

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH AGRICULTURE ADVISORY BOARD

Chairman – LaMarr Anderson (01)	Tony West (03)	Dylan Blankenship (06)	Kenneth Hoffman (10)
Vice Chair – Misty O'Connor (09)	Alexandria Hoffman (04)	Adam Jensi (07)	Thomas Bergey (11)
VACANT (02)	Jozef Slowik (05)	Craig Hanson (08)	Abby Raisanen(12)

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING DSJ BUILDING LOWER LEVEL CONFERENCE ROOM

**September 17, 2025
4:30 P.M.**

I. CALL TO ORDER; ROLL CALL

Mr. Anderson called the meeting to order at 4:34 p.m.

Members present and establishing a quorum were: LaMarr Anderson, Misty O'Connor, Jozef Slowik (by phone), Dylan Blankenship, Kenneth Hoffman, and Abby Raisanen

Members absent and excused: Tony West, Craig Hanson, Thomas Bergey

Members absent: Alexandria Hoffman, Adam Jensi

Staff present: Suzanne Reilly, Asset Manager

Margie Cobb, Department Administrative Specialist

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA; PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Agenda approved as presented.

III. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (Limit 3 minutes)

Mark Troutman, Rob Wells, and Beverly Cutler spoke in support of development of legislation to allow for smaller ag parcels and urged the Board to move this forward as quickly as possible. Ms. Cutler also sent a letter, which is attached.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The August 20, 2025 Minutes were approved as presented.

V. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Staff Report – Ms. Reilly gave an update on the Board on the following topics:

1. Leatham/Pettitt QCD
2. Pt Mac Farms Update
3. KTNA Radio Interview re: Agriculture in the Upper Susitna Valley

B. MSB Ag Program Survey Results

Discussion on the survey results and its impact on the future work of the Board. It was agreed that the survey was helpful to address fundamental questions this Board had.

- C. Work Session – Develop Draft Legislation
Investigate the feasibility of smaller parcels and more subdivisions and develop a recommendation to the Assembly while ensuring de minimis loss of agricultural land

Mr. Hoffman motioned to go into Committee As A Whole at 5:58 pm.; Mr. Blankenship seconded. Mr. Blankenship motioned to come out of Committee as a Whole at 6:18 pm; Mr. Hoffman seconded.

VI. MEMBER COMMENTS (Limit to 3 minutes)

- Ms. Raisanen: Shared about her fair participation.
- Mr. Hoffman: Farm Bureau did great during the Fair. Happy this Board is at a point to move forward.
- Mr. Slowik: Appreciated the informative survey. Important to remember that, as this is built, it will still be voluntary for property owners to opt in to.
- Ms. O'Connor: Expressed appreciation for the hard work that went into putting out the survey and how good it is to have members on this Board who farm.
- Mr. Blankenship: This is an important question that needs to be addressed for current owners and future land sales.
- Ms. Reilly: Appreciated thoughts shared by the Board. She distributed a couple handouts summarizing survey results and solutions to concerns expressed in the survey; per request of the Chairman, these will be emailed to all Board members tomorrow.

VII. NEXT MEETING: October 15, 2025

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Anderson adjourned the meeting at 6:35 p.m.


LaMarr Anderson, Chairman

10/15/2025
DATE

ATTEST:



Margie Cobb
Department Administrative Specialist

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Palmer, AK 99645
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September 9, 2025

MSB Agriculture Advisory Board
350 East Dahlia Avenue
Palmer, AK 99645

Dear Members of the Mat-Su Agriculture Advisory Board,

I write to you ahead of next week's September 17, 2025 meeting from the perspective of an original purchaser of a MSB Ag Rights parcel at the 1977 sale. Since that time I have experienced all nature of Ag issues in this state for all these decades. At last month's meeting, I waited patiently while I hoped the main topic on the agenda, the recent "Survey", would get addressed alongside the related issue raised before the board for years now about future parcel size for MSB agricultural parcels.

The purpose of this letter is to ask you to please take action at the upcoming meeting to actually send a proposal to the MSB Assembly about the last sentence above. Those of us from the '77 sale and other early '80's sales have been waiting so long for a determination of this issue (our estate planning is severely impacted) that we are likely to die before any of this gets resolved despite our best efforts to join cooperatively with the MSB in forward looking progress.

Today your board is stable, informed, and simply needs to weigh in to get something to the Assembly. Both Rob Wells (my neighbor) and myself, who both attend your meetings with great interest, purchased our Ag Rights parcels nearly 50 years ago. We believe we may be the only original owners from that sale still on their property. In 1977 MSB sold our Ag rights to us with a 20 year contract, which each of us fulfilled fully by the end of the 20 years, upon which MSB gave us our quitclaim deed. Since then, **28 more years have passed, during which we have continued to faithfully farm, because we love doing that, even though we fulfilled the contract more than double its time long ago. If I might say so, Rob Wells' and our farm are both examples of exactly what the MSB wanted to accomplish with that 1977 program.**

However, the issues confronting people now in 2025 about how to successfully farm in Alaska, as well as the inevitable MSB appropriate changes in its uses of its

lands over more than half a century, are very different situations now from the time the early Ag Programs for MSB parcels were in the making.

We don't pretend to have a magic vision, nor can we speak for all others who may have more recently obtained MSB Ag land. But we do believe that following our nearly fifty years of time, money, personal and professional efforts to use our land as MSB intended, it is time for a change. None of our heirs can afford to do what we did on such big parcels nor does it make any economic or practical sense for them to try.

But we would like to afford to a great many others the opportunity to live rurally as we have, to grow things in the ground, to provide food and other enhancements of life such as flowers, and to compensate the MSB appropriately with taxes for the privilege of doing so. Allowing 5 and 10 acre parcels would do just that. On property such as ours, the gorgeous views many would have on very livable parcels from which they would have access to nearby municipalities for jobs, schools, and stores would provide an incredible revenue to the borough.

Please help us find a way to benefit those coming after us like this, as well as for us to make necessary estate plans.

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beverly W. Cutler".

Beverly W. Cutler and Mark Troutman
(husband and diligent farmer though a man of few words)

Mat-Su Borough Survey Summary

Pros & Cons of Allowing Agricultural Parcels as Small as 10 Acres

Pros

Benefit	% Support	Comments
Easier land transfer to the next generation	72%	"It's hard to pass land to kids equally with current parcel sizes."
Improved food security	48%	"Smaller farms can help provide a more secure local source for farm products."
Lower financial burden for new farmers	48%	"Smaller parcels reduce the cost of entry into farming."
Better land utilization	44%	"Unused land could be farmed by future owners if protected."
Increased land lease opportunities	32%	"More parcels mean more chances to lease land for agriculture."
Support for niche/small-scale farming	—	"Think greenhouse operations, floriculture, and micro-farming—perfect for Alaska's climate."
Stronger community and tax revenue	—	"Smaller parcels could create a more diverse ag community and increase property tax revenues."

▲ Cons

Concern	% Concerned	Comments
Gradual loss of agricultural land	44%	"This initiative will erode the rural lifestyle and transform large parcels into subdivisions."
Loss of large contiguous farming areas	36%	"Subdividing land breaks up the space needed for serious farming."
Risk of hobby farming over commercial agriculture	—	"Smaller parcels will only create hobby farms; people will still need day jobs."
Insufficient oversight and enforcement	—	"The Borough lacks the capacity to enforce ag use and prevent misuse."
Environmental and neighbor impacts	—	"Runoff, noise, and chemical use could affect nearby residents."
Increased pressure for residential development	—	"Ag land will be used for housing rather than farming."
Economic viability concerns for small farms	—	"Farming is hard and rarely profitable—smaller parcels won't change that."

🔧 Solutions to Concerns About Allowing 10-Acre Agricultural Parcels

Mat-Su Borough Agricultural Programs Survey – Response Planning

⚠️ Concern: Gradual Loss of Agricultural Land (44%)

Solutions:

- Implement **agricultural use covenants** on subdivided parcels.
 - Partner with **land trusts** to preserve farmland through easements.
 - Offer **tax incentives** only for actively farmed parcels.
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⚠️ Concern: Loss of Large Contiguous Farming Areas (36%)

Solutions:

- Limit the number of subdivisions per original parcel.
 - Create **buffer zones** between parcels to maintain farming corridors.
 - Encourage **cooperative farming models** across adjacent small parcels.
-

⚠️ Concern: Risk of Hobby Farming Over Commercial Agriculture

Solutions:

- Provide **grants or startup support** for commercial-scale farming.
 - Require a **farm plan** for parcels receiving ag tax benefits.
 - Promote **education and mentorship programs** for new farmers.
-

⚠️ Concern: Insufficient Oversight and Enforcement

Solutions:

- Establish a **Borough Ag Compliance Office** or task force.
- Use **annual reporting** (e.g., Schedule F or farm activity logs).
- Leverage **community-based monitoring** and peer accountability.

⚠ Concern: Environmental and Neighbor Impacts

Solutions:

- Enforce **best practices for chemical use and waste management**.
- Require **setbacks and buffer zones** for livestock or spraying.
- Offer **training on sustainable farming** for small parcel owners.

⚠ Concern: Increased Pressure for Residential Development

Solutions:

- Restrict **non-agricultural development** on ag-zoned parcels.
- Allow **limited homesites** with strict acreage caps.
- Create **rezoning review boards** to evaluate development proposals.

⚠ Concern: Economic Viability of Small Farms

Solutions:

- Provide **access to shared equipment and co-op services**.
- Support **niche markets** like floriculture, honey, or greenhouse crops.
- Offer **marketing and distribution support** for small producers.