

DENALI BOROUGH

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Clay Walker, Mayor

March 2023 Mayor's Report to the Denali Borough Assembly

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

City of Anderson Wastewater System Emergency

- Governor Dunleavy did declare a state of emergency for this issue, as requested by the City of Anderson and the Denali Borough. This action makes the two entities eligible for the Public Assistance program, which can reimburse eligible expenditures. The borough will work with the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management to recoup our modest expenses in support of the disaster response.

National Association of Counties (NACo) Legislative Conference (Washington, DC)

- On a quick two-night trip, I attended a half-day NACo Board of Directors meeting, a full day of the conference, and a half day of congressional meetings with our delegation. Conference sessions attended included a presentation from Transportation Secretary Buttigieg, a federal agency round table, and a public lands wildfire resiliency summit. The congressional meetings all went very well, although scheduling was a challenge to have "the boss" there. In each meeting, I presented our approved federal priorities and for over an hour we discussed the borough's progress and needs.

Alaska Municipal League (AML) Legislative Conference (Juneau, AK)

- Together with Borough Assembly members Tallon Shreeve and Dominic Canale, we participated in AML conference sessions and attended legislative meetings February 21-24. Many thanks for their active participation.
- Conference sessions included presentations on the State's fiscal position, DOT's planning and priorities, agency updates, carbon sequestration, and current legislation. We heard from Governor Dunleavy, numerous legislators, and Senator Murkowski.
- Our legislative meetings, in which we discussed our positions and priorities as well as the bigger fiscal picture, were varied and illuminating. We met with our Rep. McCabe and Sen. Shower and scheduled meetings with a range of legislators to build relationships while targeting members of finance, transportation, and education committees. With some meetings cancelled due to illness, we disbursed 20 packets and took 10 in-person meetings.

\$2.18 M in Congressionally Directed Spending for pedestrian paths in Denali Borough

- The borough is working with the agency receiving the funding (NPS), the non-profit who was named as the recipient in the Omnibus Bill (Alaska Trails, Inc.), and the department we anticipate using the money to forward pedestrian paths here (Alaska DOT). While it may take a minute to get the funding into the right hands, we are excited about this development.

RAISE Grant Application

- With the support of grant writers at AML, the borough has submitted a RAISE grant application to federal DOT for the Parks Highway Crossing Elimination and Railroad Realignment project to address the last at-grade railroad-highway crossing in the borough. This project was ranked as a high priority project in the 2022 PEL Study. A February 2023 Cost Benefit Analysis demonstrated a strong return on a significant investment. The full realignment and elimination is estimated to cost \$70 M, with a 1.9 return on investment, due to increased safety, reliability, and decreased maintenance costs. The submitted application included commitments from AK DOT and the AKRR to account for \$9M of contributions to the project.

Community Transportation Program (CTP) and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

- In response to DOT's every three year call for projects, and in coordination with DOT, the borough submitted three applications for eligible projects. The CTP application is Otto Lake Road Reconstruction, which includes shoulders on both sides. The two TAP applications are Healy Area Pedestrian Paths and a Separated Path from Suntrana Road to Antler Ridge. The focus was on higher traffic areas leading to public facilities such as parks, school, post office, trailhead, etc. The Assembly can expect a resolution of support for consideration at the April meeting.

Interior Alaska Transportation Plan

- I am serving on a Working Group for the development of a DOT-required update of the Interior Alaska Transportation Plan. I look forward to representing our area as the plan evolves.

Winterfest and Community Service Award

- The 23rd Annual Winterfest was a hit with lots of activities at the Park and in Healy. The borough hosted the Community Dinner and BINGO Saturday night. Thanks to HAP and Doyon/Aramark for food and service ware donations and to the Tri Valley School Music and ELA classes for cooking, serving, and providing deserts as well as set-up and clean-up. Thanks to the Native Village of Cantwell Council for bringing the BINGO.
- The 10th Annual Denali Borough Mayor's Community Service Award went to the dynamic and dedicated couple Renee and Baxter Mercer, who on top of service to the Denali Borough, Tri-Valley Fire Department and more, established the Mountains of Fun Playground. The borough will install a bench at the playground in their honor. Thank you Bax and Nay for all you do!

Other Meetings Attended:

- February 16th Denali Borough School Board meeting in Cantwell.
- Met with representatives from the federal Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization to discuss programs for which we may be eligible.

Happy March, happy return of the sun. As always, feel free to contact me or staff with any questions.

- Clay