3
Ms. Mary Kvalheim, District 4
Mr. Dick Stoffel, District 6

Planning Commission members absent and excused were:

Ms. Cynthia Payne, District 2
Mr. Craig Savage, District 5
Ms. Rose M. Jenne, District 7

Borough staff participating:

Ms. Sandra Dillon, Borough Clerk
Mr. John Duffy, Borough Manager
Ms. Sandy Garley, Planning Director
Mr. Ron Swanson, Community Development Director

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

There being no objections, the agenda was approved as presented.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The pledge of allegiance was led by Barbara Hunt.

V. JOINT ASSEMBLY/PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

A. NEW BUSINESS

1. Michelle Church (Friends of the Mat-Su) re: status of Visual Preference Survey (Requested by Planning Director)

Ms. Michelle Church:

- presented a visual report and discussed the results of the survey now that it has been completed;
- commented that it was their hope that this kind of public process would increase public participation in community planning;

- identified the preferences of what the people who participated wanted to see in the community such a more rural look and vistas that include agricultural activities, open spaces, images of historical significance, and residential developments with larger lots;
- stated that high density developments rated fairly high if done well, incorporating open space and landscaping in the subdivision design; that roadways with landscaping and separated trail systems scored better than roads without such amenities; that commercial areas that had a human scale to them such as inviting people to walk around, landscaping, interesting schemes and interesting lighting rated significantly higher than commercial developments that were simply buildings set back with a parking lot or empty road in front of them.;
- believes the survey increased the public awareness and that there is growing support for a more planned approach to our growing community;
- pointed out that it is important to note that the point of the survey is not to copy verbatim what is in the photographs, but to figure out the design element that people are focusing on and try to avoid those elements that are negative and incorporate those design ideas that people like in the new developments or to retrofit into existing developments;
- discussed comparisons with other surveys and the demographics of the people who participated;
- went through the pages of the report and commented on the various photographs; and
- encouraged the use of the their report in the planning process.

Comments and questions followed.

Mayor Anderson:

- noted for the record that Assemblymember Colver joined the meeting at 6:15 p.m..

Mayor Anderson, as well as other assembly members, thanked Ms. Church and expressed appreciation for a job well done on the report.

Eileen Reilley, Alaska Railroad, Vice President Projects, Engineering, Technologies and Signals: Rail Study and Planning Efforts.

Mayor Anderson announced this addition to the agenda, stating they had invited the Alaska Railroad (after the agenda had been prepared) to give a presentation on the planning efforts of the railroad as it relates to the Mat-Su area in an effort to coordinate borough and railroad projects.

Eileen Reilley:

- distributed handouts to follow along with her presentation on the status of the project relating to Matanuska area and especially the Anchorage to Wasilla corridor;
- spoke to the South Central Community and Operations Plan and said copies were available on their website at www.alaskarailroad.com;
- reviewed the study findings relating commuter rail service between Anchorage and the Matanuska area;
- pointed out that the most widely held service concept would be a minimum requirement of four trains per day, 45 minutes apart; that a commuter service lower than that would not be successful;
- discussed and answered questions regarding destination points such as the airport and the military bases;
- discussed and answered questions regarding cost and feasibility;
- stated that the railroad is actively soliciting public comment on the commuter study; that they have a form that she can supply or it can be obtained on the website; that they would like comments from the assembly to include in the report prior to its adoption by the their board; and
- stated with regard to adoption of the study, that it would mean that the board has agreed with their premise and will support looking for local funding or potential federal funding.

Assemblymember Colver:

- suggested having Ms. Garley present assembly's position and answers to the assumptions in the report, noting that the deadline is October 31st; and
- commented that he doesn't think we have the money to contribute to a regional authority, but thinks it's a good idea and that we should pursue the federal money and any other opportunities.

Discussion and comments continued with regard to funding.

Ms. Reilley:

- went on to discuss the railroad's \$88 million worth of realignment and improvement projects they have undertaken this year;
- outlined the first project between Anchorage and the Eagle River bridge to be done in phases which started in June and is scheduled to be finished December 2001 and is funded by the Department of Defense; and
- discussed the next year projects from Eagle River to the Knik River and from Knik River to Wasilla to stop at mile 154 to begin once the grants are in place.

Discussion and questions followed.

Mr. Duffy

- reported on borough projects that relate to the railroad;:
- stated the borough is issuing an RFP for a location study for a rail spur from the Houston area to Pt. McKenzie for approximately \$420,000;
- reported the borough is in the midst of an update to its Long Range Transportation Plan stating it is critical that the railroad projects be included;
- stated in response to Assemblymember Jansen's comment about the \$7 million appropriation- -that it was for construction improvements to Port McKenzie and not specifically committed to rail construction;
- spoke to another project that would affect the railroad-- the EIS and preliminary design of the ferry landing and ferry system, which ties in with the concept of a regional transportation authority; stated that if the borough is going to fund any of these transportation improvements in the region, that we're all going to have to talk to one another and start coming up with funding mechanisms; that he thinks this is going to be part of the outcome of the study that DOT is about to issue;
- spoke to the Anchorage International Airport study which says the solution for the long term is the old airport reserve area at Pt. McKenzie for international air traffic; stated that if the borough is going to recommend that it go out to the Fish Creek area, we have to get that information included; noted that the reason the airport is leaning toward the Pt. McKenzie site at this point is because it is closer for travel times; and
- noted the Talkeetna transportation study in progress which will probably also impact the railroad.

Brief questions and discussion followed regarding railroad involvement in the Knik Arm Crossing and the estimated cost of including a rail bridge.

Mayor Anderson thanked Ms. Reilley for her presentation and expressed appreciation for the railroad's interest in being involved in planning.

2. Status of Core Area Comp Plan (Requested by Assemblymember Kelly)

Assemblymember Kelly:

- noted his request pertains to the status of the Borough-Wide Comp Plan as well as the Core Area Comp Plan; and
- stated he had just received an updated document, referring to the Borough-Wide Comp Plan, from the planning department where it shows the work being done up through chapter 5, which answers his questions at this time.

Ms. Garley:

- explained the various comp plans, such as the Long Range Transportation Plan, each of the Lake Management Plans, each of the Community Comprehensive Plans, are all chapters in a large book that is the Borough-Wide Comprehensive Plan;
- reported that what is missing, and the planning department has undertaken to complete, are some introductory chapters that explain to people who are new to the area or people who need to utilize the borough-wide plan what all the chapters were and how they tie together;
- outlined what would be included in the summary chapters to include a section that would explain how the borough plan would tie in with the state plan; and
- noted they hope to have the draft put together and to the planning commission for their review and comment by November or December and then revise based on their comments and to the assembly in a timely period.

Assemblymember Kelly:

- spoke to the state law requirement that our total comprehensive plan, not just individual chapters, is to be reviewed frequently, which has been interpreted to mean within a five-year period or less;
- voiced concern that our whole plan hasn't really been reviewed since 1970;
- suggested that since there are so many different chapters that perhaps the planning department could come up with a time plan to review certain sections every year so that over a five-year period we could have the whole plan covered;
- pointed out it would be nice to issue a single document that answers questions as to land use and zoning in a certain area to help them make intelligent decisions and be aware of the desires of the community; and
- inquired as to the status of the Core Area Comp Plan.

Ms. Garley:

- reported it is close to be completed and copies of the text and the map will be sent to the planning commission on November 5th; that following approval, it will go out for public comment and public hearing before the planning commission tentatively scheduled for its first meeting in February and based on those comments tentatively moving it forward to the assembly the first part of March 2002.

Assemblymember Kelly:

- inquired if the Long Range Transportation Plan was taken into consideration;
- also whether the planning commission had met with the Transportation Advisory Board to discuss updated road system issues.

Ms. Garley:

- stated that they have considered the Long Range Transportation Plan and explained how it fits into the zoning ordinance and into the comp plan; and
- advised that the planning commission met with the TAB board early last summer and had some general discussion regarding the update of our roadway systems; stated they would like that to be a regularly occurring process; that the TAB board asked to have a first meeting with the planning board and have that be regularly occurring also;

Assemblymember Colberg:

- commented from talking to people that one of the big opposition focal points to zoning in the core area will have to do with larger parcels of land and what they will be classified as and whether that classification will result in a financial loss to the owner;
- inquired if there could be some sort of remedy mechanism incorporated into the zoning process that would determine if there would be a loss and try to address it early on in the process rather than wait until it is before the assembly after the public hearings and have to try to amend something four months down the line; and
- raised concern regarding possible value changes on large parcels.

Mr. Duffy:

- said it was an interesting concept and he will research it, but noted there at least two mechanisms in the existing document and one is the transition zone.

Ms. Garley:

- explained that once you leave the developed part of the core area, there are many parcels that are not only large lots but are in areas where there hasn't been a lot of development, so there isn't a clear pattern;
- that there remains in the core area zoning ordinance a transition district in which there are a great mixture of uses; that it is in place to help deal with these kinds of issues;
- noted also that the planning commission has suggested, once the zoning map has been adopted, a process that would give people a long period of time, such as a year, to come forward and apply for rezoning at a reduced cost due to unforeseen or changed factors. She believes this would let people know that there is a process in place for them and that the borough would be willing to work with them;
- stated they would be prepared to spend a lot of time explaining the process to the public; and
- encouraged that borough to consider this process.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- suggested looking to the solutions of other communities, such as Seattle/King County and others that have

successfully dealt with this problem; and

- commented that we should look at the borough as a whole rather than community by community.

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Assemblymember Jansen:

- supports the idea of the long-term rezoning process that Ms. Garley described;
- commented with regard to large parcels of agricultural land--that there are programs out there that encourage people to keep them and thinks that maybe this is the time that the borough should seriously consider such programs; and
- voiced her support for looking at the borough as a whole and getting public input on what people want.

Assemblymember Kelly:

- inquired when the Long Range Transportation Plan would be revised and submitted to the planning commission and the assembly and whether it would include the Wasilla future corridor analysis.

Ms. Garley:

- stated the speed zone study has been completed and expects to receive the map based on that study this month;
- commented that they are setting a meeting with the demographic trends committee to discuss the assumptions on the traffic model; that once they are comfortable that the assumptions are presentable and understandable, they will begin the narrative part of the work;
- expects to submit to the planning commission in January or February 2002; and
- stated she believes an analysis of the future traffic systems would be included.

Mr. Duffy:

- stated they would also be looking at a highway link that goes east all the way to the Glenn Highway.

Assemblymember Kelly:

- inquired as to status of the CIP priority list; and
- also asked about a sign ordinance and noise ordinance.

Ms. Garley:

- explained that the date to get project nominations to the planning department is November 15, the TAB board has its meeting to prioritize transportation projects in December, they also expect the parks and trails and other committees that have input in December, and then the CIP is put together based on all those priorities and submitted to the planning commission in February and to the assembly in March of every year;
- stated the planning commission has determined they would like to work on a stand-alone sign ordinance but it is not currently on the planning department's calendar of events; that they need to get the core area plan and the comp plan update completed before they agree to take on another major undertaking; and
- reported they are working on a noise ordinance which is close to completion and are also working on a group home conditional use ordinance.

3. Long-Range Planning (Requested by Assemblymember Kelly)

Assemblymember Kelly:

- asked what the planning commission's long range goals are at this point.

Commissioner Kvalheim:

- commented on the sign ordinance; that they decided to work with the cities of Wasilla and Palmer to work it out for the whole area; and
- stated their biggest goal is to finalize the core area plan.

Assemblymember Kelly:

- commented that he wanted to bring these things forward and talk about them in order to try to give as much support to the planning commission as he can and hopes that this discussion has brought that about.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- commented with regard to the sign issue, discussing the small signs in Talkeetna and spoke to the need for larger

signs in communities such as Willow where people are driving through looking for certain critical information; that she hopes this is kept in mind as input for the sign ordinance.

Commissioner Stoffel:

- commented that he appreciates Assemblymember Kelly bringing up the long range goals and vision work because we get bogged down in what we're doing and it helps to be reminded.

Assemblymember Bush:

- spoke to long range plans for farm land; and
- raised concerns about zoning parcels as farm land;
- thinks that it is very important that some large farm parcels close to the city be kept for the future.

Further discussion followed regarding farm land.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- suggested the borough encourage the development of new communities.

(Assemblymember Colver exited the meeting at 8:30 p.m.)

4. Policy and Procedures for Referrals to the Planning Commission (Requested by Commissioner Kvalheim)

Commissioner Kvalheim:

- spoke for the establishment of a policy requiring the support of two or more assembly members before any requests are sent to the planning commission which requires staff time and the expenditure of funds.

Discussion and comments followed regarding directives from the assembly.

Assemblymember Simpson:

- acknowledged it is a problem that staff is often overwhelmed by requests; and
- would like to hear some conversation on how to handle a request without having to vote it down immediately at the table.

Assemblymember Colberg:

- voiced concern about setting limits on a single person to initiate a request; and
- that it may set the scene for lobbying and conflict.

Commissioner Rose:

- suggested that there be a second or a concurrence to the idea; not necessarily a formal vote.

Assemblymember Jansen:

- commented that she thinks any assembly member should be able to bring any type of resolution or ordinance forward, but at the same time use some common sense and try to get some kind of concurrence for end of the meeting actions; and
- supports Mr. Sharp's idea.

Ms. Dillon:

- noted that it has been since June that we have been trying to get back together to address this issue and her intent is to put it on the November 6 agenda under unfinished business for the assembly to address.

Commissioner Sharp:

- spoke to the issue as it relates to budget and time constraints of the borough attorney; and
- commented that he would always try to establish some sort of policy that would make council and assembly members feel that they did have some direct access to the borough attorney for relatively minor items or things that were not going to take a lot of time, but for those requests that would take over a certain amount of time would have to come from the body itself.

5. Land Disposal Policy (Requested by Commissioner Sharp)

Commissioner Sharp:

- raised concerns about what he perceives to be borough policy when it sells land without restrictions;
- discussed that when someone applies to purchase a piece of land and finds it unclassified or classified in a way that it can't be sold, it comes to the planning commission for reclassification as the first step in preparing it for sale; that this is the only time the planning commission sees the proposal; that their duty is to determine whether or not it should be reclassified which the request is usually to classify it for general use;
- stated there is a need for land use controls or restrictions to avoid incompatible uses;
- acknowledged that there are 16 different land use classifications but we seem to use "general use" every time we want to sell land; and
- suggested that for land that the borough determines that it doesn't need should be considered not just a source of revenue; but take advantage of the ability to restrict its use so it won't be developed into incompatible use some time in the future.

Assemblymember Jansen:

- spoke to the asset management plan.

Mr. Duffy:

- affirmed that Commissioner Sharp is correct in that most of the property that we move forward is recommended for general purpose, basically because of the lack of zoning making classification difficult and runs the risk of spot zoning;
- believes the asset management plan would help, but doesn't think it would be definitive when it comes to this type of recommendation.

Assemblymember Kelly:

- commented that the asset management plan and the land use concepts could be adequately addressed with an updated and current comprehensive plan.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- supports the planning commission making recommendations for assigning land use classifications.

Commissioner Rose:

- supports options rather than classifying general use; and
- commented that the land is in our trust as the borough government to do what's right with that land and believes it is important for the planning commission and the assembly to have the ability to classify the land with restrictions so that it's at least compatible with the surrounding uses.

Commissioner Stoffel:

- thinks the main focus should be putting the land into private hands first; with classification secondary.

Assemblymember Colberg:

- is against the concept of classifying individual parcels and thinks it is unfair in the outer areas;
- thinks that if you're going to zone, you should zone the whole area;
- commented that there are people in the outer areas that don't want zoning and that's why we're concentrating on the core area where it is clear that the people want it; and
- stated that we should reserve property in our inventory for a public use, but if it's for sale it should be treated the same as the land in its surrounding area.

Assemblymember Simpson:

- also supports not classifying individual parcels in the outlying areas.

Assemblymember Kelly:

- commented that he feels the whole borough is already zoned anyway, that it's just a matter of calling it classified or unclassified;

- doesn't believe there's any harm in leaving it as it is.

6. Backup Planning Commissioner re: absentees or modification of voting requirements (Requested by Commissioner Payne)

Commissioner Sharp:

- reminded that at the last joint meeting he raised the problem of a burden created on the planning commission trying to make decisions when there is no quorum.
- noted that two options were suggested, one to appoint an alternate member who could attend and participate in all the meetings but could not vote unless there was an absent member who they were replacing, and the other was to change the voting requirements under certain circumstances to allow for a majority of those present to vote; and
- volunteered to draft something.

Brief discussion followed.

Mayor Anderson said that staff would come back with a recommendation; that it's already on a tracking report.

VI. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: None.

VII. PLANNING COMMISSION, MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, AND STAFF COMMENTS

Ms. Dillon:

- advised of changes to the meeting schedule.

Mr. Duffy:

- advised re Evergreen Resources; stating that they are seeking a visit to talk with each of the assembly members to provide information about their company;
- has concerns about the potential for an OMA violation;
- said that they have indicated to him that they'll be submitting an application to lease some land from the borough;
- warned against ex parte contact and thought it best to have them come before the assembly and make their presentation here to avoid any problems; and
- thinks the assembly will find the information very insightful, that he believes the company is a very fine firm and that we're lucky to have them.

Commissioner Kvalheim:

- enjoyed the meeting and is looking forward to the completion of the core area plan.

Commissioner Stoffel:

- expressed appreciation for the hard work of everyone and the good atmosphere in these joint meetings in which to express our opinions; and
- spoke to the difficulty balancing zoning with freedom.

Commissioner Rose:

- also expressed appreciation for the joint meeting, for the opportunity to debate some of the issues affecting the borough, and to hear points of view that are different from his;
- commented on the commuter rail presentation, stating he thinks a commuter rail could really serve the valley in a lot of positive ways; and
- discussed the amount of fuel consumed by a rail system as opposed to autos would be a way to sell the project to obtain federal funding.

Commissioner Sharp:

- commented on moving the Anchorage Airport to Pt. McKenzie;
- suggested it would solve one of Anchorage's major problems which is noise; and
- voiced concern about where the noise is going to occur if the airport is moved to the valley; that the borough should make sure that it's not going to create the same problems as those that occur in Anchorage.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- expressed appreciation for the joint meeting with the planning commission;
- spoke to the airport noise issue;
- voiced concern about ex parte contact concerning Evergreen, stating she will call the attorney tomorrow for his opinion, but she scheduled a meeting for Thursday afternoon; that she has an interest in methane gas and how it can benefit agriculture.
- appreciates what staff has brought to the table; thinks they are timely issues; and
- expressed concern at not reaching a solution to conduct Planning Commission business in the absence of a quorum.

Discussion followed on ex parte contact and OMA as concerns Evergreen.

Assembly member Bush:

- thought it was a good meeting;
- emphasized that freedom of land is very important to people and it's the reason that a lot of people move here;
- expressed concern about zoning without compensation;
- supports long-term planning but has a lot of reservations about zoning; and
- wants to see that people's rights are respected.

Assemblymember Jansen:

- thanked the planning commission for all its hard work and time spent in the comp plan lengthy process.

Mayor Anderson:

- echoed the comments thanking the planning commission for its work on the comp plan;
- commented on the Larsen Elementary School dedication stating it was a very good dedication;
- encouraged attendance at the Teeland Middle School dedication on October 25; and
- reported on the bio-hazard meeting held today and outlined the presentations and safety recommendations given on anthrax and other bio-hazards by law enforcement concerning hoaxes, the postal service on the handling of mail, public health nurse, and the military with regard to explosives; commended Public Safety for organizing the meeting.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The special joint assembly/planning commission meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

TIMOTHY L. ANDERSON, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:

SANDRA A. DILLON, Borough Clerk

Minutes approved: November 6, 2001