

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Historical Preservation Commission Agenda

Edna DeVries, Mayor

Andrew Schweisthal
Kevin Toothaker
Jake Anders
Fran Seager-Boss
Janet Kincaid
Angela Wade
Vivian Smith

Gerrit Verbeek – Staff



Michael Brown, Borough Manager

PLANNING & LAND USE DEPARTMENT
Alex Strawn, Planning & Land Use Director
Kim Sollien, Planning Services Manager
Fred Wagner, Platting Officer

August 10, 2023
REGULAR MEETING
6:00 p.m.

Ways to participate in the Historical Preservation Commission meetings:

TELEPHONIC TESTIMONY:

Join on your computer or mobile app

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Or call in (audio only)

[+1 907-290-7880,,891781011#](#) United States, Anchorage

[\(844\) 643-2217,,891781011#](#) United States (Toll-free)

Phone Conference ID: 891 781 011#

- State your name for the record, spell your last name and provide your testimony.

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

IV. LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

"The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Historical Preservation Commission acknowledge that we are meeting on traditional lands of the Dene people, and we are grateful for their continued stewardship of the land, fish, and wildlife throughout time immemorial."

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Approval of 5/11/23 HPC Minutes

- VI. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*three minutes per person, for items not scheduled for public hearing*)
- VII. HISTORICAL SOCIETY/MUSEUM UPDATES
- VIII. STAFF/AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS
 - A. Historic Preservation Plan Phase II Update
 - B. Response from Brad Hanson, City of Palmer Community Development Director, Regarding Architectural Guidelines in the Palmer Historic District.
- IX. UNFINISHED BUSINESS
 - A. Drafting A Letter to the Board of Economic Development Regarding Potential Removal of Railroad Tracks in Downtown Palmer
- X. NEW BUSINESS
 - A. Discussion of Feedback on Actions Related to Geographic Naming Proposals at the May Meeting of the Historical Preservation Commission.
 - B. Selection of a Project for a 2024 CLG Grant Proposal.
- XI. MEMBER COMMENTS
- XII. NEXT MEETING DATE:
 - A. Next Regular Meeting – November 16th, 2023
- XIII. ADJOURNMENT

Disabled persons needing reasonable accommodation in order to participate at a Historical Preservation Commission Meeting should contact the borough ADA Coordinator at 861-8432 at least one week in advance of the meeting.

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Historical Preservation Commission Minutes

Edna DeVries, Mayor

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May 11, 2023 REGULAR MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 6:09 pm

Note: This meeting was conducted entirely online via Microsoft Teams. Staff member Gerrit Verbeek was out of state and other Planning Division staff were unavailable to coordinate a live meeting. Chairman Jake Anders was also working remotely from Skagway.

II. ROLL CALL – DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Members Present: Jake Anders
Kevin Toothaker
Angela Wade
Andrew Schweisthal (via conference call with Jake Anders)
Fran Seager-Boss (joined 6:17 pm)
Janet Kincaid (joined 6:17 pm)
Vivian Smith (joined 6:17 pm)

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: Jake Anders made a motion to approve the agenda with an additional item under New Business: “Drafting a Historical Preservation Commission Memorandum Regarding Local Geographic Naming Proposals Currently Under Consideration in May 2023.”
Second Kevin Toothaker

Vote: All in favor (Jake, Kevin, Angela, and Andrew present and voting)

IV. LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Read by Jake Anders

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion (Main): Angela Wade made a motion to approve the February 9, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes, second Jake Anders.

Vote: All in favor

VI. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There were no audience participants

VII. HISTORICAL SOCIETY/MUSEUM UPDATES

There were no Historical Society/museum updates

VIII. STAFF/AGENCY REPORTS & PRESENTATIONS

A. Historic Preservation Plan Phase II Update

Staff notified HPC members that DOWL had been selected as the contractor, that the project kickoff meeting had taken place on March 31st, and that work was proceeding according to schedule.

Note: at this point in the meeting Fran Seager-Boss, Janet Kincaid, and Vivian Smith all called in via Teams. Staff was notified that the Conference ID listed in the Agenda, 663 363 082#, was not working and that members and the general public would be unable to phone in.

IX. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Drafting A Letter to the Board of Economic Development Regarding Potential Removal of Railroad Tracks in Downtown Palmer

Vivian Smith noted that she served on the Palmer Board of Economic Development, which had already received a letter from a local historical society regarding the issue. She pointed out that maintaining active railroad tracks through downtown Palmer would require every vehicle with a CDL to come to a complete stop before crossing, possibly disrupting traffic. A possible solution is to allow use of the tracks up to the Pioneer Home, which would not disrupt downtown Palmer road crossings further north.

Fran Seager-Boss noted that the tracks near the train depot are contributing elements of the Palmer Historic District and should not be removed, and questioned whether any proposal had triggered a review under Section 106 [of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966].

Janet Kincaid recommends seeking information from the railroad.

Motion: Jake Anders made a motion to table this action until further information is available. Second Andrew Schweisthal.

Vote: All in favor

Action Item: Gerrit Verbeek to contact the railroad for more information about options for the railroad tracks in downtown Palmer.

X. NEW BUSINESS

A. Check-In on Knik, Matanuska, Susitna Review

Members had not had a chance to review sections of Knik, Matanuska, Susitna: A Visual History of the Valleys to consider republication as-is, or possibly rewriting sections.

B. Collecting HPC Input on the draft Mission and Vision statements for the Historic Preservation Plan

Draft Mission Statement:

“To protect, share, and celebrate the cultures, histories, and special places of the Mat-Su Borough.”

Draft Vision Statement:

“Across Alaska’s Matanuska Susitna Borough, the rich, interconnected history of the region is preserved, accessible, and celebrated. Shared understanding and experience of the Borough’s unique history connects people to each other and to the land, creating a sense of place.”

HPC members reviewed the draft Mission and Vision statements and expressed general approval, with no comment or motions.

C. Drafting a Historical Preservation Commission Memorandum Regarding Local Geographic Naming Proposals Currently Under Consideration in May 2023.

Motion: Jake Anders made a motion to take no action on these naming proposals, which would not allow postponed comment due to a May 15th deadline on comments.

Vote: 2 in favor of taking no action, 5 opposed to taking no action. Motion fails.

After discussion of how to best proceed, HPC members decided to take motions on individual names, rather than as a set.

Motion: Fran Seager-Boss made a motion to support the proposed change of from the current officially-recognized name, ‘Lion Head,’ to the Ahtna name ‘Natsede’aayi.’ Seconded by Angie Wade.

Vote: 2 opposed, on the basis that many local residents consider it difficult to spell and pronounce ‘Natsede’aayi.’ 5 in favor, on the basis that the change is a restoration of an indigenous name established millennia before the current official name. Motion passes. Fran Seager-Boss requested that the text of the memo include the translation, ‘Stone Woman.’ Angie Wade recommended the wording “restore original name,” to replace “change the name.”

Motion passes.

Motion: Fran Seager-Boss made a motion to support the proposed name, 'Feather Lake.' Second Jake Anders.

Vote: All in favor

Motion: Fran Seager-Boss made a motion to support the proposed name, 'Feather Lake.' Second Jake Anders.

Vote: All in favor

Motion: Janet Kincaid made a motion to abstain from supporting, opposing, or commenting on the proposed name, 'Langman Lake,' on the basis that the Commission has not had sufficient time to review and consider these proposals. Second Kevin Toothaker.

Vote: 3 in favor of abstaining from action on the proposed name 'Langman Lake,' 4 opposed to abstaining from action. Motion fails.

Motion: Jake Anders made a motion to oppose the proposed name, 'Langman Lake,' on the basis that there is a previous Dena'ina name for this feature and on the basis that being the first recorded homesteader on a particular lake is not a sufficient contribution to the region to justify being commemorated with a geographic name. Second Fran Seager-Boss.

Vote: All in favor.

Motion: Fran Seager-Boss made a motion to oppose the proposed names 'Coffee Spire' and 'Mocha Spire,' on the basis that the names are "trite and faddish." Second Kevin Toothaker.

Vote: Janet Kincaid abstains from voting, expressing disappointment that these actions were added to the agenda during the meeting and that the virtual meeting format reduces ability to understand the location and details of each proposed name. All others vote in favor of opposing the names.

6 in favor of opposing the name proposals, 1 abstains. Motion passes.

XI. MEMBER COMMENTS

Janet Kincaid reiterates disappointment and notes that she and Vivian Smith are attending on a cellphone connection with low battery, and may lose connection prior to adjourning.

Jake Anders acknowledges the difficulties faced by certain members when not provided with paper meeting packets or an option to meet in person. He thanks staff and HPC members for doing their best under the circumstances, and pledges along with Gerrit Verbeek to work hard in the future to accommodate member needs.

Gerrit Verbeek thanks HPC members for making the best of difficult circumstances. He is calling in from Texas, Chairman Jake Anders is calling in from Skagway, and no MSB staff were available to facilitate an in-person meeting. He commits to sending out hard copies of the agenda by mail to members who request them in advance of meetings, but reminds HPC members that this entirely-virtual meeting format is an exception and that foreseeable future meetings will always have the option to meet in person.

Fran Seager-Boss requests an update on whether Palmer requires architectural design guidelines within the historic district, which would affect plans to rebuild the Palmer Library. She reminded that it had been discussed in a previous meeting, and expressed surprise it was not on the agenda.

Kevin Toothaker thanks everyone for the evening's respectful discussion. "Go Nuggets!"

Angie Wade thanks HPC members and staff for doing the best they can.

XII. NEXT MEETING DATE:

A. Next Regular Meeting: August 10th, 2023 – 6:00 pm

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

Jake Anders made a motion to adjourn, second Angie Wade.
Meeting adjourned at 7:26 pm

Jake Anders, Chair

Date

Gerrit Verbeek, Planner II

Date



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Planning and Land Use Department

Planning Division

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Quarterly Progress Report for April 1 – June 30, 2023 **Mat-Su Borough Historic Preservation Plan Phase II** **CLG Grant #22002**

Project Status

The project is on schedule based on an extension of project funding until August 31, 2024. Work began with a project kick-off meeting with the selected contractor, DOWL, on March 31st. This quarter represents the first period of substantial progress.

Accomplishments for the Reporting Period

- Project Management:
 - A. Project Kick-Off Meeting with DOWL and MSB staff
 - B. Six (6) Bi-Weekly Status Meetings with DOWL and MSB Staff
 - C. DOWL created a Microsoft Teams channel for sharing reference material; MSB staff transferred material.
 - D. DOWL produced work plan and project schedule
- Public Outreach
 - A. MSB staff produced a stakeholder survey for organizations such as historical societies and museums; DOWL assisted with proofreading, published the survey, and is collecting results
 - B. MSB staff conducted 4 general public outreach events from June 22-29 (Wasilla, Talkeetna, Palmer, and Chickaloon); DOWL attended Wasilla and Chickaloon events
 - C. MSB staff began creating a steering committee of Borough residents to help draft goals and objectives
 - D. MSB staff briefed the Historical Preservation Commission on the project status at the May 11th HPC meeting
- Plan Drafting
 - A. DOWL created an outline for the Historic Preservation Plan document, following guidance from MSB and historic themes generated by HPC
 - B. DOWL completed drafting Introduction (Statement of Importance of Historic Preservation, Benefits of Historic Preservation); Copy/Paste Vision and Mission for HPP
 - C. DOWL is drafting Acknowledgements, Overview of Historic Preservation in MSB from 1987 Through Today; Legal Framework
 - D. DOWL is populating the Historic Themes section with text from the Borough's 2015 National Heritage Area Application: Mining, Trails, Waterways, Dog Sledding, Railroads, Government Roads and Highways, Commercial Agriculture, and Patterns of Demographics)

Problems or Obstacles and How Resolved:

Low attendance at Round 1 outreach meetings for the general public was an obstacle encountered in this quarter. The project team chose to primarily advertise the meetings by notifying local Community Councils and historical societies and ask them to help spread the word in their areas, but found that this was not effective and many groups did not follow through as hoped. In the future, staff and contractor will handle advertising directly.

Plans for the Next Reporting Period

From July 1st – September 30th, planned activity includes:

- DOWL to continue drafting Plan sections
- MSB staff to finish recruiting a steering committee and begin formulating goals and objectives
- MSB staff to conduct outreach with institutions including businesses, museums, historical societies, etc.
- Work review at Historical Preservation Commission meeting in August

Contact Information

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MSB Staff Report: Response from Brad Hanson, City of Palmer Community Development Director, Regarding Architectural Guidelines in the Palmer Historic District.

Brad Hanson confirms that there are no architectural guidelines required for construction in the Palmer Historical District or elsewhere in downtown Palmer. He notes that the Palmer City Council has considered proposals in the past, and has opted to allow market forces and individual property owners to shape the architectural look of the area.

Construction to rebuild the Palmer Public Library therefore may incorporate elements consistent with Colony architecture, but is not required to.

To Members of the Palmer Board of Economic Development (BED),

The Historical Preservation Commission (HPC) of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is a citizen's advisory body established in Borough Code 4.46.020(A) to "advise the assembly in identifying, protecting, preserving, and interpreting cultural resources within the borough." Current board members include tribal representatives, professional archaeologists, educators, local business owners, and others. Among other responsibilities, the HPC is tasked to "review and make recommendations to the assembly regarding local projects that might affect properties identified in the historic preservation plan."

The HPC is submitting this letter to the City of Palmer as it considers economic development opportunities in downtown Palmer and the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) Right-of-Way. Specifically, the HPC wishes to highlight the historic significance and character of the currently out of service ARRC tracks from the Alaska State Fairgrounds to the Palmer Depot. The HPC understands that the ARRC tracks are one of many the elements the BED is examining while planning the future of downtown Palmer, and that a wide range of possible actions have been identified, including investment in track improvements and restoration of active railroad access to downtown Palmer, to the removal of the tracks and grade entirely to open the land for other uses.

The HPC would like to note that a central portion of downtown Palmer is a nationally listed historic district (*Matanuska Colony Community Center*; National Register of Historic Places ID: 91000773 and Alaska Heritage Resources Survey Site ANC-00750). Included within the historic district are the Palmer Depot itself and roughly 100 yards of ARRC track and grade north of Evergreen Avenue leading up to the depot. Although portions of the ARRC track and grade exist outside of the historic district boundary, this does not negate the overall historical significance of the Palmer branch of the ARRC track and grade. The ARRC track and grade are interconnected through design, development and purpose with those elements within the district, and therefore should be considered to possess the same level of significance as those portions within the boundaries of the historic district.

The tracks were completed in 1916 and are one of the oldest parts of the built environment related to Euro-American settlement of the Matanuska Valley. The entire railroad network is undoubtedly one of the most influential factors in the modern settlement patterns of the Mat-Su Borough. As such the railroad is a point of pride for many, but is not universally viewed as an unambiguous improvement because of its associations with loss of sovereignty and introduction of diseases negatively impacting Dene communities within the Matanuska and Susitna watersheds. All perspectives are best served by the physical preservation of tracks and other landmarks, which make current and future residents more able to imagine the past and understand how it shaped the communities they live in.

The local community values the railroad for those reasons, and because the rails have become a landmark in their own personal histories of life in the Mat-Su Borough. The community is also demonstrating the desire to make the tracks part of the present again. The HPC notes the hard work of the Engine 557 Restoration Project, a private non-profit project. The restoration group has spent 11 years and millions of dollars to refurbish the last steam engine operated by the ARRC. Engine 557's last commercial run traveled to Palmer on September 5, 1959, and the restoration project has expressed interest in allowing it to return to service on the Palmer Branch. The Palmer business community also considers rail transport as a potentially attractive way for Anchorage visitors to participate in Palmer's Annual festivities, such as the Christmas train.

The HPC recognizes the challenge that the City of Palmer faces in attempting to manage conflicting goals such as “better parking,” “small town” and “historic character,” and “open space” within the confines of a limited space and in a way that best serves a population of individuals with different mindsets and priorities. We ask that the BED take into account that removal of the tracks will diminish the historic significance of the tracks in addition to preventing future train tourism into downtown Palmer.

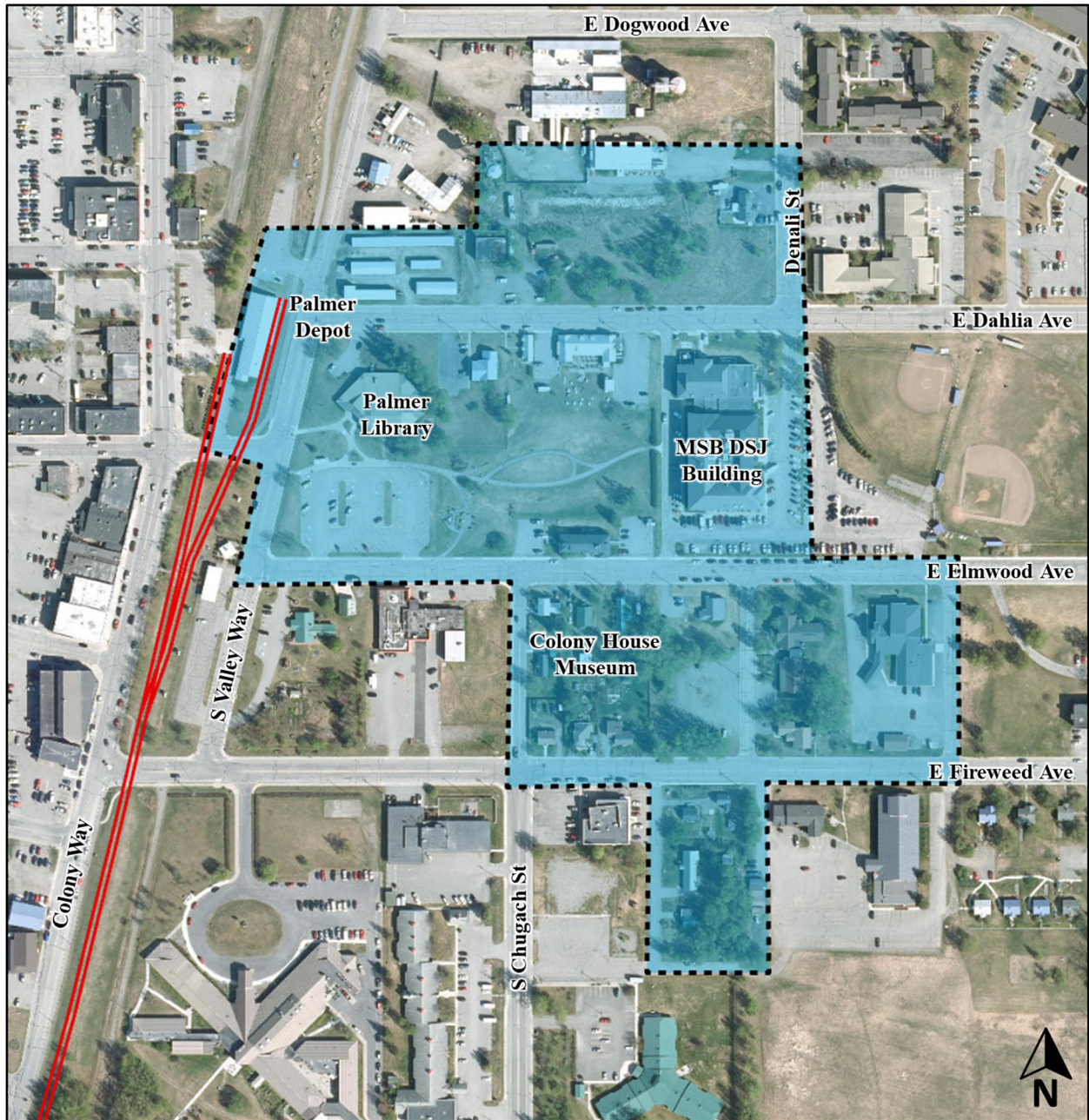
One of the frequently-mentioned alternative land uses of the railroad right-of-way is to provide more space for parking during festivals such as Colony Days. The HPC would like to point out it is, perhaps, misguided to attempt to improve a festival celebrating our history by removing the physical landmarks associated with that history.

Finally, we advise the BED to consider future generations and that ‘Gen Z,’ the demographic group aging into adulthood, has indicated a preference for walkable cities and are less likely to drive than previous generations.¹

Thank you for your attention and work to collect public feedback for your current planning effort. We are ready to assist the City of Palmer in any and all matters related to heritage tourism, historic preservation, and maintaining the unique and historic character of Palmer, “Alaska at its best.”

Sincerely,

¹ Peter Weber, “Gen Z is historically slow getting driver’s licenses,” *The Week*, February 14, 2023. <https://theweek.com/transportation/1020962/gen-z-is-historically-slow-getting-drivers-licenses-boomers-arent-letting>



Aerial imagery of downtown Palmer. Blue indicates the approximate extent of the *Matanuska Colony Community Center* historic district; red indicates the railroad tracks which are currently out of service and under consideration.

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION
RESOLUTION SERIAL NO. 23-01**

A RESOLUTION OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH HISTORICAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING LOCAL GEOGRAPHIC NAMING PROPOSALS CURRENTLY UNDER CONSIDERATION IN MAY 2023.

WHEREAS, the Alaska Historical Commission is tasked by the United States Board on Geographic Names as the entity responsible for considering proposals for geographic name changes within the State of Alaska ; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Historical Commission is currently considering five proposals for geographic name changes within the territory of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough; and

WHEREAS, the first proposal is to apply the name 'Coffee Spire' to a rock spire in Denali National Park & Preserve which has not previously been officially named; and

WHEREAS, the second proposal is to apply the name 'Mocha Spire' to a rock spire in Denali National Park & Preserve which has not previously been officially named and which is adjacent to the feature proposed to be named 'Coffee Spire'; and

WHEREAS, the third proposal is to apply the name 'Natsede'aayi' to a rocky high point at approximately Mile 108 of the Glenn Highway, which is currently officially named 'Lion Head'; and

WHEREAS, the fourth proposal is to apply the name 'Langman

Lake' to a lake in the Kahiltna Flats Subdivision which has not previously been officially named; and

WHEREAS, the fifth proposal is to apply the name 'Feather Lake' to a lake northeast of Big Lake, next to Horseshoe Lake, which has not previously been officially named; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Historical Commission is soliciting input on these naming proposals from stakeholders, including the government of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough ; and

WHEREAS, the Historical Preservation Commission is tasked in Borough Code 4.46.020(A)(1) to "advise the assembly in identifying, protecting, preserving, and interpreting cultural resources within the borough that are of archaeological, historical, cultural, scientific, or geographic importance"; and

WHEREAS, these geographic naming proposals related to the identification, preservation, and interpretation of cultural resources of historical, cultural, and geographic importance;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Historical Preservation Commission advises the government of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the Alaska Historical Commission, to take the following actions with regard to these naming proposals:

- Oppose the proposal to apply the name 'Coffee Spire,' on the basis that it is frivolous.
- Oppose the proposal to apply the name 'Mocha Spire,' on

the basis that it is frivolous.

- Support the proposal to apply the name 'Natsede'aayi,' on the basis that it is an indigenous Ahtna name in local use for millennia longer than the current official name of 'Lion Head.' The English translation of the proposed name is 'Stone Woman.'
- Oppose the proposal to apply the name 'Langman Lake,' on the basis that the lake has an older Dena'ina traditional name, 'Uq'e Tsits'ełdatl'i Bena,' and that being the first recorded Euro-American homesteader on the lake is an insufficient connection to justify a commemorative name.
- Support the proposal to apply the name 'Feather Lake.'

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Historical Preservation Commission this 11th day of May, 2023.



Jake Anders, Chair

ATTEST:



Gerrit Verbeek, Planner II

Selection of a Project for a 2024 CLG Grant Proposal.

Context: CLG Grant Applications are due in late August, which would allow for an HPC letter of support at the Aug. 10 meeting.

Proposals:

- Archaeological survey at a site overlooking Moose Creek along the Glenn Highway, which is potentially at risk because of a proposal to mine gravel beginning next year
- Archaeological survey at a Dena'ina village site in the Nancy Lakes region (on the left bank of Fish Creek above the confluence with Cow Lake outlet), which is potentially at risk because of development and private land sales around the lake shores
- “The new parcels that are being added to Settlers Bay Coastal Park will need cultural resources assessment” – Richard Martin, Knik Tribe
- “More interpretive signs, for instance there are no Dena'ina or Ahtna related signs anywhere along Hatcher Pass” – Richard Martin, Knik Tribe
- All other suggestions from HPC members and the public are welcome