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Denali Borough Mayor's Annual Report

July 30, 2018

Greetings Neighbor,

I hope you and yours are enjoying the blessings of the summer.

As with past reports, I'll structure this report in alignment with the powers bestowed to the government by the people of the Denali Borough.

Taxation/Finance

Financial information including audits, budgets and monthly reports can be found on the borough website under Finance Department. Highlights of the Fiscal Year 2019 Denali Borough Budget include maximum allowable school funding of \$2,782,299 and contributions to non-profits totaling over \$500,000.

The borough is financially strong. We are forward funded and maintain a healthy fund balance. Overnight accommodations tax revenue makes up almost eighty percent of the borough's general revenues. The outlook for this industry remains positive, with current hoteliers expanding and interest in additional new facilities. The growth is also within our neighborhoods as seen by a proliferation of different accommodation offerings.

The last tax increase of any kind in the borough was in 1995. As borough residents, we are very fortunate in many regards, and certainly the taxation level is one.

Planning, Platting and Land Use Regulation

This past year the borough embarked on an effort to update our Comprehensive Plan by adding a new Land Use and Economic Development Plan. Land management decisions are guided by the Comprehensive Plan. Many thanks to all who participated in the public meetings and special thanks to the Planning Advisory Team. The plan was approved by the Assembly in January and is found on our website under Land Management Department.

One recommendation which emerged from the public meetings was to explore a few limited land use rules which could provide a mechanism through which local concerns could be addressed in the event of a large scale development. In order to implement such a conditional use permit process, our zoning code needs revision.

Since 1996, the entirety of the Denali Borough, with a few exceptions, has been zoned using an “Unrestricted” category, within which there are no prohibitions. The Assembly and Planning Commission are considering ways forward to improve our code, while at the same time respecting the strong private property rights enjoyed in the borough. As always, public input is welcomed.

Education

With the passage of the annual budget, once again the Denali Borough Assembly demonstrated a strong commitment to the Denali Borough School District. Not only did the Assembly provide maximum allowable funding but they also contributed \$100,000 to the Major School Maintenance Fund, which is used to repair our aging school facilities.

I have been pleased with the coordinated efforts of the borough and the district administrative staffs in identifying, developing, funding and carrying out major school maintenance projects. On the State’s prioritized grant fund list, the Cantwell School Roof Replacement was the second ranked project in the entire state. Recent legislative action resulted in the provision of funding for this project, which also requires a healthy borough contributing share. Planning for the project will take place this winter, with construction planned for next summer. The oldest school in the borough will be getting a much needed new roof!

Solid Waste

This enterprise has seen a lot of activity – from the completion of our landfill shop expansion, to continuing work on renewing our permit, to a new Healy Transfer Station facility. Construction of the facility, at milepost 253, is nearing completion and the next steps of outfitting will follow. Acceptance and pricing will be the same as at Cantwell Transfer Station. The facility will accept residential refuse for a fee of \$2 per bag or \$15 per cubic yard. Large loads should proceed to the landfill as acceptance at the transfer stations is capped at five cubic yards. The station will also accept Freon containing units for a \$35 fee and accept household hazardous waste such as lead acid batteries, oils and solvents free of charge. We plan to operate roughly 20 hours per week – and to open this fall!

This past year we began a free scrap metal acceptance program, which remains in effect. We collected – and recycled - 262 tons of scrap metal. Let’s continue to clean up the borough and bring more scrap metal to the landfill. While economic activity increased in the borough this year, our landfill acceptance fell below our ten year average. Kudos to those involved with the Native Village of Cantwell Recycling Program and to the Subaru/Denali National Park Zero Landfill Initiative. Let’s keep making strides to limit the amount of refuse going to the landfill – and thereby extend the life of our facility.

For the first time in history we received a 100% score on our annual inspection at the landfill. Kudos to staff and everybody who has picked up wind-blown litter as a fundraiser. That fundraising opportunity also remains open.

General Administration

Another legislative outcome that the borough has long supported was the potential sale and transfer of Tri-Valley Subdivision leased land. This is a big step forward for the long-term strength and stability of the community. While much work lies ahead, we applaud the Alaska Railroad and Usibelli Coal Mine for moving this forward.

This past year, the Local Emergency Planning Committee asked the borough to consider the implementation of a borough wide addressing system for the purpose of assisting emergency response. Staff have been researching approaches and will bring recommendations back to the Assembly. If the Assembly decides to move forward, this will be a sizable project which will require local input.

A number of ways to stay engaged with borough happenings include attending public meetings, and reading meeting minutes and monthly mayor's reports; both of which are found on the borough website.

Welcome Wendi Planty and Sherry Shorey to the office staff. We appreciated the May 2018 tour of the many changes taking place at Clear Air Force Station and learning about the Team Clear approach. Here is our office team, with the base commanders:



From left to right: Lt. Colonel John Oberst, Deputy Clerk/Financial Clerk Connie MacMaster, Mayor Clay Walker, Administrative Assistant Sherry Shorey, Emergency Planner/Project Coordinator Chris Noel, Planner Marsha Lambert, Treasurer Wendi Planty, Borough Clerk Amber Renshaw, Lt. Colonel Joel Lane

Please join me in thanking borough office staff and solid waste staff for all their hard work.

Always, feel free to call the office with any questions. This Home Rule Borough is your local government.

Sincerely,

Clay Walker, Mayor