

DENALI BOROUGH

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Clay Walker, Mayor

October 2022 Mayor's Report to the Denali Borough Assembly

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

Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund

- A final ARPA (American Rescue Plan) program was rolled out recently, in which the U.S. Treasury determined an allocation methodology and formula to distribute \$1.5 billion over the course of two federal fiscal years to eligible revenue sharing counties (read: PILT recipient counties). As an eligible revenue sharing county, the Denali Borough carefully tracked this program and participated in the recommendations to Treasury. The final formula included a lower population cap than proposed, among other tweaks to the PILT standard.
- The Denali Borough will receive \$477, 900 a year for two years for a total of \$955,800. Following dramatic revenue losses, this is welcomed relief. Expect a resolution accepting the funds and stating an intention of use at the next meeting.

Brush Collection Program

- The program of accepting brush at all three solid waste locations has helped many residents to better Firewise their properties. The piles at Cantwell and Healy Transfer Stations were at capacity prior to the Division of Forestry coming down to burn with local Fire Department support. We are grateful to enjoy the support of Forestry and the VFDs in this evolving program. An annual Memorandum of Agreement with Forestry articulates goals and allows for expenditures and reimbursements toward fuel reduction efforts.

Clear Fire Ongoing Recovery Efforts

- The borough is engaging FEMA's Public Assistance Program to recoup the \$10,000 of waived tipping fees at the Denali Borough Landfill and for funding to complete the repair of the roads damaged by fire suppression efforts. That work was supposed to be done by the fire response but was left incomplete.

Street Addressing Progress

- The consultant work building the GIS database continues. We developed a system for inventorying and mapping all street sign locations within the borough. Field work to gather and record this information also began. We are developing a business address request form, which will be live in the coming months, with street addresses being issued in 2023.

Parks Hwy RR Crossing (MP 235)

- The at-grade Parks Hwy. – Railroad crossing within Denali National Park is one of the last remaining on the highway. The project of eliminating the crossing by realigning the railroad mainline was identified as a high priority project in the 2021 PEL Study.
- I wrote a letter to the U.S. Transportation Secretary Buttigieg supporting the State of Alaska DOT's application under the Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program.

AGDC Public Meeting

- The Alaska Gasline Development Corporation, a state-owned corporation, is planning to hold an informative public meeting and project update at the Tri-Valley Community on Wednesday, October 26. Time TBD.

Community Wildfire Defense Grant

- The borough submitted a grant application for this program, with a goal of developing a borough-wide Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The grant request is for \$96,000. There is and will be federal funding in support of wildfire mitigation projects, but first an area needs to have an approved plan. Developing a strong plan with local input borough-wide is the stated goal in this application.

Compression Break Research

- After Assembly discussion regarding excessive highway noise from engine compression braking systems at the September Assembly meeting, I conducted some research on the matter. Industry information and a knowledgeable local resident said that properly muffled systems are not excessively loud and that non-enforcement of “straight-pipe”, or non-muffled systems, is the issue. That seems to be a statewide issue rather than borough. The only municipality I found which regulates engine compression brake use is the compact City of Soldotna.

Fall Vaccination Clinic

- The borough has been working with partners at the Division of Public Health, Tri-Valley VFD, Horizon Medical, Interior Community Health Center and Denali National Park to put on a vaccination clinic for flu and COVID boosters. Due to flu vaccine shortages, the date needed to be changed to Thursday November 10th. The clinic will be from 3 to 7 pm at the Tri-Valley Community Center. Register for an appointment at www.horizonmedicalak.com or just stop in.

Annual Alaska Municipal League Conference

- This conference and business meeting will be held in Anchorage's Dena'ina Center December 7-9. A virtual session of the valuable training called “Newly Elected Officers” will be held on November 30th. To register and/or approve travel to attend, contact the borough office.

MTA Broadband Grant Application

- MTA plans to apply for a \$9 million federal grant under USDA's ReConnect4 Program to bring fiber high speed connectivity to the unserved and underserved area from Colorado Lakes (MP 187) to Denali Park (MP235), which includes 365 different service locations. The grant application includes a requirement to receive consent from any tribal area to be served. The Native Village of Cantwell has yet to provide this consent. I shared my support of the provision of consent with the Council, and with Ahtna, Inc. and am hopeful for an outcome which favors addressing our collective lack of digital equity.

Happy October, Happy Ease into Winter. As always, feel free to contact me or staff with any questions. - Clay