



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Office of the Borough Manager

350 East Dahlia Avenue • Palmer, AK 99645

Phone (907) 861-8689 • Fax (907) 861-8669

Mike.Brown@matsugov.us

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 23, 2025
TO: Mayor and Assembly
FROM: Michael Brown, Borough Manager
RE: Manager's Weekly Post

FY2026 Proposed Budget Online: The FY2026 Proposed Budget is available on the Borough's website for review at <https://borough-matanuska-susitna-borough-ak-cleardoc.cleargov.com/10059/298657/d>.

The FY26 proposed budget document is slightly different than prior years, utilizing a program called ClearGov. ClearGov is designed to be a digital budget book, which explains why some formatting might appear slightly off in the printed versions provided to the Assembly members earlier this week. The online format offers a cleaner presentation with interactive charts to explore the data in more detail.

Firearms Training Update: Resident firearm training is wrapping up soon with only a few classes remaining. Classes have been held at all three locations, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Due to some no-shows at classes, the consultant volunteered to hold some extra classes, allowing individuals on the wait list to participate. Upon completion of the program, a report will be delivered with final numbers, feedback forms, and photos from the classes.

The following are a sample of the comments from attendees:

"I appreciate how patient and helpful the trainers are with the beginners. This training was more helpful than any other training I've had."

"Great instructors. It's so much info, need to take more classes."

"Top notch course, very professional, exceeded my expectations."

"Very knowledgeable instructors, funny and informative. Very professional, kept class engaged."

"I'm looking forward to future classes."



Private Property Vehicle Removal Program Update: The private vehicle removal program has restarted utilizing a new vendor. Debach Auto Salvage will be finishing out the program this Spring with funding available for approximately another 106 vehicles. In addition to removing up to three vehicles from private property, the vendor will accept up to two drop-off vehicles from each property.

The previous contractor, AK Car Crushing & Recycling, removed 307 vehicles and took in countless drop-offs as part of the program. Public response to the program has been positive, with a larger portion of the vehicles coming from the northern valley compared to last year.

Board of Equalization Appeals Update:

- Total Formal Appeals: 42 (four are commercial properties)
- Five appeals were heard the week of April 14, 2025. The Borough value was upheld in three appeals, and the Board of Equalization adjusted two values.
- 14 appeal hearings (one is a commercial property) are scheduled for the week of April 21, 2025.

Gateway Visitor Center Q&A: Attached is a flyer with details about the new facility that is expected to open in the Spring of 2026.

Public Affairs Media Flyover:

Disaster Mitigation

- EMS in the ash zone: Alaska's Mount Spurr and the volcanic challenge (Podcast)
EMS 1

Radio

- Being Firewise: DNR's Kevin Lankford and Mat-Su Borough's Jeff Smith about wildland fire mitigation including your own wild yard
Frontiersman

Assembly

- Matanuska-Susitna Borough Votes to support a clear pathway for residency for Ukrainian refugees
KTNA

Development

- Annual report cites Alaska's Susitna River as under threat from development
Alaska Beacon
- Susitna River ranked eighth most endangered river in America
KTNA
- Susitna River Coalition on road construction impact on watershed: Susitna is at real risk
Alaska Sporting Journal

Infrastructure/Roads

- Talkeetna revetment costs more than anticipated
KTNA
- Seward Meridian Parkway road improvements continue
Frontiersman
- Rep. McCabe, 13 other lawmakers on record supporting Mat-Su northern rail extensions
Frontiersman
- Glenn Highway Knik River bridges to undergo preservation work
Frontiersman

Education

- School Board round-up: Teacher employment and curriculum
Frontiersman

Library books

- Mat-Su Borough survey seeks parent input on kids' library checkout alerts, collections
KTNA

Future Events:

- **National DEA Prescription Drug Take-Back Day**, Sat., April 26 from 10am-2pm, Fred Meyer in Palmer and Wasilla
- **Annual Recreation Area Community Clean-ups.** Thank you to all our community partners who help make this happen!
 - [Crevasse Moraine](#): Sat., May 3 12-3pm - meet at the Loma Prieta Drive trailhead pavilion
 - [Jim Creek](#): Sat., May 10 at 10am - meet in the campground parking area
 - [Jonesville/Slipper Lake](#): Sat., May 17 at 10am - meet in parking area on north shore of Slipper Lake



Gateway Visitor Center Q&A

Q: In today's digital age, why is a physical visitor center necessary?

A: Visitor centers are crucial for tourism and play a vital role in enhancing the visitor experience and engagement. In 2024, the Morris Thompson Visitor Center in Fairbanks welcomed 140,000 visitors (*Explore Fairbanks*) and 120,000 stopped at the Visit Anchorage Visitor Center downtown (*Visit Anchorage*), showing people use physical visitor centers during their trip. They serve as a hub for information, providing travelers with essential details about attractions, activities, and the local area. They also promote a sense of place, connect visitors with the local culture and history, and influence visitor behavior toward more responsible tourism practices. They are not intended to replace online trip planning resources but rather to enhance them once a visitor is in market.

Q: Who will operate the Gateway Visitor Center once it opens?

A: The Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau has been the destination marketing partner of the Mat-Su Borough for 39 years. The non-profit organization will operate the center year-round and be responsible for all programming and events.

Q: How much is the construction of the Gateway Visitor Center and how is it funded?

A: The Mat-Su Borough was awarded a \$6.7 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration in late 2022 to fund construction costs. The Borough is providing a 20-percent non-federal match for the project.

Q: How will the Gateway Visitor Center benefit Mat-Su Borough residents?

A: The facility is a community asset that will benefit residents, along with visitors. There is a classroom in the building that will be used for community events such as meetings, lectures and workshops. The facility will also be available to rent for community functions.





Q: How is a visitor center considered economic development?

A: By building visitor engagement and providing information about local attractions that help extend visits, the Gateway Visitor Center will contribute to economic development through increased city sales taxes, an increase in bed tax for the Mat-Su Borough and additional revenue for hundreds of local businesses located throughout the Mat-Su Borough, which is money that circulates throughout our communities. The money spent by visitors also benefits businesses that supply goods and services to those directly impacted, and further impacts are felt as employees of these businesses spend their wages locally. In 2024, the average visitor spent \$318 in the Mat-Su Borough, and contributed 21.2 percent of all spending Borough-wide (*Zartico Business Intelligence*). Providing additional personal information to visitors in market, beyond just what they find online, can help increase visitor spending.

Q: Is the Gateway Visitor Center just for Palmer?

A: No! The Gateway Visitor Center will have interpretive displays and exhibits that represent the history and culture of the entire Mat-Su Borough. Interactive trip planning kiosks and related visitor services will represent businesses and attractions from Denali State Park to Lake Louise, and every area in between. The goal is to educate visitors about what each individual Mat-Su community has to offer, and then have them explore and contribute to the economies of all our communities. Every Mat-Su community will benefit from the Gateway Visitor Center.



Q: What is the timeline for completing the Gateway Visitor Center?

A: The project is on schedule to have major completion at the end of December 2025. Then, the exhibits and interpretive displays will be installed starting in January. It is expected the Gateway Visitor Center will open to the public in spring, 2026. Steppers Construction was awarded the bid to build the facility, and Orion Construction was awarded the bid for the exhibits and displays.

Artistic renderings courtesy of Wolf Architecture