

# DENALI BOROUGH

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*Clay Walker, Mayor*

## **August 2021 Mayor's Report to the Denali Borough Assembly**

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

### **Invitation to Bid on Healy Municipal Land Entitlement Land Boundary Survey Posted**

- The Borough issued an Invitation to Bid for the above project on July 28, with bids due by August 16<sup>th</sup>. Moving forward with our lands program means investing in boundary surveys in order to take full title of the land. The borough estimates the cost of this survey project, which encompasses just over 1,000 acres, to be under \$100,000. Per code, the Borough Assembly will approve all contracts over \$50,000 via ordinance.

### **Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program Application with MTA**

- The borough is partnering with Matanuska Telephone Association on an application to the Broadband Infrastructure Program offered by the US Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). The proposed project will expand broadband availability and speeds in underserved areas of the borough from Cantwell through Healy. The borough will provide grant compliance support while MTA will lead the construction and deliver the enhanced service to residents. More on this later, hopefully, as the Assembly, via ordinance, approves and accepts grants.

### **Alaska Municipal League Summer Legislative Conference (Aug 3-6, Fairbanks' Westmark Hotel)**

- There were actually five different conferences all together in this full week in Fairbanks. I participated, in ways, in all five. They were:
  - The Alaska Defense Forum. I attended the first ADF in October 2019 and this second forum was equally top notch. In the session I attended, we heard from and engaged with Maj. General Torrey Saxe, Alaska National Guard, and Lt. General Crum, Alaska Commander, as well as the Congressional Delegation. Also, a very interesting roundtable on the "New Geopolitical Landscape" highlighted the growing importance of the Arctic.
  - The Conference of Young Alaskans (COYA). AML facilitated this Conference of 42 emergent leaders from around the state. They drafted and presented to the Conference of Mayors their Resolutions relating to:
    - Sustainability of Communities
    - Diversity, Social Justice and Equity
    - Education
    - Economic Development
    - Infrastructure and Public Utilities
    - Climate Resilience

- **Quality of Life**

Their energy motivated the mayors group to consider ways to better involve youth. I am happy to share their resolutions with anyone interested.

- The Conference of Mayors. Most of this session related to State Budget Decisions and the upcoming Fiscal Policy Special Session. Senate President Pete Micciche joined us and offered a sobering view on the legislature's prospects of coming together on a fiscal plan. More on that below.
- The Municipal Mangers Association meeting. I joined this group for a tour of the Army Corps of Engineers Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory station located in Fox, also known as "The Permafrost Tunnel" – a fascinating facility with an interesting past and relevant future.
- Alaska Municipal League Conference. Topics of these sessions included: engagement with DOT on projects, economic recovery and the role economic development organizations, legislation impacting municipalities, and anticipated cost and responsibility shifting from the state to municipalities.

### **Alaska State Legislature Special Session beginning August 16th**

- As the state continues its efforts toward a sustainable fiscal policy, many components are in play and will likely be interconnected in order to secure a path forward. Those components include the draw on the Earnings Reserve, the Permanent Fund Dividend, Oil Taxes, a potential Statewide Sales Tax, potential veto overrides, the Spending Cap and Constitutional Amendments.
- We heard from Sen. Kawasaki, a member of the Fiscal Policy Working Group, who said talks include: extending the moratorium on school bond debt reimbursement, the future of the Community Assistance Program, a Sales Tax, and the Power Cost Equalization (PCE) Program.

### **Alaska Municipal League Health Trust**

- With a goal of offering competitive health care plans through the efficiency of pooling, AML recently stood up a new Health Trust. The borough compared our long-held coverage plan with the new offerings and found that the level of coverage was comparable while the cost savings were considerable. The Denali Borough, with the engagement and concurrence of staff, transitioned to a new health care provider on August 1. The expected cost savings are around \$100,000 this first year. As the Trust grows in membership, a governing body of municipal representatives will guide the future plans and offerings.

### **Final FEMA Approval of Public Assistance Reimbursement Request**

- Our project of past COVID Testing and Transportation has achieved full approval. Over \$80,000 will be provided from FEMA to our CARES account.

### **Public Visit from Congressman Young's Staff Friday August 13**

- Congressman Young's staff, including Chief of Staff Alex Ortiz, will "post up" a mobile office this Friday in front of the Healy Napa Store from roughly 10:30 to 12:30. Stop by to meet, greet, and engage.

### **Antler Ridge Trailhead Construction Update**

- Construction of the new trailhead has begun and is scheduled to be completed within 30 days.

### **Resignation of Lee Lightfoot from Planning Commission**

- With regrets, I accepted the resignation of Planning Commissioner Lee Lightfoot of Cantwell. Lee answered the call of service with grace and served with dignity. He will be miss by the Commission, among many. We wish Lee the best in the future. This creates an opening on the Commission from the southern district.

### **Vaccination Clinic at Blueberry Festival August 14**

- The Denali Chamber of Commerce is hosting the Blueberry Festival at Otto Lake Park on Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup>. Among the activities is a free vaccination clinic offered by local health care providers.

### **Other Meetings and such of note attended since last meeting:**

- July 22 Denali Borough Planning Commission meeting
- July 30 Alaska Municipal League Joint Insurance Assn. (AMLJIA) Board of Trustees meeting
- August 2 USFS Public Outreach Regarding Spruce Bark Beetles at McKinley Community Center
- August 3 Joint meeting of AMLIP (AML Investment Pool) and AML Boards of Directors
- August 3 Denali Borough School District Board meeting
- August 6 AML Board of Directors meeting

Happy August, happy late summer. As always, feel free to contact me or staff with questions.

-Clay