

I. CALL TO ORDER

The special meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on March 23, 2010, at the Borough Assembly Chambers, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Mayor Talis J. Colberg for the purpose of holding a joint Assembly/Planning Commission meeting.

II. ROLL CALL

Assembly members present and establishing a quorum were:

Ms. Lynne Woods, Assembly District No. 1 (*Deputy Borough Mayor*)
Mr. Pete Houston, Assembly District No. 2
Mr. Ronald Arvin, Assembly District No. 3
Mr. Mark Ewing, Assembly District No. 4
Ms. Cindy L. Bettine, Assembly District No. 5
Mr. Jim Colver, Assembly District No. 6 (*via teleconference*)
Mr. Vern Halter, Assembly District No. 7 (*arrived at 6:05 p.m.*)

Planning Commission members present and establishing a quorum were:

Mr. David Cheezem, District 2
Mr. Mark Masteller, District 3 (*Chair*)
Mr. Patrick Johnson, District 4
Mr. William Bruu, District 5
Mr. Dick Zobel, District 6

Staff in attendance were:

Ms. Lonnie R. McKechnie, Borough Clerk
Mr. John Duffy, Borough Manager
Mr. John Aschenbrenner, Deputy Borough Attorney
Ms. Cheryl D. Marino, Deputy Borough Clerk
Ms. Christine Nelson, Planning and Land Use Director
Ms. Frankie Barker, Planner II Environmental
Ms. Fran Seager-Boss, Cultural Resource Specialist
Ms. Vickie Cole, Cultural Resource Assistant

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Colberg inquired if there were any changes to the agenda.

GENERAL CONSENT: The agenda was approved as presented without objection.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mr. Joe Griffith, General Manager of Matanuska Electric Association.

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

The following person spoke regarding Nelson Road Extension alternatives and requested that the Assembly start moving forward with the extension: Mr. Randy Dellar.

VI. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Platting Board Update *(Requested by the Assembly)*

Mr. Nicodemus, Platting Board Chair:

- reported that the Platting Board had begun to discuss holding their meetings in the evening to accommodate the public;
- noted that the Platting Board is working with the Planning Director to streamline how the Platting Board business is conducted;
- spoke to the Platting Board work sessions held regarding the Subdivision Construction Manual; and
- requested that the Platting Board be able to hold an additional meeting regarding the Subdivision Construction Manual before the manual goes forward to the Planning Commission.

Assemblymember Ewing:

- spoke to the importance of holding meetings in the evening so that the public that works during the daytime are able to attend; and
- requested that the Clerk look at possible evening meeting times for the Platting Board.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- the Subdivision Construction Manual;
- the Platting Board meeting time change; and
- remote access to subdivisions.

B. Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Presentation *(Requested by Assemblymember Colver)*

Ms. Mandy Migura, National Marine Fisheries Service, provided a presentation regarding the Cook Inlet Beluga Whales.

Ms. Migura:

- explained what a critical habitat is;
- spoke to the critical habitat essential features analysis;
- reported on how areas are determined to be critical habitat;
- spoke to the movement range of beluga whales within the Cook Inlet;

- reported on the prey of beluga whales; and
- spoke to the proposed beluga whale critical habitat areas in the Cook Inlet.

Assemblymember Ewing queried the reason for more critical habitat further up the Cook Inlet.

Ms. Migura:

- reported that there is no functional difference between the areas; and
- noted that biologically, the beluga whales are concentrating in those areas as there seems to be more importance for feeding, potential nursery habitats, and predator avoidance habitats; and
- stated that she could not speak to the reason the belugas are choosing the areas, she could only speak to what they have been seeing.

Assemblymember Halter queried if the killer whale is the beluga whales primary predator.

Ms. Migura noted that the killer whale is the beluga whales primary predator.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- the areas that killer whales have been spotted;
- the toxin and pollutant testing that have been performed on beluga whales;
- the Endangered Species Act (ESA) critical habitat exemptions;
- that critical habitat regulations only apply to federal agency actions and do not apply to state and private citizen actions;
- whether the National Marine Fisheries Service regulates commercial fishing;
- the consultation process;
- whether offshore fishing affects the beluga whale population;
- the acoustic guidelines;
- the current population of beluga whales;
- how beluga whales are counted;
- whether there is a direct correlation between the abundance of salmon and beluga whales;
- the beluga whale recovery plan; and
- beluga whale gender distribution.

C. Regional Integrated Resource Plan Presentation (*Requested by Administration*)

Mr. Joe Griffith, Matanuska Electric Association (MEA) General Manager, provided a presentation regarding the Regional Integrated Resource Plan.

Mr. Griffith:

- reported that an Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) looks at assets that are available to a utility to meet its future needs and requirements;
- spoke to when IRP's are completed;
- spoke to the railbelt electrical system; and
- noted that there are three hydro-electric projects in the railbelt.

Chair Masteller:

- queried the current percentage of production that comes from natural gas, hydro, and coal; and
- asked what is the total current demand in mega watts.

Mr. Griffith:

- reported that the total demand is 450 mega watts peak for the whole railbelt that is on the Chugiak system;
- advised that Golden Valley Electric's load is not normally included in the 450 mega watts;
- stated that MEA runs 145 mega watts peak, averages 90 mega watts, and on a summer day it could be as low as 60 mega watts;
- commented that natural gas is at 80 percent, hydro is at 19.5 percent, and coal is at .5 percent;
- noted that there are several hundred miles of high voltage transmission lines;
- spoke to the reasons why a railbelt IRP is needed;
- commented on the power sales contract between MEA and Chugiak Electric;
- spoke to the condition of the transmission system;
- spoke to the need to diversify the field source; and
- reported on repair costs for the top five transmission projects.

Chair Masteller queried the electrical generation at Mount Spurr.

Mr. Griffith

- stated that MEA is highly interested in the electrical generation at Mount Spurr; and
- spoke to the Mount Spurr projects.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- mine mouth power plants;
- the Susitna Hydro capacity fluctuation;
- nuclear power plants;
- the number of people who have died working at various electrical generation plants;
- the reasons why electrical lines are not underground in Alaska;
- the differences between the voltage of a transmission line and other primaries;
- energy conservation;
- distributed generation;
- the need to work together;
- whether electrical generation costs more than electrical transmission;
- the size of the Fairbanks electrical plant;
- that natural gas is possibly the best recourse;
- the cost differences between a natural gas plant and a coal plant;
- the Cook Inlet gas supply and demand;
- liquefied natural gas (LNG);
- who MEA is currently working with to meet future energy needs;
- current MEA developments;
- the Nikiski export permit;

- coal bed methane technology;
- the cost of hydro versus natural gas;
- the best direction to go in regards to energy supply;
- the viability of routing the gas along the rail corridor;
- the best harbor for exporting LNG; and
- whether Lake Chakachamna would have the same sedimentation and silt issues as the Susitna Hydro would.

(The meeting recessed at 7:57 p.m. and reconvened at 8:09 p.m.)

MOTION: Assemblymember Woods moved to suspend the rules and take up discussion item “F”, Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, as the next item of business.

VOTE: The motion passed without objection.

F. Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership Update *(Requested by Administration)*

Ms. Corrine Smith, The Nature Conservancy in Alaska, Mat-Su Basin Program Director, provided an update on the Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership.

Ms. Smith:

- spoke to the Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership’s vision;
- stated that the Susitna River is the fourth largest king salmon fishery in the state of Alaska and the Little Susitna River is the second largest fishery of freshwater silver salmon;
- spoke to how salmon supports Alaska tourism and how it contributes to the local economy;
- spoke to the importance of healthy salmon runs and salmon habitat;
- reported on the history of the Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership;
- noted the current partners of the Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership;
- spoke to the Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership Strategic Action Plan;
- reported on the focal issues for Mat-Su salmon; and
- commented that northern pike have decimated some Mat-Su salmon populations.

Assemblymember Bettine queried what could be done in regards to the northern pike decimating the salmon population.

Ms. Smith:

- stated that the northern pike issue is a difficult one; and
- stated that the Alaska State Department of Fish and Game would be able to speak to that question; and
- opined that northern pike could not be eradicated; however, they could be kept at a low level where they would not be so destructive.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- culvert replacement projects;
- where the northern pike are frequenting;
- whether giving public incentives would help in eliminating the northern pike threat to the salmon;
- highlights of the current projects of the Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership;
- salmon habitat education;
- the salmon watersheds atlas;
- the annual salmon related economic activity;
- incentives for private land owners for the urban creeks that would maintain a protective habitat buffer;
- the cost differences between different types of culverts; and
- whether hydrocarbons and E. coli have a harmful effect on fish.

D. National Heritage Area Designation (*Requested by Administration*)

Ms. Fran Seager-Boss provided a presentation regarding the National Heritage Area Designation.

Ms. Seager-Boss:

- stated that the Borough has been working on the National Heritage Area designation for four years;
- spoke to designated National Heritage Areas in the United States;
- explained what a National Heritage Area is;
- noted that National Heritage Areas are designated by an act of Congress, however, designation does not add any federal land ownership or federal regulation of private property or development;
- spoke to working towards the Glacial Gardens National Heritage Area designation;
- spoke to the Glacial Gardens boundaries;
- commented that Kenai received the National Heritage Area designation for their transportation corridor;
- noted the principles and benefits of National Heritage Areas;
- spoke the assets of heritage areas;
- spoke to potential projects that are funded by National Heritage funding; and
- reported that they are currently working on a feasibility study.

Assemblymember Bettine queried whether the Kenai National Heritage Area encompassed the entire Kenai Borough.

Ms. Seager-Boss advised that the area is comprised of the transportation corridor from Anchorage to Seward.

Commissioner Cheezum queried whether art groups could be included in the process.

Ms. Seager-Boss:

- advised that some art groups have recently been given a presentation regarding the National Heritage Area; and
- noted that the art groups are working with various museums and are excited to become part of the program.

Assemblymember Arvin commended Ms. Seager-Boss on her expertise.

E. Evaluation of Appointments of New Planning Commissioners (*Requested by Assemblymember Houston*)

Assemblymember Houston:

- spoke to the reasons why he requested this topic to be an agenda item;
- stated that the Planning Commission has an interest in the appointment process;
- spoke to the possibility of looking at the process and making some changes;
- spoke to code as it applies to appointments; and
- noted that he would like to open up the discussion.

Assemblymember Ewing:

- spoke to Mayor Colberg wanting to have balance on the Planning Commission;
- noted that so far it has not happened; and
- stated that it is the Mayor's job to move names forward on the vacancy report.

Commissioner Masteller:

- stated that the Planning Commission does not agree that often and has good debates;
- spoke to the importance of having seven commissioners; and
- commented that he hopes that the Assembly can work this issue out.

Commissioner Cheezum:

- encouraged the Assembly to look at certain qualities of applicants;
- noted the importance of having a Planning Commission where everyone does not agree;
- spoke to the need for Planning Commissioners to understand the concept of planning, have future planning in mind, and not so ideologically driven and oppose all ideas of planning; and
- spoke to the need for Planning Commissioners to be able to switch hats from debating what the law should be to their quasi-judicial role.

Assemblymember Houston:

- spoke to Borough code for the appointment and confirmation process of boards, commission applicants, and the Planning Commission membership qualifications;
- noted the need to have an evaluative process for the quasi-judicial process;
- spoke to evaluating candidates and the possibility of having the evaluation take place with a public hearing; and
- spoke to increasing the Planning Commission membership from seven to nine.

Assemblymember Ewing:

- spoke to the need to take a closer look at the applications and resumes to evaluate experience rather than having a public hearing process; and
- stated that he supports increasing the Planning Commission membership to nine if that is what the Planning Commission would like to do.

Discussion ensued regarding:

- the need to have equal representation;
- the need to have gender diversity;
- what having balance means;
- the need for diversity;
- the Alaska Public Offices Commission financial disclosure statement requirements deterring candidates; and
- the need for the Assembly to be willing to compromise.

VII. PLANNING COMMISSION, MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, AND STAFF COMMENTS

Commissioner Johnson spoke to the need for land use legislation to be referred to the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Cheezum:

- spoke to recent earthquakes; and
- spoke to the need for buildings to follow national code.

Commissioner Masteller:

- stated that when talking about large hydro, the economic value of Susitna River or Mat-Su Borough salmon, we should all be thinking about Chakachamna Hydro;
- spoke to the need to look at incentives for private land owners to plan for the future; and
- stated that he would like to see the Subdivision Construction Manual moving forward.

Assemblymember Halter:

- spoke to the need to have a presentation from the Alaska State Department of Natural Resources regarding the Susitna Matanuska Area Plan; and
- opined that there is a better way to generate electricity than generating it with hydro.

Assemblymember Ewing thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.

Assemblymember Colver noted that he enjoyed the Cook Inlet Beluga Whale presentation and Regional Integrated Resource Plan presentation.

Assemblymember Bettine:

- spoke in support of continuing having presentations at joint Assembly/Planning Commission meetings from various organizations;
- noted that the tourism summit is scheduled on April 10, 2010, at the Central Public Safety Building in Wasilla;

- noted that the tourism industry continues to grow and could be doing a lot better;
- spoke to the need to expedite the Subdivision Construction Manual;
- spoke to the proposed fiscal year 2011 budget meeting schedule; and
- spoke in support of having the Borough department's presentations take place in one day.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:44 p.m.



TALIS J. COLBERG, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:



LONNIE R. McKECHNIE, CMC, Borough Clerk

Minutes approved: 04/20/10