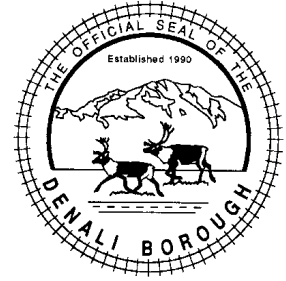


DENALI BOROUGH

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Chris Noel, Mayor

March 2025 Mayor's Report

This report primarily speaks to non-agenda items, agenda items will be addressed during the Assembly Meeting.

The theme of the last four weeks was “advocacy.” It’s budget season for the state of Alaska, and we had a strong showing at the Alaska Municipal League (AML) winter Legislative Conference. Assembly Members Walt Warner and David Alexander, along with Community Development Director Stephanie Ford and City of Anderson Mayor Katie Griebe all attended the winter conference, gathering information and connecting with other municipal leaders. We had productive meetings with Senator Shower and Representative McCabe, in addition to other legislators.

I also attended the National Association of Counties (NACO) Legislative Conference in Washington DC. A few highlights are below.

AML Legislative Conference

- Education was a prominent theme in the AML Legislative Conference. At a joint House/Senate Education committee meeting 3/19, AML members took an opportunity to advocate directly for education, the need for a robust increase to the Base Student Allocation, and automatic adjustments to account for inflation moving forward. I shared the value of our school building as more than just learning centers- in small communities they are resource hubs, recreation centers, libraries, cafeterias, and dormitories. We need steady partnership from the state in the Major School Maintenance and School Construction program as well.
- The legislative response to this advocacy is something along the lines of “Show me the money.” Given current state revenue, prioritizing a Permanent Fund Dividend, and maintaining state services at approximately current levels, the state simply cannot afford to make the investments needed to adequately maintain the system of public schools. Something must give. Additional notes regarding the FY 2026 budget.
 - The Governors proposed FY 26 budget includes a \$30 M payment to the Community Assistance Fund, but the balance remains below the cap of \$90 M.
 - The budget includes no funding for school construction or major school maintenance yet there are over \$500 M in grant requests, showing large backlog of deferred maintenance statewide.

- The Governors operating, capital, and mental health budget, introduced as HB 53-55 is open for public testimony starting this week in House Finance.

NACO Legislative Conference

- One theme from the NACO Legislative Conference is “resilience.” There are 3,069 Counties, Boroughs, and Parishes across the US, and in this moment, we are challenged with both a changing federal landscape, reoccurring natural hazards, in addition to providing the normal critical services each local government provides (planning, solid waste management, education support etc).
- While in DC, I met with Senator Murkowski and staff, staff of Senator Sullivan, and Representative Begich and staff. I shared concerns about the haphazard nature of recent federal workforce cuts, and concerns about Denali National Parks ability to provide basic services to summer visitors. All showed great interest in impacts of federal staffing reductions, and
- We discussed the Parks Highway Mile Post 235 at-grade Railroad crossing elimination project. The project requires an exclusive use easement swap between Denali National Park and the Alaska Railroad. There is interest in including required language in the current legislative cycle, and we will stay engaged with our federal delegation.

Solid Waste

- The 966 loader is finished, we will address the cost during the budget amendment portion of the Assembly meeting. This unexpected nearly \$170,000 expenditure was not included in the FY 2025 budget.

Emergency Planning

- Emergency Manager Forest Shreeve assisted Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA) with a Community Wildfire Defense Grant application, submitted at the end of February. IF awarded, the grant would allow GVEA to implement Community Wildfire Protection Planning projects throughout their power distribution corridor. The grant award would also allow GVEA to clear hazard trees from private property adjacent to their distribution lines, with landowner permission.

Land Planning

- The March Planning Commission meeting is Tuesday, March 18th at the McKinley Park Community Center. We’ll hold an open house from 4-6 PM to review the Yanert Subdivision conceptual designs. A virtual open house will go live at the same time with the same maps, information, and a link to comment on the designs.
- Address update- Address applications are open and available on the borough website. This is an important tool enabling first responders to rapidly provide service, and is even more important when first responders from out of the area provide service in the borough ie: wildland fire response.
- Lease applications- We received two lease applications since the February Assembly meeting. Renewable IPP, a current lease applicant, did inform the borough it must pause its existing lease application for borough land near the City of Anderson.

Healthcare

- Copper River Native Association Clinic (CRNA), Cantwell- CRNA provides primary care on a two week on- two week off basis at the Cantwell Clinic. Call 907-822-8463 to schedule an appointment.

- Interior Community Health Center (ICHC), Healy – ICHC provides tele-health by appointment, and primary care in the Healy clinic every Thursday, weather and provider dependent.
 - ICHC will share health assessment information and hold a community listening session on April 1st, from 12- 2 PM at the Tri-Valley Community Center. Lunch will be provided. Call 907-455-4567 to schedule an appointment.
 - ICHC is recruiting for a Denali Borough resident and current ICHC patient to serve on their board of directors.

Other Items of Interest

- National Defense Authorization Act FY2025- City of Anderson Mayor Katie Greibe heard that changes to the Alaska National Guard (AKNG) presence on Clear Space Force Station (SFS) may impact local families. While at the AML Conference we connected with staff from Adjutant General of the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (Major General Torrence Saxe) and shared community concerns. The NDAA authorized Space Force to absorb all space missions across the Air Force, including the missions currently filled by members of the Alaska Air National Guard at Clear SFS. So – in the short term, AKNG is moving existing guard units at Clear SFS to the 168th Wing at Eielson, but that is an administrative move not a physical move, at this point. Space Force must stand up their own guard to assume the mission on the ground before the units would physically transfer.
 - City of Nenana Mayor Josh Verhagen has coordinated a mission brief and visit to Clear SFS later this spring for Interior Mayors. I hope to gather more information about the transition to a Space Force Guard and impacts to borough residents at that time.
- Congratulations to both the girls and boys Tri-Valley High School basketball teams. For the second time in school history, both teams made it to the State Tournament. The 1A round of 16 kicks off with games on Wednesday, March 12. Go Warriors!

Health and Safety Fair

The third annual Health and Safety Fair is March 27th at the Tri-Valley School gym- 9-3:30. This free event is open to the public and there will be over 20 booths from local organizations providing handouts, information, and free resources.

Alaska Health Fair will be offering affordable blood tests. Walk-ins are welcome, but scheduling an appointment is recommended for faster service. Visit the Denali Borough website for the scheduling link, or call Alaska Health Fair at (907) 374-6853.

Happy Spring,

- Chris