

SUBJECT: INFORMING THE ASSEMBLY OF THE MANAGER'S SIGNATURE ON A GRANT APPLICATION FOR SUBMISSION TO THE RASMUSON FOUNDATION FOR THE MATANUSKA RIVER PARK AND CAMPGROUND.

AGENDA OF: April 21, 2026

ASSEMBLY ACTION:

Presented to the Assembly 04/21/26 - EMW

AGENDA ACTION REQUESTED: For information only.

Route To	Signatures
Originator	4 / 8 / 2 0 2 6 X A n d r e w M e r g e n s S i g n e d b y : A n d r e w M e r g e n s
Community Development Director	4 / 8 / 2 0 2 6 X J i l l i a n M o r r i s s e y S i g n e d b y : J i l l i a n M o r r i s s e y
Finance Director	 R e c o v e r a b l e S i g n a t u r e X C h e y e n n e H e i n d e l S i g n e d b y : C h e y e n n e H e i n d e l
Borough Attorney	4 / 9 / 2 0 2 6 X N i c h o l a s S p i r o p o u l o s S i g n e d b y : N i c h o l a s S p i r o p o u l o s
Borough Manager	4 / 9 / 2 0 2 6 X M i c h a e l B r o w n S i g n e d b y : M i k e B r o w n
Borough Clerk	4 / 1 0 / 2 0 2 6 X L o n n i e M c K e . . . S i g n e d b y : L o n n i e M c K e h n i e

ATTACHMENT (S): Grant application (5 pp)

SUMMARY STATEMENT: The Community Development Department is seeking grant funding for critical utility upgrades and targeted development at the Matanuska River Park & Campground. Proposed improvements include replacing and modernizing aging electric and water systems to enhance safety, reliability, and long-term operational capacity for park users. The project will also establish the park as a recognizable Alaska Long Trail gateway through coordinated milepost design, wayfinding, and interpretive elements, while supporting local economic development through high-quality outdoor recreation. Matanuska River Park and Campground experienced an 84 percent increase in reservations last

year, and this grant will support much-needed continued improvements to maximize use, enhance visitor experience, and increase the Borough's return on investment.



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Community Development Department

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Matanuska River Park & Campground - Alaska Long Trail Gateway Development

Project Budget Contact Information

Jillian Morrissey, Community Development Director
(907) 861-8634
Jillian.Morrissey@matsu.gov

Project Budget

Budget Item	Amount	Funding Status	Notes
Mat-Su Borough Assembly Appropriation	\$250,000	Secured	Primary local match and project backbone
Active Forestry Management (Safe Glidepath)	\$25,000	Secured	Aviation and public safety
Aviation-Themed Universal Play Equipment	\$100,000	Pending	Inclusive, destination-level play feature. Funding request: Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation
Electric & Water Infrastructure (equipment, construction & installation)	\$200,000	Pending	Core utility upgrades to support site use Funding request: Rasmuson
Alaska Long Trail Gateway Milepost (design & installation)	\$100,000	Pending	Gateway identity, wayfinding, and interpretation Funding request: Rasmuson
Total Secured Funding	\$275,000	Secured	
Total Pending Funding	\$400,000	Pending	
Total Project Budget	\$675,000		

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Project Director

Jillian Morrissey is the Community Development Director for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (Borough), where she provides executive leadership for land and resource management, economic development, and parks, recreation and libraries. She oversees more than 100 staff and manages an annual departmental budget of approximately \$11 million. Her role integrates land stewardship, public access, recreation planning, infrastructure investment, and community engagement, all key elements of the *Matanuska River Park & Campground - Alaska Long Trail Gateway Development* project.

Ms. Morrissey has led planning and coordination efforts supporting improvements at recreational areas across Alaska and the Borough, working with tribal, local, regional, state and federal partners to align project investments with Borough priorities, accessibility, safety, and long-term operational sustainability. She brings more than 20 years of experience in public service and leadership, including prior roles as Executive Director of Alaska Trails and Chief Communications Officer for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. Ms. Morrissey holds a Master of Science in Environmental Education and has extensive experience administering grants, ensuring compliance, and establishing long-term management frameworks that support public access and stewardship.

Project Scope

The *Matanuska River Park & Campground - Alaska Long Trail Gateway Development* project will advance priority infrastructure, access, and wayfinding improvements to establish the park as a highly visible, functional, and welcoming gateway to the Alaska Long Trail (AKLT). Located in the heart of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, Matanuska River Park & Campground is uniquely positioned to serve both neighborhood residents and regional visitors accessing the AKLT corridor.

Project scope includes modernization of aging utility infrastructure, particularly electrical and water upgrades, to improve safety, reliability, and capacity for public use, as well as the installation of visible gateway elements and milepost features that clearly identify the park as a key AKLT access point. Improvements will enhance visitor experience, strengthen trail connectivity, and support safe access to recreation, camping, and play amenities within an urban setting. The project builds on recent interagency coordination and regional planning momentum, including the Alaska Long Trail Reconnaissance Evaluation Study, which identified the park as a strategic hub for gateway development.

Project Goals

The primary goals of the project are to improve public health and safety, strengthen regional trail connectivity, and enhance the usability and visibility of Matanuska River Park & Campground as a multi-use recreational destination. Specifically, the project aims to:

- Replace and modernize critical utility infrastructure to improve safety, reliability, and long-term operational capacity for park users
- Establish the park as a recognizable Alaska Long Trail gateway through milepost design, wayfinding, and interpretive elements

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- Improve equitable access to outdoor recreation, including pedestrian- and bike-friendly access within the city of Palmer
- Support community well-being, tourism, and stewardship by creating a welcoming, functional nexus for local residents and long-distance trail users alike.

Staffing and Operations

The Borough will oversee project implementation and long-term stewardship through its Community Development Department, in close coordination with the Borough's operational Parks, Recreation and Libraries Division. The Parks team currently caretakes and stewards Matanuska River Park & Campground and will continue to provide day-to-day operations, maintenance, and visitor services following project completion.

This existing staffing structure ensures that improvements are integrated into established maintenance and operations systems, supporting long-term sustainability without the need for new permanent staffing. The Borough's Project Management, Finance, and Purchasing teams will support procurement, construction oversight, and compliance, ensuring the project is delivered efficiently and in alignment with Borough policies and funding requirements.

Project Reach and Community Impact

Matanuska River Park & Campground serves approximately 60,000 visits annually, functioning both as a neighborhood park for Palmer residents and as a destination for regional, statewide, and out-of-state visitors. Visitor data from the past year reflects use by individuals representing more than 20 countries of origin, underscoring the park's role as a welcoming, internationally accessed recreation space.

The park and campground are pedestrian- and bike-friendly, making them uniquely accessible to residents without vehicle access. Its central location places it at the heart of the Borough community and positions the park as a natural gathering place for recreation, natural and cultural history, and outdoor activity.

As a designated Alaska Long Trail Gateway Milepost, the park functions as a critical nexus for trail users, providing visible access, orientation, and services for long-distance travelers while also enhancing daily use by local residents. By strengthening infrastructure and gateway identity, the project will amplify the park's role in connecting people to nature, promoting health and wellness, and reinforcing the Borough's identity as a hub for outdoor recreation and natural beauty.

Project Timeline

Spring 2026

- Procure electrical equipment and related materials

Summer 2026

- Begin installation of new electric pedestals and water lines
- Install required conduit, piping and system connectivity
- Publish RFP for artist to design the Alaska Long Trail (AKLT) Gateway Milepost

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Fall 2026

- Complete electrical installation and site restoration
- Award RFP for AKLT Gateway Milepost artist

Spring 2027

- Install AKLT Gateway Milepost

Fundraising Plan

The Borough is pursuing a phased and diversified fundraising strategy for the *Matanuska River Park & Campground - Alaska Long Trail Gateway Development*, leveraging secured local investment to attract additional public and philanthropic support.

To date, the Borough has secured \$275,000 toward the total \$675,000 project budget. This includes a \$250,000 appropriation from the Borough Assembly, demonstrating strong local commitment and serving as the primary financial backbone of the project, as well as \$25,000 from the City of Palmer Airport for active forestry management to support aviation safety. These early investments position the project for successful implementation and strengthen its competitiveness for external funding.

The remaining \$400,000 is being sought through targeted fundraising efforts aligned with distinct project components. Pending funds include \$200,000 for electric and water infrastructure upgrades, which are essential to improving safety, reliability, and long-term operational capacity at the park. An additional \$100,000 is being pursued for aviation-themed, universally accessible play equipment, expanding inclusive recreation opportunities and enhancing the park's role as a family-friendly destination. The final \$100,000 will support the design and installation of the Alaska Long Trail Gateway Milepost, a highly visible element that establishes the park as a regional trail nexus and strengthens visitor orientation and identity.

Financial Statements

The Borough publishes their audited financial statements online [here](https://transparency.matsugov.us/pages/acfr). Or this link can be copied and pasted into a URL: <https://transparency.matsugov.us/pages/acfr>. The document will also be included as a separate attachment.

Operational Pro Forma and Long-term Sustainability

Matanuska River Park & Campground is an established, Borough-owned facility with a proven operational model and demonstrated long-term sustainability. The park is operated and maintained by the Borough's Parks and Recreation team, which provides routine maintenance, utilities management, visitor services, and capital lifecycle planning as part of its annual operating program. No new permanent staffing is required as a result of this project; operations will be absorbed within existing departmental capacity and approved budgets.

In recent years, the park has experienced its highest attendance in more than 35 years, a trend directly attributable to the Borough's transition to an online reservation system for campground and facility use. The

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shift to online reservations has significantly improved ease of use for patrons, streamlined staff workload, reduced administrative burden, and increased occupancy and visitation. This system also supports data-driven management and allows the Borough to engage in targeted outreach and advertising to encourage return visits, improving long-term utilization and revenue stability while enhancing visitor experience.

Operational funding for the park is supported through a combination of user fees, campground revenues, and annual Borough appropriations. The Borough Assembly has approved the operational budget for the Parks team each year, reflecting sustained policy commitment to maintaining high-quality parks and recreational facilities and advancing the Borough's vision of being the best place in Alaska to live, work, and play. This consistent budgetary support ensures that routine maintenance, utilities, and staffing needs are met and that capital investments are protected over time.

The proposed infrastructure improvements, particularly electrical and utility upgrades, will further strengthen operational sustainability by reducing maintenance risk, improving reliability, and increasing capacity to meet current and future demand. Modernized systems will lower the likelihood of service disruptions, reduce emergency repair costs, and support safe, efficient operations during peak visitation periods. Gateway improvements associated with the Alaska Long Trail will enhance wayfinding and orientation without adding significant ongoing operational costs.

Together, strong attendance growth, modern reservation and management systems, dedicated operational staffing, and consistent Assembly-approved funding create a stable and resilient operational foundation. These factors ensure that the Matanuska River Park & Campground — Alaska Long Trail Gateway Development will be sustainably operated and maintained for the long term, maximizing public benefit and safeguarding the investment made through this project.