

I. CALL TO ORDER

The special meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on October 30, 2007, at the Borough Assembly Chambers, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska. Deputy Mayor Lynne Woods called the meeting to order at 6 p.m. for the purpose of holding a joint Assembly/Planning Commission meeting.

II. ROLL CALL

Assembly members present and establishing a quorum were:

Ms. Lynne Woods, Assembly District 1 (*Deputy Mayor*)
Mr. Pete Houston, Assembly District 2
Ms. Michelle Church, Assembly District 3
Ms. Mary Kvalheim, Assembly District 4 (*via teleconference, arriving at 6:19 p.m.*)
Ms. Cindy L. Bettine, Assembly District 5
Mr. Rob Wells, Assembly District 6
Mr. Tom Kluberton, Assembly District 7

Planning Commission members present and establishing a quorum were:

Mr. Ken Klunder, District 1
Ms. Helga Larson, District 2 (*Chair*)
Mr. Mark Masteller, District 3 (*Vice-Chair*)
Mr. David Webster, District 5
Mr. Vern Halter, District 7

Planning Commission members absent and excused were:

Ms. Dianne Woodruff, District 4
Mr. Dick Zobel, District 6

Staff in attendance were:

Ms. Marian Romano, Deputy Borough Manager
Ms. Michelle M. McGehee, CMC, Borough Clerk
Mr. Nicholas Spiropoulos, Borough Attorney
Ms. Amanda E. Charles, Executive Assistant to the Borough Clerk
Mr. Dave Hanson, Economic Development Director
Ms. Patty Sullivan, Public Relations Officer
Ms. Eileen Probasco, Acting Chief of Planning

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Deputy Mayor Woods inquired if there were any changes to the agenda.

Commissioner Masteller requested that “Land Conservation Tools” be added as item VI (D) on the agenda.

Assemblymember Church requested that an Update on Community Council changes be added as item VI (E) on the agenda.

There was no objection noted.

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

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mr. Dave Hanson.

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

The following person spoke regarding a Bogard Road Extension charrette she attended: Ms. Kathy Wells.

The following person spoke regarding the South Denali Regional Airport: Mr. Dave Fiefer.

The following person spoke regarding Dowl’s Aviation Study Report: Mr. Shell Ewing.

The following person spoke regarding the negative impacts to the area around the South Denali Regional Airport: Mr. Gary Faucett.

The following person spoke regarding the connection between the Long Range Transportation Plan and the proposed Bogard Road Extension: Mr. Dean Maxwell.

The following person spoke regarding platting variance requirements for small airstrips: Mr. Andrew Hague.

The following person spoke regarding the necessity for a decision to be made on the Bogard Road Extension: Mr. Gene Yaakey.

The following person spoke regarding the effects of the Regional Aviation System Plan: Mr. John Strassenberg.

VI. JOINT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Regional Aviation System Plan Presentation (*Requested by: Administration*)

Ms. Probasco introduced Mr. Tom Middendorf of Dowl Engineering.

Mr. Middendorf provided a project report on the Regional Agency System Plan (RASP) which covered such areas as:

- project schedule and status;
 - explained that the RASP began in April 2006;
 - stated that the System Plan and Public Airport Location Study draft reports were completed in September 2007;
 - noted that the final public meeting occurred October 22, 2007, in Talkeetna;
 - added that Dowl Engineering would be reporting back to the Assembly and Planning Commission in early 2008; and
 - informed the Assembly that the final report would be available in early 2008;
- six key issues, which were identified by survey, public meetings and a technical committee (consisting primarily of people with aviation interests or government officials);
 - aviation community involvement in government;
 - communications;
 - airspace;
 - airport compatibility; and
 - new public airports;
- aviation overview;
 - reported that there are 200-250 airports in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough;
 - explained that 25 percent – 30 percent of the airports are unregistered;
 - informed the Assembly that only 110 airports had recent airspace reviews;
 - added that there is overlapping and congested airspace in some areas; and
 - elaborated that there is confusion about the multiple radio frequencies and their use;
- registered and unregistered airports in the Eastern Matanuska-Susitna Borough;
 - discussed the dense airport population
- RASP recommendations which provided;
 - governmental involvement recommendations;
 - communications recommendations; and
 - airspace recommendations.

Assemblymember Church requested that an explanation of the RASP recommendations be provided in the final report.

Mr. Middendorf agreed and continued his RASP report which further explained:

- airport compatibility, which covered four key problem areas;
 - commercial buildings;
 - residential housing;
 - industrial areas; and
 - road ways;
- RASP airport compatibility recommendations, which discussed seven areas;
 - notification to property owners of the proximity to airport;
 - comprehensive plans and Special Land Use Districts (SPUD);
 - involvement of the MSB Aviation Advisory Board with Lake Management Plans;
 - consolidation of antenna farms;
 - appropriately siting public facilities;
 - consideration of noncommercial floatplane lakes; and

- ongoing involvement in aviation through the MSB Aviation Advisory Board;
- South MSB Location Study and the South Denali Location Study:
 - illustrating the alternative locations for a floatplane airport;
 - displaying the conceptual airport layouts; and
 - comparison of alternatives for the location study;
- recommendations and ownership options for the airport location study.

Assemblymember Kluberton asked if the reason behind the study was due to the density of the airstrips in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Mr. Middendorf stated that it is being performed at the request of the FAA and Borough staff due to the concentration of the airports and the future growth of the Borough.

Deputy Mayor Woods added that there have been complaints made by the subdivision.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- death rates in direct correlation to airstrips;
- remote airports;
- Matanuska-Susitna Borough mapping;
- displaying GIS data for MSB airports on the Borough website;
- the State's Aviation Plan on public airports;
- lack of registration with the FAA;
- informing the public of FAA requirements;
- complaints with commercial float plane sites; and
- the necessity for platting variances.

Assemblymember Bettine requested clarification regarding this study being a location study not a development study.

Mr. Middendorf:

- explained that there were two separate earmarks, one for the system study and one for the location study; and
- spoke to the Borough being a large growth area for float plane use, especially in the South Denali and Trapper Creek areas.

Assemblymember Church requested further information on why they are looking at the South Denali area.

Mr. Middendorf explained that the scope of work said to look at growth areas and what areas were already being serviced and those which were not.

Assemblymember Kluberton:

- explained that his constituents do not support the suggested airport sites at mile 121 nor mile 131;
- acknowledged that there is a projected growth at some point;

- clarified that that growth area has not yet been identified; and
- queried the compelling reason for putting the site selection into the study at this time.

Mr. Middendorf:

- explained that as an airport planner, finding an appropriate site is difficult, so is building the airport because of conflicts, additionally the cost;
- clarified that they are not recommending building an airport immediately, but proposing sites that may need it in the future if the growth demands it; and
- spoke to the need to reserve land now for future use.

Assemblymember Kluberton asked what the projections were for when the floatplane airport would be needed.

Ms. Probasco:

- stated that Mr. Sworts was the appropriate person to answer that question;
- noted that she is aware of the valid concerns of the public;
- explained that part of Mr. Middendorf's scope of work was to address the potential for growth in different areas;
- added that based on the comments received and the meetings, this part of the plan is expected to be amended;
- opined that it is a fair conclusion that the Trapper Creek area will need an airport at some point; and
- concluded that this is just a draft plan.

Assemblymember Kluberton expressed his concerns with the lack of need in the area.

Assemblymember Bettine spoke to concerns from the public regarding public meeting notifications.

Ms. Probasco:

- explained that the Planning Department is sending out emails to anyone on their list;
- elaborated that there are numerous public notices on the radio; and
- summarized that as the specific sites come into view, there will be an extensive public process.

Assemblymember Bettine suggested a direct mailing to property owners in the concerned areas.

Ms. Probasco ensured the Assembly that the public process will be developed further.

Chair Larson asked if the proposed sites were Borough-owned.

Mr. Middendorf affirmed the query.

Chair Larson explained that due to the cost of inflation, it is important to have the property reserved now.

Kluberton reiterated his concerns with involving the property owners with land use decisions, not

just the pilots.

Commissioner Klunder expressed his concerns regarding having the Planning Commission involved in the process.

Further discussion ensued regarding the direction of choosing a site for the airport and sites to leave reserved for non-use.

Mr. Middendorf:

- thanked the Assembly and Planning Commission for their commentary;
- extended his appreciation for the public process; and
- agreed that the public process needs to be more involved and concentrated as the time draws closer for choosing a site.

(The meeting recessed at 7:50 p.m. reconvened at 7:58 p.m)

[Clerk's Note: Assemblymember Wells left the meeting at 7:50 p.m.]

B. Bogard Road Extension Project Update *(Requested by: Administration)*

Mr. Hanson:

- stated that Mr. Sworts was in Washington D.C. on Borough business;
- provided information regarding the charrette process;
- explained that there were four groups, which consisted of two-thirds of affected property owners and one-third of users of the new routes; and
- noted that the topics of discussion were:
 - location of the preferred route if there was a blank route;
 - how to make traffic routes safer; and
 - what to do with the added user growth for the Palmer Wasilla Highway

Mr. Tom Brigham, HDR Alaska:

- provided the perimeters of where the extension had to be located;
- commended the group for their work; and
- explained the different alternative routes and the difficulties presented in each.

Assemblymember Church asked if the Fishhook route was considered.

Mr. Bringham:

- clarified that the Fishhook option was considered a “no build route” which was not discussed at the charrettes; and
- explained that it is still an option.

Discussion ensued regarding what routes were discussed at the charrettes.

Assemblymember Bettine requested an explanation of why alternative two was forwarded to the Planning Commission.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- the cost comparison;
- the home acquisition differences;
- alternative two, which is the preferred route on the East end of the corridor;
- the historic sites involved in route three which would delay the project; and
- noise concerns and farming concerns with both routes.

Mr. Hanson:

- spoke to further concerns addressed in the two routes even after they had been amended;
- provided a report from the four groups;
- stressed that the groups only met several days ago and the data is still being collected and compartmentalized; and
- added that the information will be brought forward at a later date.

Chair Larson queried if the cost estimates included noise abatements.

The speaker explained that noise abatements had been taken into consideration, to additionally include rubberized asphalt.

Assemblymember Houston stressed his concerns with listening to the groups and their want to explore the Fishhook option.

Mr. Hanson ensured Assemblymember Houston that it would be done.

Assemblymember Church opined her concerns that Bogard Road would turn into another problem road like the Palmer-Wasilla Highway.

Deputy Mayor Woods agreed that the Fishhook Road is used by everyone north of the road to traverse to Wasilla.

Assemblymember Bettine spoke to transportation concerns with the dense population of Wasilla and Big Lake traveling to Palmer.

Discussion ensued regarding traffic flow concerns.

Mr. Hanson spoke to the length of the project and stressed that quite a bit of thought has been put forth into the project.

Commissioner Masteller:

- opined his support for a route outside the project area; and
- spoke to the need for community transit.

Commissioner Webster spoke to the need to make a decision quickly in order to get the public out of limbo on the issue.

Assemblymember Bettine opined that this is not an interim fix, but a long-term consideration for transportation flow.

C. Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project Update (*Requested by: Administration*)

Mr. Hanson:

- clarified that staff is making no recommendation for a route;
- explained that the Surface Transportation Board (STB) will be choosing the route over the next 1.5 years;
- noted a deadline of December for the Rail Extension Application;
- added that a contractor will be chosen from the STB list; and
- spoke regarding an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) which is to begin in 2010.

Ms. Sullivan:

- spoke regarding the public process;
- added that there was a question and answer session with the Willow Dog Mushers Association;
- noted general support for the railway; and
- summarized that it was to go before the Planning Commission on November 5, 2007, and before the Assembly on November 20, 2007.

Mr. Hanson explained the economic benefits to the railway.

Assemblymember Kluberton:

- queried if the projected method of payment is revenue bonds; and
- asked if there was anything in writing from AGRIMUM regarding the transportation of coal via the railway to their site.

Mr. Hanson:

- explained that the Borough is expecting that it will not be funded solely by revenue bonds, but a mix of funding sources;
- added that AGRIMUM cannot support \$300,000,000 of funding;
- noted that there will be a comprehensive study to find funding availability; and
- spoke regarding how the estimates show that there will be enough freight on the railway to cover the cost of maintenance and operation during the first few years.

Commissioner Halter queried when AGRIMUM expects to be up and running.

Mr. Hanson:

- reported that they have a decision-making schedule;
- added that recently they completed all their feasibility studies, and determined it is feasible; and
- stated that in approximately one year, they will know if they will be moving forward or not.

Discussion ensued regarding the misconception of revenue bonds funding the railway.

Mr. Hanson:

- spoke to the diversity of the funding options;
- noted that this is a legacy project; and
- concluded by informing the Assembly and Planning Commission that there will be further information in about six months.

D. Land Conservation Tools *(Requested by: Commissioner Masteller)*

Ms. Probasco:

- spoke regarding how during the past several years the Planning Commission has faced difficult decisions, one being that they don't currently have viable options, more specifically being able to have a Green Infrastructure program;
- added that the Borough does not have any tools in place to ensure these options are available;
- noted concerns with having to buy back previously publicly-owned property that had been sold to private investors; and
- suggested getting together several bodies to discuss further alternatives for solution.

Deputy Mayor Woods spoke to previous discussions regarding possibilities.

Commissioner Masteller:

- opined that the Borough needs a program to trade land; and
- added that there is a current developer who wants to trade land with the Borough;

Chair Larson:

- suggested a "land bank" where land can be set aside and later traded; and
- stressed his concerns regarding the increase in prices for parcels greater than 10 acres.

Deputy Mayor Woods spoke to the fees associated with setting aside personal lands for conservation.

Assemblymember Bettine:

- supported the "land bank" idea; and
- queried if it was possible to take these properties off the tax roll.

Mr. Spiropoulos:

- explained that the properties could be assessed at a conservation rate; and
- added that this is something that the assessors are currently struggling with.

Assemblymember Bettine opined her concern regarding keeping track of the fiscal impact.

Chair Larson suggested that a group get together to discuss the possibilities in order to gear it towards what is actually wanted.

Assemblymember Houston:

- requested that this be added to the tracking report; and
- asked if there was any way to take into consideration the economic value of land versus the actual assessed value.

Chair Larson:

- noted that this is a huge point of contention; and
- added her concerns regarding selling borough-owned land that could potentially be put on the conservation list instead of selling it.

Assemblymember Kluberton:

- spoke regarding land management policies; and
- stressed keeping large parcels of land intact.

Ms. Probasco stated that the Planning, Public Works and Land Management departments are currently working together to provide a public facilities update.

[Clerk's Note: Commissioner Masteller left the meeting at 9:17 p.m.]

Deputy Mayor Woods requested that interested members of the bodies who would like to participate in a group to bring this forward.

E. Update on Community Council *(Requested by: Assemblymember Church)*

Assemblymember Church requested that Ms. Pam Graham forward an update to the Planning Commission.

Assemblymember Bettine:

- spoke to the variances in community council meetings;
- requested that the Planning Commission update the Assembly on the three-year review before it moves forward;
- stressed the importance of attending all the community councils meetings and providing copies of the code to them, and to make sure the information is more than a boundary report; and
- concluded that if there are community councils who are unresponsive, there are options in code for making them obsolete.

Assemblymember Kluberton:

- spoke regarding how in the "Y" Community Council hearing the opposing council stated that community councils are political subdivisions of the Borough;
- clarified that this is a false statement according to code; and
- stressed that this is kept in mind.

Assemblymember Houston:

- requested further information due to the fact that only a small part of his district has community councils; and

- opined his concern regarding how he would like more mechanisms for his community to bring forward their concerns.

Chair Larson:

- queried how often the applicable code is mailed out; and
- suggested mailing out the code with a letter stating that they must respond.

Deputy Mayor Woods:

- stated that the Clerk's Office keeps track of all the members and the meetings; and
- added that she personally hands out copies of code to her community councils.

Ms. Probasco:

- spoke to the factors included in the boundary of review and a more comprehensive effort to determine if the community councils are still active; and
- added that Ms. Graham is trying to make personal contact with every community council.

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

Ms. McGehee clarified that there is a meeting with Mr. Mark Von Dongen at 1 p.m. on Thursday.

Mr. Spiropoulos:

- stated that the community councils are voluntary self-governing entities;
- added that there would be legal liability if they become part of the Borough;
- stressed that the Law Department, the Clerk's Department, and the Planning Department will need more staff if this addition was made; and
- opined that it would be a monumental undertaking.

Ms. Romano spoke to concerns with the land management and conservation piece on the agenda.

Commissioner Webster:

- reminded everyone of the sewer plant; and
- opined that the Bogard Road Extension matter needs closure.

Commissioner Halter:

- opined that the Y Community Council is functioning well now;
- added that northern community councils are meeting quite regularly now; and
- offered that the body needs to give the community councils more respect.

Commissioner Klunder:

- stated that every meeting reminds him of how quickly the Borough is growing;
- stressed the need for the public process and how to bring them in; and
- noted that the bodies could look at how quickly the public process is brought in and use it as a planning tool and not as a listening tool.

Chair Larson:

- stated that Ms. Woodruff has resigned from the Planning Commission;
- added that Mr. Webster's term is over at the end of the year; and
- asked the Mayor to nominate people to move forward.

Assemblymember Kvalheim:

- thanked the Clerk's office for the documents that were emailed to her; and
- opined her support of making a final decision on the Bogard Road Extension.

Assemblymember Houston:

- noted similar concerns with the airport development and the Bogard Road Extension;
- offered his support of setting aside land for no development;
- suggested the idea of a charrette process when it is time to select an airport site; and
- opined his support of the charrette process because the community was able to speak and get feedback, not limited to three minutes, as in audience participation.

Assemblymember Kluberton:

- supported Commissioner Klunder's suggestion of bringing in the community earlier in the planning processes;
- spoke regarding how the economic hub of the Northern Susitna Valley is the Y, and not Talkeetna; and
- noted a need to upgrade the community comprehensive plan.

Assemblymember Church agreed that the charrettes are needed now and that the Borough can make a plan for future growth gathered from the feedback received.

Assemblymember Bettine:

- provided a report from the joint work session with the Municipality of Anchorage that occurred on October 26, 2007; and
- stated her want for a formal way for staff to get reports to the Assembly in addition to the Manager's Report.

Deputy Mayor Woods:

- spoke regarding getting the community involved in the planning process; and
- noted the difficulties therein.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The joint meeting adjourned at 9:54 p.m.

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CURTIS D. MENARD, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:

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MICHELLE M. MCGEHEE, CMC, Borough Clerk

Minutes approved: 11/20/07