

I. CALL TO ORDER

The special meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on October 11, 2008, at the Central Mat-Su Public Safety Building, Station 61, 101 West Swanson Avenue, Wasilla, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Mayor Curtis D. Menard for the purpose of discussing tourism and infrastructure development.

II. ROLL CALL

Assembly members present and establishing a quorum were:

Ms. Lynne Woods, Assembly District No. 1 (*Deputy Mayor*)
Mr. Pete Houston, Assembly District No. 2 (*arrived at 12:18 p.m.*)
Ms. Cindy L. Bettine, Assembly District No. 5
Mr. Robert Wells, Assembly District No. 6
Mr. Tom Kluberton, Assembly District No. 7

Assembly members absent and excused were:

Ms. Michelle R. Church, Assembly District No. 3
Ms. Mary Kvalheim, Assembly District No. 4

Staff in attendance were:

Ms. Lonnie R. McKechnie, Borough Clerk
Mr. John Duffy, Borough Manager
Mr. Nicholas Spiropoulos, Borough Attorney
Ms. Amanda E. Charles, Executive Assistant to the Borough Clerk
Ms. Linda Brenner, Community Development Director
Mr. Dan Keyes, Division Manager of Recreational Services

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Menard:

- noted that there had been a request to take up audience participation at 10:30 a.m.; and
- asked if there was any objection.

There was no objection noted.

Mayor Menard inquired if there were any additional changes to the agenda.

GENERAL CONSENT: The agenda was approved as amended without objection.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mr. Wes Tegler, a member of the audience.

V. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. TOURISM SUMMIT; INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Hanson:

- provided an outline for how the meeting would progress;
- spoke to the Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study; and
- asked if there was any objection to limiting comments to two minutes per person for the participants.

There was no objection noted.

Mr. Hanson:

- spoke regarding the discussion items;
- covered the ground rules for the meeting; and
- went through the items provided in the packets.

Mr. Bill Allen, Palmer City Manager:

- thanked the Assembly for the meeting;
- opined that any progress that is made would need to be done cohesively as a group;
- noted that the city of Palmer's support for the tourism industry was inadequate in the past;
- stated that the issues will be remedied;
- spoke regarding promoting the attractions available in Palmer;
- reported that they had hired a marketing professional to help them through this process;
- spoke to the need for meeting facilities in Palmer;
- commented on the areas that the city of Palmer will be focusing on;
- spoke specifically to the Palmer Hay Flats and a Palmer Community Center;
- stated that their model facility was the Nolan Center located in Wrangell;
- noted that they could partner the community center with a local non-profit organization; and
- summarized that the city of Palmer needed to strengthen their presence.

Mr. Roger Purcell, Houston City Council Member:

- commented that the city of Houston is behind in the tourism industry;
- spoke regarding the need to advertise and market;
- stated that they would like to open a year-round visitors center;
- spoke regarding focusing on both the summer and winter markets;
- advised on the current tourist attractions in Houston and how they could be improved;
- opined that it may be a good idea to have fish hatcheries in the Little Su River; and
- spoke regarding improving the access road to the Hatcher Pass Ski Area.

Mr. Mark Yoder, Wasilla City Deputy Administrator:

- commented on the Dorothy Page Museum and Wasilla Convention and Visitors Bureau;
- noted areas of growth for the Sports Complex;
- advised that one of the Council's main objectives is to encourage overnight accommodations;

- spoke regarding the need to protect Lake Lucille;
- stated that Target had dedicated land along Cottonwood Creek; and
- reiterated Mr. Allen's statement regarding working together cohesively and as a group as the tourism industry in the Borough moves forward.

Ms. Linda Brenner, Matanuska-Susitna Borough Community and Economic Development Director:

- stated that their main focus were the camp grounds;
- noted that they rely heavily on volunteer groups to maintain the trails;
- spoke regarding future areas of growth such as multi-use trails, Point MacKenzie; and Eska Falls;
- elaborated that there were further efforts needed to maintain the current, as well as future, facilities;
- spoke to the importance of building relationships in the community; and
- spoke regarding community participation.

Ms. Bonne Quill, Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau Director:

- spoke regarding the history and funding for the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau (MSCVB);
- commented on the highlights of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, such as wildlife and glaciers;
- covered a number of accomplishments performed by the MSCVB;
- noted that the MSCVB participates in national events to promote the Matanuska-Susitna Borough;
- supplied a list of tourism areas for the Borough to expand on like South Denali, Hatcher Pass Ski Area; Gateway Visitors Center; and
- stated that the Morris Thompson Cultural Center in Fairbanks was a good model facility.

Karen Harris, Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau President:

- stated that there was a MSCVB Task Force formed regarding the tourism study;
- noted that they were in favor of the McDowell Study;
- expressed her desire for the new MSCVB building to be co-located with the South Gateway Visitors Center;
- encouraged the Assembly to get State funding for restrooms;
- stated that individual community guides with maps should be developed;
- spoke to the amount of bed tax monies that are not collected; and
- commented on the possibility of changing the bed tax rate.

Mr. Hanson provided an overview of the Tourism Infrastructure Study recommendations.

VI. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

The following persons spoke against raising the bed tax to fund tourism infrastructure: Mr. Walt Leffek, Alaska Hotel and Lodging Association; Mr. Bruce Bustamante, Princess Tours; and Mr. Fernando Salvador, Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge.

The following person spoke regarding her appreciation for the Tourism Infrastructure Study and how the Palmer Hay Flats can be a tourism destination: Ms. Kris Abshire, Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats.

The following person spoke to the importance of trails: Ms. Pat Owens.

The following persons spoke regarding the need to focus on winter business, maintaining restrooms, and providing accurate signage for local attractions: Ms. Dee Dee Kay, Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge; and Ms. Phenie Miller, Ship Creek Lodge.

The following person spoke regarding maintaining restrooms, local pike derbies, the bed tax, and the launching of the Wasilla Convention and Visitors Bureau website: Ms. Cheryl Metiva, Executive Director for Wasilla Chamber of Commerce.

The following person spoke regarding funding for the Houston Visitors Center: Ms. Nancy Sult.

The following person spoke regarding joint meetings between the cities and the Borough as it pertains to strategic planning: Ms. Helen Munoz.

The following person spoke regarding the preservation of the Iditarod National Historic Trail: Mr. Kevin Keeler.

The following person spoke regarding improving the access road to the Little Susitna River: Mr. Andy Couch.

The following person spoke in favor of maintaining the trail system, building kiosks, increasing signage, and creating a comprehensive map which would illustrate the available activities in the Borough: Mr. Dan McDonald.

(The special meeting recessed at 11:50 a.m. and reconvened at 12:41 p.m.)

(Mayor Menard exited the meeting at this time.)

(Deputy Mayor Woods assumed the duties of the chair.)

Mr. Hanson:

- spoke regarding tourism infrastructure;
- commented on the five year implementation plan;
- noted that there would need to be a conceptual agreement before moving ahead; and
- asked the participants for their input.

Discussion ensued regarding the approach and timeline of the small infrastructure projects.

Small Infrastructure Projects:

- New Road System Enhancement (wayside) Priorities, Gateways to Borough;
 - Southern Gateway on Glenn Highway;
 - Eastern Gateway on Glenn Highway;
 - Northern Gateway on Parks Highway;
 - King Mountain Viewpoint wayside;
 - Moose Creek Wayside;
- Trail Head Refurbishments;
- Fishing Access Priorities;
- Scenic Viewpoint Enhancements; and
- Other Information Kiosk Locations.

(Mayor Menard returned and resumed the duties of the chair at 1:25 p.m.)

Mr. Hanson:

- provided an overview of the discussions;
- noted that the top priorities were road side enhancements, trail heads, and fishing access;
- advised that the participants had removed kiosks from the list; and
- pointed out that there were several requests to merge the scenic view points with the road side enhancements.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- trails;
- the need for a matrix; and
- legal dedicated trails.

Mr. Hanson lead the participants into a discussion regarding large tourism infrastructure projects.

Discussion ensued regarding each participants top three choices for large projects and possible funding sources.

Large Tourism Infrastructure and Tourism Destination Projects

- South Denali Project and Hatcher Pass Project;
- South Gateway Project;
- Palmer Hay Flats Natural Science Education/Community Center;
- Improve Willow Road to Hatcher Pass;
- Glenn Highway Raptor Center;
- Independence Mine Tour and Development; and
- Convention Center.

Mr. Hanson:

- noted that the large project list would need to be addressed again at a later date;
- stated that the bodies were not prepared to assign a funding source to particular projects;
- reported that he would bring back a comprehensive list to participants; and
- asked MSCVB to follow-up with a funding option from the cruise ships.

Ms. Quill:

- noted that there were some possible legal loopholes pertaining to maritime law; and
- stated that she would follow-up with Mr. Hanson.

Mr. Hanson noted that there was a consensus to review the monies which were being received on the bed tax to make sure that everyone was contributing appropriately.

Mr. Duffy stated that administration would prepare a matrix for the bodies to review which would delineate the possible tourism infrastructure locations that could simultaneously accommodate a rest area.

Ms. Quill requested that everyone consider using green and environmentally sustainable project designs when approaching any new building concepts.

Mr. Duffy stated that the Borough currently has a very similar policy.

VII. MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, AND STAFF COMMENTS

Mr. Duffy thanked Mr. Hanson for his work.

Mr. Yoder spoke to the importance of building relationships.

Mr. Keyes:

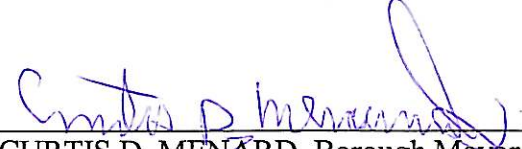
- noted previous discussions with Mr. Wayne Biessel, Park Superintendent for the Alaska State Department of Natural resources, regarding fishing access on State property; and
- asked if he could continue those discussions to develop the groundwork to move forward with that project.

Mr. Duffy responded that Mr. Keyes should move forward with the discussions.

Assemblymember Bettine noted a need to meet again and follow-up with these discussions in the near future.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The special meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.


CURTIS D. MENARD, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:


LONNIE R. McKECHNIE, CMC, Borough Clerk

Minutes approved: 11/18/08