

DENALI BOROUGH

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Clay Walker, Mayor

April 2022 Mayor's Report to the Denali Borough Assembly

This report speaks primarily to non-agenda items. Agenda items will be discussed in meeting.

NTIA MTA Broadband Grant Request Update

- Unfortunately, our grant submission, filed with the support of Matanuska Telephone Association, was not selected for funding by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. This grant was very competitive, and a minority of submissions were funded. We will continue to seek opportunities, in partnership with MTA, to increase broadband service throughout the Denali Borough.

State of Alaska Legislative Redistricting Update

- The proposed state legislative redistricting map contained “The Cantwell Appendage”, a long finger reaching westward from the Richardson Highway and touching Cantwell. This “appendage” kept all Ahtna villages under one House seat and effectively maintained a direct Denali Borough connection to legislative districts currently served by Rep. Cronk and Sen. Bishop. The Alaska Supreme Court recently ruled this “appendage” unjustifiable, and therefore in need of remedy. It is expected that the final redistricting map will merge the entire Denali Borough with our neighbors to the south – the northern Mat-Su Borough. By the by, Wasilla Mayor Ledford and I met over Zoom recently to discuss working together and communicating with area legislators.

Denali Borough Redistricting

- Thanks to School Board member Dawn Adams, At-large public member Vernon Carlson, Planning Commissioner Susan Braun, and Assembly Members Jeff Stenger, Tallon Shreeve, and Dominic Canale for stepping up to serve on the new Redistricting Committee. The first meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 27. The committee will review census data and consider proposals to bring our borough representation districts into proper apportionment; as well as considering the most effective structures for the bodies going forward. Recommendations will go to the Assembly, which will forward a ballot question for the November election. Our districts are in Charter and can only be adjusted through a Charter change, which requires a vote. The Assembly recently reviewed the 2020 census data and declared our current districts mal-apportioned.

Legislative Update

- This past month, I provided testimony to the Senate Finance Committee in support of fully recapitalizing the Community Assistance Program, funding the Major School Maintenance Grant Program, our Capital Budget request (one half cost share of the Tri-Valley School back-up power generator replacement project), and for funding in support of the Alaska Long Trail.

- I also provided invited testimony to a House Committee considering potential changes to the current Alaska Public Offices Commission's Financial Disclosure Forms. I shared history on the topic and shared the form through which the Denali Borough conducts our own substitute disclosures.

Local Government Lost Revenue Relief Grant Program

- Working with the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, we have completed our grant agreement and expect the relief funding of \$3.18 million to hit our account any day now. For municipalities who suffered severe revenue losses, this allocation is intended to help maintain the provision of governmental services. The agreement did state that we intend to use these funds to meet our obligations to the Denali Borough School District and to maintain levels of support to emergency service providers and non-profit organizations within the borough. The FY 23 budget proposes to utilize these funds in that manner.

Changes, Changes

- Chris Noel, after 7.5 years of excellent service to the borough as our Emergency Planner and Projects Coordinator, is moving on and taking a new job in the area. He was instrumental in advancing projects such as Healy Transfer Station and Street Addressing, led coordination with emergency services and pursued grants, and did an amazing job coordinating the borough's response to the COVID pandemic. He will be greatly missed at the borough. We wish him the best in his next chapter here. After a review of duties and title, the job opening will be posted.
- Marsha Lambert has done a great job balancing the many duties of the Land Planner position which are in addition to the Street Addressing Project. Those duties include: planning (comprehensive, transportation, trails, etc.), plat and subdivision reviews, coordination with and support of the Planning Commission, managing 49,000 acres of borough land, map production, helping the public with land inquiries, land use permits, gravel sales, borough IT lead, coordinator of borough land surveying, managing leases and potential sales of borough lands, and more. Collectively, and with Street Addressing demands in mind, we decided to distribute some of those duties. Teresa Floberg has done a great job as the part-time Community Development Aide. She has demonstrated abilities to coordinate and move projects forward and has expressed a desire to play a larger role. The budgets for Assembly consideration include moving this position to full time, with a title of Community Development Director. This position will retain the grant pursuit focus while adding development-related roles such as planning, permitting, and land leases and sales. Her background in non-profit development, sales and marketing, and as a General Manager, are a good fit for the position. Additionally, the Land Planner role is redefined to incorporate the technical focus - Land Planner/GIS Technician.
- We have considered the effectiveness our open office space with seven people working together upstairs in light of the changing work place which involves many Zoom calls and meetings. We are considering, pending funding approval, of moving out of the Land Planning and moving into the "old bank space", where offices with doors will be able to support the necessary focus and coordination needed to continue to move our priorities forward.

Infrastructure Grant Symposium (Dena'ina Center Anchorage, April 11 and 12)

- Senator Murkowski is hosting the April 11 session, which includes numerous federal agencies presenting their roles within the \$1.2 trillion Act. The Alaska Municipal League is hosting the second day focusing on how municipalities can participate and coordinate. Teresa Floberg and I are attending for the borough and taking in the different educational sessions. We received a \$750 travel scholarship from AML to defray the costs of attending.

Happy April, Happy Easter. As always, feel free to contact me or staff with any questions. -Clay