MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
WASTEWATER & SEPTAGE ADVISORY BOARD

Mike Campfield, Vice Chair	Archie Giddings	Tom Healy, Chair
Gina Jorgensen	Helen Munoz	Ronald Phillips
Thomas Stoelting		

REVISED AGENDA

REGULAR MEETING — Thursday, September 8, 2016

MSB Assembly Chambers — 2:00 p.m.
350 E. Dahlia Ave
Palmer, AK 99645

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL AND DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

V. AUDIENCE INTRODUCTIONS

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PRECEDING MEETING
   A. July 28, 2016 (regular meeting)

VII. PRESENTATIONS (*Approximately ten minutes per presentation*)
   A. Mr. Ryan Moyers, HDR
      i. Proposed Upgrades to the Palmer Wastewater Treatment Plant

VIII. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*Three minutes per person*)

IX. AGENCY AND STAFF REPORTS
   A. City of Wasilla – Mr. Archie Giddings, P.E., Public Works Director
   B. City of Palmer – Mr. Nate Wallace, City Manager
      and Mr. Chris Nall, Public Works Director
   C. City of Houston – Ms. Gina Jorgenson, City Council Member
   D. Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility – Mr. Mark Corsentino, PM Supervisor
   E. Matanuska-Susitna Borough – Mr. Mike Campfield, P.E., Environmental Engineer
   F. State of Alaska - DEC- Mr. Oran Woolley, Wastewater Engineering Associate

X. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

XI. NEW BUSINESS

XII. INFORMATIONAL HANDOUTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

A. Copy of IM No. 16-155: Request Assembly approval of the loan offer from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Clean Water Fund, loan no. 561041, authorizing the manager to incur debt in the amount not to exceed $5,000,000.00, accept and appropriate the loan proceeds, and set the scope of work and budget for the design, permitting and initial phase of construction of the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility, project no. 25054.

B. Copy of "The Sewer Lady" article from The Frontiersman on 9-7-2016

XIII. COMMENTS FROM THE BOARD

XIV. NEXT MEETINGS

A. November 10, 2016

XV. ADJOURNMENT

I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Wastewater and Septage Advisory Board was held on Thursday, July 28, 2016, at the MSB Assembly Chambers, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 2:02 p.m. Mr. Tom Healy chaired the meeting.

II. ROLL CALL AND DETERMINATION OF A QUOROM

Wastewater and Septage Advisory Board members present and establishing a quorum were:

Mike Campfield, P.E.
Archie Giddings, P.E.
Tom Healy
Helen Munoz
Ronald Phillips
Thomas Stoelting

Wastewater and Septage Advisory Board members absent and excused were:

Gina Jorgensen

Staff and Agency Representatives in attendance were:

Debbie Passmore, Board Administrative Support

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Today's agenda was reviewed by the Board and discussed.

VOTE: No objection and the agenda was approved as amended.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Helen Munoz

V. AUDIENCE INTRODUCTIONS

Eugene Carl Haberman
Kelsey Trimmer
Tom Munoz
Priscilla Gillow, CRW

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PRECEDING MEETING

A. Minutes for the May 4, 2016 meeting were reviewed by the Board.

VOTE: The minutes were approved without objection.

VII. PRESENTATIONS

None

VIII. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (*Three minutes per person)*

Kelsey Trimmer, A-2 Septic

- He has been asked to come to our meetings in the past.

- Can't stress how important it is to get the Septage & Leachate Treatment Facility project started
- It is negligent to ask us to drive and haul to Anchorage
- It is hazardous to drivers
- It is not the way to do business for a Borough of our size
- Urges that this project move forward a quickly as possible
- In light of the recent fund cuts, this is a necessity and not an option. It's something we owe the people of the Borough to have.

Eugene Carl Haberman

- Reported that some of the Board members were at the Palmer meeting
- The notice went out on Monday for the Thursday meeting
- It wasn't on their website but the picnic was
- This is a $5M deal
- There was little or no information
- The press reported that when there is little or no information, it's not right
- There seems to be a debate that the public needs to be heard
- Why have the meeting when people can't hear the Board members
- He said that the minutes should not have been voted on without public comments
- He wanted to make a correction
- He thinks that the public would like to comment on the reports
- The idea of what we have is not good because there is no back and forth with the public
- There should be a dialogue between the public and the Board
- Believes this Board needs to resign
- Mentioned the Boards that he has asked to resign

Tom Munoz, Tom's Septic Service

- Has been hauling to Anchorage for 39 years
- Dumped 14,000,000 gallons last year alone (per the AWWU's inaccurate calculations)
- Lost revenue to the Borough is probably $1.2M in dumping fees.
- The loss should be calculated into the figures for the septage facility that is to be built
- Agrees with Kelsey that hauling to Anchorage has gone on too long. They have hauled millions and millions of gallons of sewage to Anchorage through all types of weather and traffic conditions.
- This is a necessity that we need here. This will not be a major loss like the ferry.
- This facility will pay for itself; the only thing we need to do is to get on the ball and get the facility built.
- The cost of the rates that will be charged will be paid for by raising the rates, just like other company's (city, water, garbage, etc.) rates go up. That's the cost of business; everything has to be paid for.
- We've had no choice in the past; it has to be done for the new guys. It's long, long overdue.
- This is a Borough situation here, not a City of Palmer or City of Wasilla situation.

IX. AGENCY AND STAFF REPORTS

A. City of Wasilla – Mr. Archie Giddings, P.E., Public Works Director
   a. No updates
   b. Has had quite a delay on the soils report; looking that over now
B. City of Palmer – Tom Healy
   a. Chris Nall is the City of Palmer's new Public Works Director. He will be attending some WSAB meetings in the future by I will continue to be Palmer's representative on the WSAB and will continue to give the City of Palmer's reports in the future.
   b. The City of Palmer has completed the update of the facility plan.
   c. They are in the process of getting the funding in line now.
   d. HDR did the update; they were given the contract to provide the design of the new plant
   e. The new plant will move away from the lagoon system to a MBBR which will provide a necessary level of treatment.
   f. There is a tight schedule to make the improvements
   g. There is a resolution before the City Council to put on the ballot a Voter Authorization for up to $5M in bond authority to provide a portion of the funding for the improvements (along with a combination of loans and grants).
   h. That will be a ballot issue in the fall.
   i. Estimated cost for Phase 1 of this is approximately $12-15M.
   j. Major improvement for basic infrastructure and facilities.
C. AWWU, Debbie Passmore read an email from Mark Corsentino
D. MSB, Mike Campfield
   a. CP Department is working with the PW Department to bring to the Assembly on August 16 to accept and appropriate the $5M grant from the DEC
   b. If that gets approved by the Assembly, we'll get the project started.
   c. Debbie Passmore will send out a reminder to the Board when the legislation will go to the Assembly so Board members can attend the meeting and show their support.

XI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

XII. NEW BUSINESS

None

XIII. INFORMATIONAL HANDOUTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

A.

XIV. COMMENTS FROM THE BOARD

Helen Munoz

- (talked quite a bit without her microphone on)
- In 1981, this was on the ballot along with the pools at the high schools to be built; the pools passed
- Here she is still fighting for the same thing

- Had a Palmer Assembly person say to her "Well, you don't live in the City." Helen said, "Not everybody wants to live in the City. Only about 15% of the population are on City of Palmer or City of Wasilla sewer. The rest are on septic tanks or outhouses."

Archie Giddings

- Clarified the comment about this being the number one priority in Juneau. Actually, the number one priority was getting funding for this project. Obviously there's no money in Juneau. It seems that the Borough is recognizing that.

Tom Stoelting

- Would like to see this move a lot faster. It's time!
- They can come up with fire stations and schools but not this?
- If AWWU with their upgrades cuts off the Boniface at Turpin station, then what will we do?
- If they make us haul all the way to King Street in South Anchorage, can you imagine what we're going to have to charge to make that up?

Ron Phillips

- We need to get this under way.

Mike Campfield

- No comments

Tom Healy

- Pretty clear consensus here in terms of what needs to happen. The Board has taken action to support moving this forward.
- Thinks contacting our politicians to let them know of our support is appropriate at this time.

Helen Munoz

- There's a Borough meeting on August 2. It would be nice to see others in this room at that meeting, too.

XV. NEXT WSAB MEETINGS

A. Thursday, September 8, 2016, at 2:00 p.m. in the MSB Assembly Chambers
B. Thursday, November 10, 2016, at 2:00 p.m. in the MSB Assembly Chambers

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business at hand, the meeting was adjourned by Tom Healy at 2:35p.m.

_____
Mr. Tom Healy, Chair

ATTEST:

Debbie Passmore, Board Administrative Support

	ADOPTED	AMENDED	POSTPONED	DEFEATED

VII. SPECIAL ORDERS

A. PERSONS TO BE HEARD (MSB 2.12.081; Three Minutes Per Person.)
(Requires 11 Days Advance Notice And Must Otherwise Be In Compliance With The Necessary Code Requirements. If No Advance Notice Is Given, Persons Wishing To Speak May Do So Under The Audience Participation Section Of The Agenda.)

B. PUBLIC HEARINGS (Three Minutes Per Person.)

pp. 86-89
Beck

1. **Ordinance Serial No. 16-103:** An Ordinance Accepting $13,140 From The Insurance Proceeds Account, Fund 100, To Allow For The Replacement Of An Emergency Medical Services Vehicle That Was Destroyed In A Collision. ✓
   a. IM No. 16-140 no obj

pp. 90-93
Beck

2. **Ordinance Serial No. 16-104:** An Ordinance Accepting And Appropriating $13,755.67 From The Alaska State Division Of Homeland Security And Emergency Management For The Borough Local Emergency Planning Committee, Fund 480, Project No. 20259, For Fiscal Year 2017 Operations. ✓

pp. 94-95

   a. **Resolution Serial No. 16-071:** A Resolution Approving The Scope Of Work And Budget For The Alaska State Division Of Homeland Security And Emergency Management Grant, Project No. 20259, Fund 480, For The Borough Local Emergency Planning Committee.
      (1) IM No. 16-144 no obj

pp. 96-109
Beck

3. **Ordinance Serial No. 16-106:** An Ordinance Approving The Loan Offer From The Alaska State Department Of Environmental Conservation, Clean Water Fund, Loan No. 561041; And Authorizing The Manager To Incur Debt In The Amount Not To Exceed $5,000,000, Accept And Appropriate The Loan Proceeds To The Septage And Leachate Treatment And Disposal Facility, Fund 415, Project No. 25054 For The Design, Permitting, And Initial Phase Of Construction Of The Septage And Leachate Treatment And Disposal Facility. ✓

pp. 110-112

   a. **Resolution Serial No. 16-072:** A Resolution Approving The Scope Of Work And Budget For The Design, Permitting And Initial Phase Of Construction Of The Septage And Leachate Treatment And Disposal Facility.
      (1) IM No. 16-155 no obj

pp. 113-121
Mayfield

4. **Ordinance Serial No. 16-107:** An Ordinance Amending MSB 5.25.145, To Annex Property In The Brazil Circle Area Into The West Lakes Fire Service Area No. 136. ✓

pp. 122-123

   a. **Resolution Serial No. 16-073:** A Resolution Finding The Annexation Of Properties In The Brazil Circle Area Into The West Lakes Fire Service Area No. 136 Serves The

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH INFORMATION MEMORANDUM **IM No. 16-155**

SUBJECT: Request Assembly approval of the loan offer from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Clean Water Fund, loan no. 561041, authorizing the manager to incur debt in the amount not to exceed $5,000,000.00, accept and appropriate the loan proceeds, and set the scope of work and budget for the design, permitting and initial phase of construction of the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility, project no. 25054.

AGENDA OF: August ~~16~~ 17, 2016

ASSEMBLY ACTION:

MANAGER RECOMMENDATION: Introduce and set for public hearing.

APPROVED BY JOHN MOOSEY, BOROUGH MANAGER: _____

Route To:	Department/Individual	Initials	Remarks
	Originator		
	Capital Projects Director		
	Public Works Director		
	Finance Director		
	Borough Attorney		
	Borough Clerk		

ATTACHMENT(S): Fiscal Note: YES __x__ NO _____
Ordinance Serial No. 16-___ (___ pp)
Resolution Serial No. 16-__
Loan Offer Letter (1 pg)
Assembly Resolution 14-110 (4 pp)

SUMMARY STATEMENT: Resolution No. 14-110 was adopted by the Assembly on November 19, 2014, which authorized the Manager to apply for loan funds through the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Alaska Clean Water Fund to construct a new septage and leachate facility.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough was notified by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation on July 7, 2015, that a loan request was approved in the amount not to exceed $5,000,000.00 for the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility, Project 25054, fund 415, to be repaid from the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund.

The attached ordinance and resolution, if approved, will accept and appropriate the loan funds to allow for the design, permitting and initial phase of construction of the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility, and identify the scope of work and budget for future construction.

The total project cost is expected to be approximately $19,000,000.00. Additional construction funding will be obtained in the future as the design develops and more refined cost estimates emerge.

RECOMMENDATION OF ADMINISTRATION: Request Assembly approval of the loan offer from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Clean Water Fund, loan no. 561041, authorizing the manager to incur debt in the amount not to exceed $5,000,000.00, accept and appropriate the loan proceeds, and set the scope of work and budget for the design, permitting and initial phase of construction of the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility, project no. 25054.

Action:

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
RESOLUTION SERIAL NO. 16-___

A RESOLUTION OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH ASSEMBLY APPROVING THE SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET FOR THE DESIGN, PERMITTING AND INITIAL PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION OF THE SEPTAGE & LEACHATE TREATMENT AND DISPOSAL FACILITY.

WHEREAS, design and construction of a septage and leachate treatment and disposal facility is a top priority of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) for the 2015 legislative session, as identified in Assembly Resolution 14-084 dated August 26, 2014; and

WHEREAS, in Resolution No. 14-110 dated November 19, 2014 the Assembly authorized the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Manager to apply for loan funds in the amount of $22,000,000 from the Alaska State Department of Environmental Conservation, Alaska Clean Water Loan Fund to be repaid with revenues from the Central Landfill enterprise fund and septage tipping fees; and

WHEREAS, the MSB Wastewater and Septage Advisory Board Resolution No. 15-02, dated April 14, 2015, supported the designation of the Central Landfill as the site for a new septage and leachate treatment facility; and

WHEREAS, the MSB Planning Commission Resolution No. 15-21 dated May 4, 2015, supported the designation of the Central Landfill as the site for a new septage and leachate treatment

facility; and

WHEREAS, the MSB Assembly Resolution No. 15-060 identified the Central Landfill as the site for a new septage and leachate treatment facility; and

WHEREAS, the next phase of the project is design and permitting of the proposed facility; and

WHEREAS, on July 7, 2015, the MSB received an offer of loan funds from the Alaska Clean Water Loan Fund in the amount of $5,000,000 for a septage and leachate facility; and

WHEREAS, Ordinance No. 16-___ authorized the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to accept the loan offer and incur debt in the amount not to exceed $5,000,000 from the Department of Environmental Conservation, Clean Water Fund; and

WHEREAS, approval and acceptance of the loan offer will allow for advancement of this project.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly hereby approves the following scope of work and budget for the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility.

SCOPE OF WORK

Design, permitting and initial phase of construction of the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility.

BUDGET

Alaska State Department of Environmental Conservation, Clean Water Fund	$5,000,000
Total	**$5,000,000**

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly this - day of -, 2016.

VERN HALTER, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:

LONNIE R. McKECHNIE, CMC, Borough Clerk

(SEAL)

NON-CODE ORDINANCE

Sponsored By:
Introduced:
Public Hearing:
Adopted:

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
ORDINANCE SERIAL NO. 16-_____

AN ORDINANCE OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH ASSEMBLY APPROVING THE LOAN OFFER FROM THE ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION, CLEAN WATER FUND, LOAN NO. 561041, AND AUTHORIZING THE MANAGER TO INCUR DEBT IN THE AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED $5,000,000, ACCEPT AND APPROPRIATE THE LOAN PROCEEDS TO THE SEPTAGE & LEACHATE TREATMENT AND DISPOSAL FACILITY, FUND 415, PROJECT 25054 FOR THE DESIGN, PERMITTING AND INITIAL PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION OF THE SEPTAGE & LEACHATE TREATMENT AND DISPOSAL FACILITY.

WHEREAS, design and construction of a septage and leachate treatment and disposal facility is a top priority of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) for the 2015 legislative session, as identified in Assembly Resolution 14-084 dated August 26, 2014; and

WHEREAS, in Resolution No. 14-110 dated November 19, 2014 the Assembly authorized the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Manager to apply for loan funds in the amount of $22,000,000 from the Alaska State Department of Environmental Conservation, Alaska Clean Water Loan Fund to be repaid with revenues from the Central Landfill enterprise fund; and

WHEREAS, the MSB Wastewater and Septage Advisory Board Resolution No. 15-02, dated April 14, 2015, supported the

designation of the Central Landfill as the site for a new septage and leachate treatment facility; and

WHEREAS, the MSB Planning Commission Resolution No. 15-21 dated May 4, 2015, supported the designation of the Central Landfill as the site for a new septage and leachate treatment facility; and

WHEREAS, the MSB Assembly Resolution No. 15-060 identified the Central Landfill as the site for a new septage and leachate treatment facility; and

WHEREAS, the next phase of the project is design and permitting of the proposed facility; and

WHEREAS, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) was notified on July 7, 2015 by the Alaska State Department of Environmental Conservation, Clean Water Fund that loan funds were approved in the amount not to exceed $5,000,000.00 for the design, permitting and initial construction of the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility; and

WHEREAS, the MSB Solid Waste Division currently operates the Central Landfill under an Alaska State Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) permit; and

WHEREAS, the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund will repay the principle amount and the finance charges at a rate of 1.5%, calculated and provided on a 20-year amortization schedule,

provided by the State ADEC loan officer and agreed to by the Borough; and

WHEREAS, repayment begins one year after date of reported project completion by the MSB; and

WHEREAS, the MSB must pass an ordinance authorizing the Manager to enter into a loan agreement with the State of Alaska to incur the debt on behalf of the Borough;

WHEREAS, since the loan is being repaid by the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund, the funds are being appropriated to that fund; and

WHEREAS, the Assembly must pass an ordinance accepting and appropriating the Clean Water Fund Loan 561041 funds in the amount of $5,000,000 prior to the expenditure of said funds.

BE IT ENACTED:

Section 1. Classification. This Ordinance is a non-code ordinance.

Section 2. Authorization to Incur Indebtedness. For the purpose of providing funds required to pay the costs of design, permitting and the initial phase of construction of the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility, and to pay all costs incidental thereto, the Assembly hereby authorizes indebtedness in the principle the amount not to exceed Five Million Dollars

($5,000,000) and authorizes the Manager to enter into a loan agreement with the State of Alaska.

Section 3. Appropriation source. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly hereby appropriates the loan proceeds in the amount of $5,000,000 from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Clean Water Fund, Loan No. 561041 to the Septage & Leachate Treatment Facility Preliminary Engineering - FY17, fund 415, project no. 25054, for design, permitting and initial phase of construction of the Septage & Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility.

Section 4. Designation, Principle Loan, Interest Rates, and Other Details of the Loan. The loan shall be designated "Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Septage and Leachate Treatment Facility." The principle loan amount shall not exceed the amount of Five Million Dollars ($5,000,000). The Solid Waste Enterprise Net Asset Fund will pay a finance charge of **1.5%** percent on each disbursement received from the State of Alaska. The loan amount will be paid back within **21** years following the completion of the Septage and Leachate Treatment and Disposal Facility. Repayment of the loan will be made with either equal annual principle payments plus the finance charge or equal annual total payments plus finance charge. The first loan payment will be

due one year following project completion. The final loan payment will be no later than 20 years after the first payment. The MSB will separately account for all monies received from the Alaska Clean Water Fund and will maintain project accounts in accordance with generally accepted governmental accounting principles.

Section 5. Debt Instrument. A loan from the Alaska State Department of Environmental Conservation, Alaska Clean Water Fund Agreement.

Section 6. Execution. This loan shall be executed in the name of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough by the manual signature of the manager, and notarized by a Notary Public, State of Alaska.

Section 7. Payment of Principle and Interest. The loan shall be payable in lawful money of the United States of America which at the time of payment is legal tender for the payment of public and private debt. The payment of principle and interest thereon shall be made to the State of Alaska as provided in the Alaska Clean Water Fund Agreement, ADEC Loan Number 561041, Septage and Leachate Treatment Facility. The Solid Waste Enterprise Fund will repay the principle amount and the finance charges on a 20-year amortization schedule provided by the State ADEC loan officer and agreed to by the MSB.

Section 8. Security for loan. The manager may only pledge

either revenues from the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund or funds subject to annual appropriations as security for the loan. Neither the full faith and credit nor the taxing power of the Borough may be pledged to the payment.

Section 9. Effective date. This ordinance shall take effect upon adoption by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly.

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly this __ day of _____, 2016.

_____
VERN HALTER, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:

_____
LONNIE R. McKECHNIE, CMC, Borough Clerk

(SEAL)

FEATURED

'The Sewer Lady'

At 85, fiery Munoz won't rest until she sees a Valley-wide sewage system

By Matt Hickman Frontiersman.com 5 hrs ago 2

Helen Munoz watches Gov. Bill Walker speak at the Alaska State Fair last Wednesday. (MATT HICKMAN/Frontiersman)

PALMER — Once upon a time, Helen Munoz stood at 4-foot-10. She says she doesn't stand quite so tall anymore, but don't tell that to the countless politicians and businesspeople who've stood in her way in the 44 years she's lived up on Lazy Mountain.

With a scowl and stare that could singe right through a man with twice her size and supposed expertise, Munoz balances her intensity with a sardonic, self-effacing wit that's helped her remain vital and engaged with the big issues facing her community well into her 80s.

Still living on her 80 acres, which include a bed and breakfast and a garage, her causes over the years have included better hospice care in the Valley and AIDS awareness and financial literacy in the school system. But her raison d'etre has been the same since the day she and her husband Larry arrived 44 years ago and opened their business A1 Cesspools: seeing the implementation of a sewer system in the Mat-Su Borough outside of Wasilla and Palmer proper.

"I've lived too long and I haven't shut up and I ain't dying until it's done," Munoz said. "It better get done."

The next month figures to be an important one in the progress of her cause. Starting with last night's meeting, the Mat-Su Borough Assembly is hearing testimony on the need for and viability of a borough-wide sewer system, which ultimately would take an estimated $22 million to get off the ground.

On Oct. 4, voters in Palmer will get a chance to have their say on a citywide proposition that would allow the city to spend $5 million on improving its wastewater system, and last week, Alaska Gov. Bill Walker phoned Muñoz to get her thoughts on the matter.

Munoz said she heard she was referred to by the governor as "The Sewer Lady," a moniker she wears proudly.

"I get a kick out of it," she said. "A lot of women my age would be insulted, but I consider it a compliment. It shows I'm not sitting on my duff doing nothing, and (this cause) ain't for me, so I don't think I'm going to give up till I draw my last breath."

Walker, for his part, found the 85-year-old most refreshing.

"I love people with passion and she has a lot of passion on that issue," Walker said. "It's in the works to get a facility in the Valley... It doesn't happen in a year, but we're on the right track to getting it resolved."

Munoz first came to Alaska in 1965, six years after her brother Bill moved to the Valley from the family home in Armonk, N.Y.

Making the trip out once a year to see Bill, Helen and Larry finally decided it would be cheaper to simply make their next drive their last, moving to Palmer in 1972 and acquiring land up on Lazy Mountain shortly thereafter.

Helen's mother died in 1968, prompting the Munozes to decide it would be simpler and cheaper to move, once and for all, to the Last Frontier.

Larry worked the pump truck for A-1 Cesspool septic service and Helen handled the office affairs and bookkeeping.

That was until 1992 when the two divorced. Larry, Helen said, had fallen in love with a mutual friend of theirs whose husband had just died, prompting a deep sympathetic relationship between them.

"I saw him stand at this door and cry the day he left. I didn't kick him out. He lived here a month after the divorce," Helen recalled, sitting in her kitchen. "I'd known him since I was 11 and he was awfully good to my mom — he carried her downstairs the night before she died... so I can't hate him."

Single again at age 62, Helen didn't see herself marrying again.

"I don't look like a swan, but swans mate once in a lifetime," she said. "Maybe it's a selfish way of looking at it, but when you're 62 and get a divorce, one person is going to end up looking after the other."

She put that energy into opening a bed and breakfast, a successful venture that occupied much of her time until a few years later when her son Steven, who had moved out to Los Angeles to become an agent, died from AIDS. That loss, coupled with the loss of another of her four sons, this one having died of prostate cancer, turned her attention toward improving Hospice care in the Valley, as well as becoming an advocate for AIDS awareness in schools.

"Back in 1995 Steven looked across the room at me and said, 'hey Ma, you got a big mouth, go back to Palmer and talk to the kids in schools about AIDS," Helen recalled. "I didn't answer him right away... but his answer was, 'if you can reach one kid, it's worth the effort.' So I came back to Palmer, talked to the (superintendent) and went into every school."

Finding success on both fronts, Helen turned her attention back to the issue that, left unattended, she believed would one day degenerate into a catastrophe for the Mat-Su Valley.

"In Anchorage, there's no room to expand — that's why it's growing out here and so why can't we take care of our own s—t, literally," Muñoz said. "If you're hauling septic from Talkeetna that's 200 miles, round-trip. And now you can't dig clams down in the clam gulch anymore. When I first got here you could eat them, you can't now. They tell me it's red tide. That's a bunch of B.S."

Munoz believes the biggest barriers to a borough-wide sewer has been short-sighted politicians and misusing resources when they do become available.

"With that $5 million (should the Oct. 4 proposition pass), if I see them do one more study without putting something in the ground... you know what? I don't have too much respect for engineers. I've seen more money spent on studies to paper the inside of this house and nothing is produced," she said. "How much clean water is left on this planet? I could care less whether there's water on Mars; there's not much clean water here and we don't know what to do with sewer?"

(2) comments

kniknorth Sep 7, 2016 9:59am

Helen, God bless you and thank you so much for continuing your productive and necessary quest.

Report + Add Reply

Valley Kid Sep 7, 2016 9:54am

Yup, we need to take care of our own . I agree with her that some engineer is going to get paid big bucks to "study" something... You'd think they could save a million buck by having MSB staff or the AK DEC do some basic research, and copy a successful, pre-existing, cold climate water treatment facility... but no, I anticipate we will have some "unique" issues that require special engineering to solve.

Report + Add Reply

From the front page of the Frontiersman newspaper, September 7, 2016
Page 5