

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

350 East Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska 99645 - 907-861-8683

BOROUGH MAYOR
Vern Halter

BOROUGH CLERK
Lonnie R. McKechnie, CMC

BOROUGH MANAGER
John Moosey

BOROUGH ATTORNEY
Nicholas Spiropoulos



BOROUGH ASSEMBLY
Jim Sykes, District 1
Matthew Beck, District 2
George McKee, District 3
Ted Leonard, District 4
Dan Mayfield, District 5
Barbara J. Doty, District 6
Randall Kowalke, District 7

MEETING MINUTES

ASSEMBLY CHAMBERS
350 EAST DAHLIA AVENUE, PALMER

ASSEMBLY SPECIAL MEETING

6:00 PM

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2017

Joint Assembly/School Board

I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on Tuesday, September 12, 2017, at the Borough Assembly Chambers, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m. by Mayor Vern Halter.

II. ASSEMBLY ROLL CALL

Present 4 - Assemblymember Jim Sykes, Assemblymember George McKee, Assemblymember Steve Colligan, and Assemblymember Randall Kowalke

Excused 2 - Assemblymember Dan Mayfield and Assemblymember Barbara J. Doty

Telephonic 1 - Assemblymember Matthew Beck

SCHOOL BOARD ROLL CALL

School Board Member Ray Michaelson, School Board Member Yvonne Ruth, School Board President Donna Dearman, School Board Member Deborah Retherford, School Board Member Sarah Welton, School Board Member Ole Larson, and School Board Member Kelsey Trimmer.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved as presented without objection.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The pledge of allegiance was led by Mr. Mike Brown, School District Executive Director of Information Technology.

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Assemblymember Sykes expressed condolences to the Flores and Quakenbush family over the loss of their children. Recognized Borough Emergency Services for their quick response to this tragedy.

Mayor Halter stated that this is the worst incident that has occurred in the Borough since he has been Mayor. Expressed his condolences to the family.

The following person spoke to Mat-Su Education Association (MSEA) members having concerns with the School District managing their health insurance: Mr. Tim Walters, MSEA President.

The following person spoke to the need for less government involvement in citizen's private lives: Ms. Amy Henry.

The following person spoke to concerns over a teacher who was fired from Academy Charter and in opposition to the monument placed at Academy Charter for David Grunwald: Dr. Joseph Hawkins.

VI. JOINT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Building Construction Progress And Review Capital Construction Plan (Required By MSB 2.12.075)

Mr. Jude Bilafer, Capital Projects Director, reported on building construction progress and the capital construction plan.

B. Health Care Benefits Consolidation/Coordination For The Matanuska-Susitna Borough And The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (Requested by Assemblymember Doty)

Ms. Sonya Conant, Borough Human Resources Director, reported on the Borough's employee health insurance program.

Ms. Katherine Gardner, Human Resources Director, reported on the School District's health insurance.

C. Sales Tax Committee Report Update (Requested by Mayor Halter)

Mr. Moosey provided an update regarding the status of the Sales Tax Committee.

VII. MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, AND STAFF COMMENT

School Board Member Larson stated that he is hopeful that the Assembly will attend the school tour on September 26th. Spoke to how increased class sizes impact students. Spoke to the need to ensure kids are educated so that they do not end up in the legal system.

School Board Member Retherford spoke to her personal experience as a student in the School District. Opined that things are done much better now. Spoke to kids who slipped through the cracks in the past, which does not occur any longer. Noted that now, teachers work to ensure that all kids are educated and that their families are supported. Noted her pride in the District's graduation rate. Stated that teachers are providing more education with less funds. Opined that activity fees are shockingly high. Stated that she hopes the Assembly is able to join the school tour on the 26th.

School Board Member Ruth stated that she is looking forward to reviewing the school's financial operations.

School Board Member Michaelson stated that he is looking forward to the school financial operations review. Noted the importance of being responsible with public funds. Spoke to the need for the sales tax committee to be balanced. Thanked Assemblymember Colligan for his service on the Assembly.

School Board Member Welton thanked staff for the informative health care reports. Stated that she appreciated the construction update. Opined that student anxiety is due to large class sizes. Further opined that teachers are coping as well as can be expected with large classes. Spoke to differences in education in the past to the present. Spoke to her public school education. Spoke to the need for education options. Stated that teaching methods are ever changing. Noted that kids with a positive high school experience do better in college. Thanked the body for the meeting.

School Board Member Trimmer stated that he is looking forward to results of the school financial operations review. Stated that the School District has already done a lot of trimming, which resulted in the loss of some administration positions. Noted that he is in favor of any improvement that may result from the review. Stated that he hears all the comments about test scores, and that it is a cause for concern, but opined that test scores do not reflect an accurate picture of the District. Related that there are kids who went through the School District who are succeeding professionally. Spoke to the ways that kids are honored for achievements at school. Noted the importance of remembering that teachers are doing a good job.

President Dearman thanked the Assembly for the meeting. Spoke in support of the school financial operations review. Stated that she is looking forward to the results. Spoke to her appreciation of the presentations provided this evening. Noted ways the School District has looked at cutting health care costs. Noted the frustration the District is dealing with, due to the lack of response to the health care information that has been requested. Stated that she is hopeful that the Assembly will join the September 26th school tour. Thanked Assemblymember Colligan for his service and wished him good luck. Thanked the body for the meeting.

Assemblymember Colligan stated that he is pleased with engaging discussion that occurred this evening. Opined the Borough has the best school district in the state, but there is always room for improvement. Spoke to concerns with the drug epidemic and how it impacts students. Shared a story about a visit to a village school to talk to kids about opportunities. Stated that he asked kids what is the most important thing you learn in school. Related that a young lady answered that the most important thing you learn is how to learn, so that when you are out of school you can continue to learn. Noted the need to work together on health insurance issue. Opined that education is ever evolving. Stated his appreciation of the questions that have been asked this evening. Spoke to the need to have answers for the public about a sales tax. Thanked the body for the meeting. Stated that he has learned a lot through his service on the Assembly.

Assemblymember Sykes thanked the body for the meeting. Stated that a sales tax is a sensitive issue. Noted that most funding requests by the District have been honored because the Assembly thinks the School District does a good job. Stated that he does not want the body to lose sight that investing in education is important. Opined that the public did not completely understand the sales tax question and that it is a process that has to be very well explained. Spoke to concerns with a financial operations review deadline being moved from November to January. Stated that he would like to see a designated due date for a report, as he is not in favor of this process being drawn out. Spoke in support of the review being completed prior to the next budget cycle.

Mr. Moosey stated his reasons for moving the deadline. Summarized his plan and noted that the extra time would be beneficial to the committee, unless the Assembly would like to move in a different direction.

Dr. Goyette stated that it was the School District who had requested the review timeframe be extended and not Mr. Moosey. Related that she is hopeful to have a report for the Assembly at joint meeting in December.

Mayor Halter queried if there was any objection.

There was no objection noted.

Assemblymember McKee opined that the Sales Tax Committee will need sufficient time to do the work requested of them. Stated that he does not have a problem if it takes six months to do the work requested. Opined that the price of oil is not going up unless there is a major war and that this is the last year that there will be a state reserve account. Further opined that if a statewide sales tax goes through, that a local sales tax would be rejected. Spoke in opposition to a sales tax at this time due to the current financial crisis. Stated that \$1.4 billion of the State's operating budget is for education and that only the health care portion is higher. Sated that it is health care practitioners that drive up costs and the only way that it can be controlled is to consolidate all governmental health insurance policies.

Assemblymember Kowalke opined that it was interesting meeting and that he enjoyed it. Stated that he is planning to attend the September 26th school tour. Stated that a single Assembly Member should not dictate deadlines to staff, that it is up to the body as a whole. Stated that he does not favor speed over quality.

Assemblymember Beck thanked staff for the presentations this evening. Thanked Ms. McKechnie for emailing copies of the presentations to him so that he could follow along while on the phone. Thanked the body for a good meeting. Apologized for not being able to attend the school tour. Spoke in support of public school education. Stated that he looks forward to supporting the growth of the School District.

Mayor Halter expressed his desire that the Manager and the School District Come back with a plan. Opined that the Borough and School District's relationship is being tested by way of the fundamental stress of funding education. Noted that the most important issue at this time is funding education in the future. Stated that he brought forward the sales tax legislation because the School District requested it be done. Noted the need for the bodies to be nice to each other during this difficult time. Noted that it will be hard to tell what will happen during the next legislative session. Spoke to the need to diversify the tax base. Stated that property tax is at its cap and that property tax payers need relief and do not need to be taxed any higher. Thanked the School Board and the Assembly for the privilege of a joint meeting.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.



Mayoral Signature and Clerk Attestment

For

September 12, 2017, Regular Assembly Meeting Minutes (5 pages)


VERN HALTER, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:


LONNIE R. McKECHNIE, CMC, Borough Clerk

Minutes Approved: 11/07/17