

By: Rebecca Skjothaug
Introduced: August 18, 2025
Public Hearing: September 15, 2025
Action: Approved

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. 25-13**

A RESOLUTION OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION APPROVING A VARIANCE TO MSB 17.55.020 FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A DWELLING TO BE PLACED APPROXIMATELY 52.5 FEET FROM THE SHORELINE OF BIG LAKE ON SHEPARDS ISLAND LOT 7, SUBD. OF GLO LOTS 10 AND 11, PLAT #W-58, PALMER RECORDING DISTRICT, STATE OF ALASKA, LOCATED ON SHEPARDS ISLAND, BIG LAKE, TAX ID# 6270001007.

WHEREAS, Michael and Lindsay Williams are requesting a variance to MSB 17.55.020 to construct an additional 856.5 square foot cabin at its closest location of 52.5 feet from Big Lake, on Shepard's Island, Big Lake, Tax ID #6272000L007; and

WHEREAS, to grant a variance, the Planning Commission must find that each requirement of MSB 17.65.020(A) has been met; and

WHEREAS, the subject lot is part of the South Big Lake Alaska Subdivision and was initially plated in 1958 before Borough setback and lot size regulations were established; and

WHEREAS, the subject parcel does not conform to the current Borough subdivision standards for lot size; and

WHEREAS, Big Lake is located south of the subject parcel, and north, east and west of the subject parcel are residential properties; and

WHEREAS, according to the Borough Assessments data, the subject parcel is approximately 0.57 acres; and

WHEREAS, according to the application material, the property at its widest point east to west is 65 feet, and at its longest point is 330 feet north to south; and

WHEREAS, the lakebed begins on the subject parcel at approximately 125 feet from the ordinary high water mark of Big Lake and continues to the northernmost point of the parcel; and

WHEREAS, 62% of the subject parcel is lakebed; and

WHEREAS, Planning staff analyzed all 26 lakefront parcels on Shepards Island of Big Lake and found that 16 of them contain residential structures; and

WHEREAS, the dwellings that may violate the setback requirements were not included in the average dwelling size calculation; and

WHEREAS, after conducting an analysis, the Planning staff found that there are 11 lakefront parcels with dwellings that appear to meet the 75-foot setback criteria, have legal non-conforming status or a granted variance, and these dwellings have an average size of 1,230 square feet; and

WHEREAS, Planning staff found the lakefront properties within the analysis area vary in size from 0.28 to 4.68 acres; and

WHEREAS, development within the analysis area ranges from 384 square foot cabins to structures exceeding 3,304 square feet; and

WHEREAS, according to the application material, the applicant proposes building an additional 856.5 square foot single-story structure; and

WHEREAS, according to the application materials, the proposed structure is planned to be 12.6 feet from the eastern property line, 27.3 feet from the western line, and 52.5 feet from Big Lake; and

WHEREAS, according to Borough records, the existing 320 square foot cabin was constructed on the subject parcel in 1986 by the granting of a variance; and

WHEREAS, according to the application material, the existing 320 square foot cabin is approximately 34.7 feet from the ordinary high water of Big Lake; and

WHEREAS, according to the application materials the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) approved septic is located at 101' from the ordinary high-water mark of Big Lake and requires that any structure is a minimum of 10 feet away from the holding tanks; and

WHEREAS, according to the application this reduces the buildable area to a 13' by 40' area that can be built adhering to all MSB and ADEC setback requirements

WHEREAS, according to the application material, the subject parcel has 65 feet of shoreline on Big Lake; and

WHEREAS, based on the application materials, the applicant proposes preserving a minimum of 50% of undisturbed native vegetation of the shoreline bank; and

WHEREAS, according to the application materials, the applicant was provided with an Alaska Fish & Game permit to reconstruct the dock on October 17, 2022; and

WHEREAS, in 2005, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly adopted voluntary best management practices (BMP) for development around waterbodies; and

WHEREAS, MSB Chapter 17.65 - Variances, was written to grant relief to property owners whose lots are impacted by existing land use regulations, thereby making the lot undevelopable; and

WHEREAS, the Big Lake Comprehensive Plan (2009 update), by design, does not set out precise binding rules on development but instead provides general goals on the type of place the community wants to be in the future and then outlines general strategies to reach those goals; and

WHEREAS, Goal (LU&E-3) of the Big Lake Comprehensive Plan Update (August 2009) is to "Protect the natural environment"; and

WHEREAS, Goal (LU&E-4) of the Big Lake Comprehensive Plan Update (August 2009) is to "Provide for freedom to enjoy our properties"; and

WHEREAS, Goal (LU-1) of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan (2005 Update) states: Protect and enhance the public safety, health, and welfare of Borough residents; and

WHEREAS, Policy LU1-1 of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan (2005 Update) states: Provide for consistent, compatible, effective, and efficient development within the Borough; and

WHEREAS, Goal (LU-2) of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan (2005 Update) states: Protect residential neighborhoods and associated property values; and

WHEREAS, the variance request is consistent with the policies and goals of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan (2005 Update) as the residential structure cannot be constructed on the lot without a setback variance, the structure is placed as far back on the property as possible, and the structure is similar to surrounding development; and

WHEREAS, according to the Planning staff's analysis, constructing an 856.5-square-foot dwelling is compatible with the surrounding area; and

WHEREAS, the subject parcel is not in a special land use district; and

WHEREAS, residential structures are allowed on this property; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Commission hereby adopts the aforementioned findings of fact and makes the following conclusions of law supporting approval of Planning Commission Resolution 24-10;

1. The 0.57-acre parcel has limited legal buildable area due to the 75' building setback and the additional 62% of the subject parcel encompassed with lakebed, which is an unusual condition (MSB 17.65.020(A)(1)).
2. The strict application of the provisions of this title would deprive the applicants of rights commonly enjoyed by others, as the subject lot has certain unique conditions and circumstances that apply. The average size of dwellings within the analysis area is 1,230 square feet. The property is 0.57 acres of land, and 62% of the subject parcel is lakebed. Therefore, constructing an additional 856.5-

square-foot cabin on the property is a reasonable use of the land. (MSB 17.65.020(A)(2)).

3. Granting a variance will not be injurious to nearby property nor harmful to the public welfare (MSB 17.65.020(A)(3)).

4. The proposed variance is consistent with the applicable comprehensive plans and does meet the intent of MSB 17.65 (MSB 17.65.020(A)(4)).

5. Granting a variance will be no more than necessary to permit a reasonable use of the property (MSB 17.65.020(A)(5)).

6. The person seeking the variance did not cause the need for the variance (MSB 17.65.030(A)(1)).

7. The variance will not allow a land use in a district in which that use is prohibited, as residential structures are allowed on this site (MSB 17.65.030(A)(2)).

8. The variance is not solely being sought to relieve pecuniary hardship or inconvenience (MSB 17.65.030(A)(3)).

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Commission hereby approves the 52.5 FEET FROM THE SHORELINE OF BIG LAKE ON SHEPARDS ISLAND LOT 7, SUBD. OF GLO LOTS 10 AND 11, PLAT #W-58, PALMER RECORDING DISTRICT, STATE OF ALASKA, LOCATED ON SHEPARDS ISLAND, BIG LAKE, TAX ID 6270001007, as referenced in the application material.

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Commission
this __ day of September 2025.



Richard Allen,
CHAIR

ATTEST



Lacie Olivieri
PLANNING CLERK

(SEAL)



YES: Scoggin, McCabe, Carpenter, Collins, Allen

NO: