

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

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

BOROUGH MAYOR
Edna DeVries

BOROUGH CLERK
Lonnie R. McKechnie, CMC

BOROUGH MANAGER
Michael Brown

BOROUGH ATTORNEY
Nicholas Spiropoulos



BOROUGH ASSEMBLY
Michael Bowles, District 1
Stephanie Nowers, District 2
Dee McKee, District 3
Maxwell Sumner, District 4
Bill Gamble, District 5
Dmitri Fonov, District 6
Ron Bernier, District 7

MEETING MINUTES

ASSEMBLY CHAMBERS
350 EAST DAHLIA AVENUE, PALMER

ASSEMBLY REGULAR MEETING

6:00 PM

TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2026

I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on Tuesday, April 7, 2026, at the Borough Assembly Chambers, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m. by Mayor Edna DeVries.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: 6 - Assemblymember Michael Bowles, Assemblymember Stephanie Nowers, Assemblymember Dee McKee, Assemblymember Maxwell Sumner, Assemblymember Dmitri Fonov, and Assemblymember Ron Bernier

Telephonic: 1 - Assemblymember Bill Gamble

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor DeVries queried if there were any changes to the agenda.

Assemblymember Bowles moved to removed Ordinance Serial No. 26-027 from the agenda.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

No: 2 - Assemblymember Nowers and Assemblymember McKee

Mayor DeVries queried if there were any additional changes to the agenda.
Assemblymember Fonov moved to remove Ordinance Serial No. 26-036 from the agenda.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 6 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

No: 1 - Assemblymember Nowers

Mayor DeVries queried if there were any additional changes to the agenda.

There were no additional changes noted and the agenda was approved as amended.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Assemblymember Ron Bernier led the pledge of allegiance.

V. MINUTES OF PRECEDING MEETINGS

26-065 A. Joint Assembly/Planning Commission Meeting Minutes: 03/10/26
The minutes were approved as presented without objection.

VI. REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE

A. AGENCY REPORTS (MSB 2.12.082; Seven minutes per person)

1. Reports From Cities

There were no reports provided.

2. Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District

Katie Gardner, Deputy Superintendent of Business and Operations, reported on changes to the curriculum and other activities of the School District.

3. State of Alaska

Todd Smoldon, Executive Director of Governor Dunleavy's Mat-Su Office, reported on Governor Dunleavy's budget and actions of the Legislature.

4. Mat-Su Convention and Visitor's Bureau

Casey Ressler, Executive Director of the Mat-Su Convention and Visitor's Bureau, reported on the tourism promotion campaign that is occurring this year and status of the new Gateway Visitor's Center, which will open June 1, 2026.

B. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Joint Assembly/School Board Committees

There were no reports provided.

2. Assembly Public Relations

Assemblymember Fonov spoke to visiting several schools in the School District.

C. MANAGER COMMENTS

1. State/Federal Legislation

2. Strategic Planning Issues

There was no report provided.

D. ATTORNEY COMMENTS

There was no report provided.

E. CLERK COMMENTS

Ms. McKechnie spoke to the upcoming meeting schedule.

F. CITIZEN AND OTHER CORRESPONDENCE

26-056

1. Big Lake Community Council: 02/10/26
2. Butte Community Council: 02/11/26
3. Knik RSA Board of Supervisors: 03/03/26
4. Library Board: 12/09/25, 02/10/26
5. MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission: 10/09/25, 11/13/25, 01/08/26, 01/29/26
6. Parks, Recreation, and Trails Advisory Board: 02/23/26
7. Planning Commission: 03/02/26
8. Platting Board: 02/04/26, 02/05/26, 02/18/26, 03/05/26
9. South Knik River Community Council: 02/19/26
10. Tanaina Community Council: 02/23/26
11. Trapper Creek Community Council: 02/19/26
12. West Lakes FSA Board of Supervisors: 01/12/26

The citizen and other correspondence were presented, and no comments were noted.

G. INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUMS

IM 26-063 Reporting The Conclusion Of Contract For Bid No. 25-108B With CGC Services, LLC. For A Final Contract Amount Of \$293,372.71 For The Palmer High School Boiler Upgrades.

IM 26-064 Informing The Assembly Of The Submittal Of A Funding Request To The Denali Commission In the Amount Of \$200,000 To Support A Port Mackenzie Master Plan Update.

The informational memorandums were presented, and no comments were noted.

VII. SPECIAL ORDERS

A. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (You can speak under one of the audience participations on the agenda, but not both; Three Minutes Per Person.)

The following persons spoke to concerns with property tax assessments within the Borough: Dawson White, Butch Moore, and Jesse Sumner.

The following persons spoke in opposition to the School District shuttering schools and in support of full funding for the School District: Riley Laws, Tori Genter, Roxie Simmons, Heather Bauman, Mary Dooher, Violet Rainbeaux Brooks, Susan Dunham, Nathan Meadows, Barrie Blackman-Green, and Victoria Grey.

The following person spoke in opposition to lifting seasonal weight restrictions for roads: Karel LaWalter.

The following person spoke to the need to plan for long-term, safe infrastructure and to concerns with road maintenance that occurred in her neighborhood: Lisa Harrison.

The following person proposed several ideas for community use of the Glacier View Elementary School if the School District closes it: Gary Wolske.

The following person spoke to concerns with the award of the road service area contract for Meadow Lakes Road Service Area: Daniel Potter.

The following person spoke in support of intellectual freedom and in support of libraries: Mary Robinson.

The following person spoke to concerns with data centers and their impacts on the environment: Travis Friesen.

The following person thanked Mayor DeVries for attempting to veto the data center resolution, spoke to concerns with tax waivers, closing schools, raising taxes, and road maintenance: Steve Edwards.

The following person spoke to the need to preserve section line easements to protect public access: Mark Johnson.

The following person noted that closing and consolidating schools is not a popular decision, but likely one that will have to occur: Andrew Traxler.

The meeting recessed at 7:45 p.m. and reconvened at 8 p.m.

B. PUBLIC HEARINGS (Three Minutes Per Person.)

OR 26-033 An Ordinance Extending The Time Limit For Completion Of Expiring Project Funds Through June 30, 2027.

Ms. McKechnie read the legislation into the record.

Mayor DeVries opened the public hearing.

There being no one present who wished to testify, the public hearing closed, and discussion moved to the Assembly.

Assemblymember Bernier moved to adopt Ordinance Serial No. 26-033.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

OR 26-034 An Ordinance Accepting And Appropriating \$281,250 From The State Of Alaska, Department Of Commerce, Community, And Economic Development, Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery Program, For The Hazard Mitigation Plan Update Project. RS 26-022: A Resolution Approving The Scope Of Work And Budget For A Grant In The Amount Of \$281,250 For The Hazard Mitigation Plan Update Project And Authorizing The Manager To Enter Into An Agreement With The Alaska State Department Of Commerce, Community, And Economic Development.

Ms. McKechnie read the legislation into the record.

Mayor DeVries opened the public hearing.

There being no one present who wished to testify, the public hearing closed, and discussion moved to the Assembly.

Assemblymember Bernier moved to adopt Ordinance Serial No. 26-034 and Resolution Serial No. 26-022.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

OR 26-035 An Ordinance Increasing The Compensation Of The Members Of The Board Of Equalization.

Ms. McKechnie read the legislation into the record.

Mayor DeVries opened the public hearing.

There being no one present who wished to testify, the public hearing closed, and discussion moved to the Assembly.

Assemblymember Bernier moved to adopt Ordinance Serial No. 26-035.

Assemblymember Fonov moved a primary amendment by striking "\$100" and inserting "\$150" in its place.

Assemblymember Sumner called for the question (to stop debate).

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

The primary amendment failed by the following vote:

Yes: 3 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

No: 4 - Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, and Assemblymember Gamble

The main motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 6 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

No: 1 - Assemblymember McKee

C. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (You can speak under one of the audience participations on the agenda, but not both; Three Minutes Per Person.)

The following person spoke to the success of Ficklin Construction in the past, spoke to hardships the company faced last year, and to changes that have been made to set the company up for success: Brian Ficklin.

D. CONSENT AGENDA

1. RESOLUTIONS

[Clerk's Note: All resolutions were pulled from the consent agenda for further discussion.]

2. ACTION MEMORANDUMS

- AM 26-034** Award Of Bid No. 26-121B To Northern Gravel In The Contract Amount Of \$300,000 To Remove The Conveyor System At Port Mackenzie.
- AM 26-035** Award Of Proposal No. 26-087P To ECI In The Contract Amount Of \$718,484 To Design The Willow Emergency Services Building.
- AM 26-036** Authorization To Renew The Borough's Cartegraph Asset Management Software With Opengov, Inc. Under A Three-Year Agreement Covering July 1, 2026, Through June 30, 2029; The Total Cost Of The Agreement Is \$261,246.41, With Annual Payments Subject To Appropriation.
- AM 26-037** Authorization To Renew Projectmates Software With Systemates, Inc. Under A Three-Year Agreement Covering July 1, 2026, Through June 30, 2029; The Total Cost Of The Agreement Is \$415,657.13, With Annual Payments Subject To Appropriation.
- AM 26-038** Authorization To Renew The Borough's Opentext Content Manager Software With Information First Under A Three-Year Agreement Covering July 1, 2026, Through June 30, 2029; The Total Cost Of The Agreement Is \$292,165.75, With Annual Payments Subject To Appropriation.
- AM 26-039** Award Of Bid No. 26-123B To Meier Excavation, LLC. In The Contract Amount Of \$496,093 To Construct A New Fish Passage Culvert At An Existing Culvert Crossing On Homebuilt Circle At Neklason Lake.

Ms. McKechnie read the legislation into the record.

Assemblymember Bernier moved to approve the consent agenda as read into the record by the Clerk.

Assemblymember Bowles moved to divide the question to take up discussion of AM 26-039 separately.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 6 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

No: 1 - Assemblymember McKee

FIRST SEGMENT: Assemblymember Bernier moved to approve the consent agenda as read into the record by the Clerk, with the exception of AM 26-039.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

SECOND SEGMENT: Assemblymember Bernier moved to adopt AM 26-039.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

AM 26-032 Award Of Bid No. 26-129B To Ficklin Construction, LLC. In The Contract Amount Of \$1,186,406 For Meadow Lakes Road Service Area Annual Road Maintenance - Rebid.

Ms. McKechnie read the legislation into the record.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Assemblymember Sumner declared a conflict of interest as he does business with Ficklin Construction.

RULING: Mayor DeVries ruled that Assemblymember Sumner had a conflict of interest and would be recused from voting.

Assemblymember Sumner exited the meeting.

Assemblymember McKee moved to adopt AM 26-032.

The motion failed with Assemblymembers Bowles, Nowers, and Gamble in support and McKee, Fonov, and Bernier opposed (tie vote).

The motion passed with Mayor DeVries invoking her voting power in the affirmative.

Assemblymember Sumner re-entered the meeting.

RS 26-027 A Resolution Requesting The State Of Alaska To Review DMV Processes And Consider Modifications To Facilitate Refugees' Ability To Renew Driver's Licenses.

Sponsors: Fonov

Ms. McKechnie read the legislation into the record.

Assemblymember McKee moved to adopt Resolution Serial No. 26-027.

Assemblymember McKee moved a primary amendment, page three of the resolution, no. 6, by striking the words, "In this state."

The primary amendment passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

The main motion passed as amended by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

RS 26-028 A Resolution Opposing Senate Bill 277 And Urging The Protection Of Parental Rights, Charter School Funding, And Correspondence Education.

Sponsors: Bowles

Assemblymember Bowles moved to adopt Resolution Serial No. 26-028.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

[Clerk's Note: Ordinance Serial No. 26-027 was removed from the agenda at approval of the agenda.]

OR 26-027 An Ordinance Amending MSB 3.28 To Increase The Property Owner Ballot Threshold For Contiguous Local Improvement Districts From 54 Percent To 67 Percent, And Remove The Provisions That Only Returned Ballots Are Considered In Tabulation.

Sponsors: Nowers and Bowles

IX. VETO

There were no vetoes.

X. NEW BUSINESS

A. INTRODUCTIONS (For Public Hearing 04/21/26, Assembly Chambers)

- OR 26-037** An Ordinance Accepting And Appropriating \$28,792.55 From The Alaska State Division Of Forestry, Volunteer Fire Capacity Grant Program; And Appropriating \$2,879.25 In Matching Funds For Firefighter And Firefighting Equipment, Supplies, And Communications Equipment.
RS 26-023: A Resolution Approving The Scopes Of Work And Budgets For The Alaska State Division Of Forestry Volunteer Fire Capacity Grants And Matching Funds For The Fire Service Areas Of Willow-Caswell, Talkeetna, And Sutton.
- OR 26-038** An Ordinance Accepting And Appropriating Disaster Relief Funds From The Alaska State Division Of Homeland Security And Emergency Management In The Amount Of \$823,135.48 For The January 2022 Mat-Su Windstorm Disaster.
RS 26-024: A Resolution Approving The Scope Of Work And Budget For Disaster Relief Funds For The January 2022 Mat-Su Windstorm Disaster Project No. 55030.
- OR 26-040** An Ordinance Accepting And Appropriating \$175,000 From The Alaska State Department Of Military And Veteran's Affairs, Emergency Management Performance Grant; And Requesting A Reappropriation Of \$175,000 From The Emergency Management Fiscal Year 2026 Operating Budget For Emergency Management Wages And Benefits.
RS 26-026: A Resolution Approving The Scope Of Work And Budget For A Grant In The Amount Of \$175,000 From The Alaska State Department Of Military And Veteran's Affairs, Emergency Management Performance Grant, For Emergency Management Wages And Benefits.
- OR 26-042** An Ordinance Extending The Date Of Completion On The Palmer High School Elevator Replacement Project Through June 30, 2028.
RS 26-029: A Resolution Amending The Budgets Of The Palmer High School Elevator Replacement, Finger Lake Elementary School Boiler Replacement, And Snowshoe Elementary School Boiler Replacement Projects; And Approving The Scope Of Work And Budget For The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District Deferred Maintenance - Fiscal Year 2026 Project.
- OR 26-043** An Ordinance To Accept And Appropriate 2026 Series B Taxable General Obligation Transportation System Bonds Proceeds Including Issuance Costs And Additional Premium To Debt Service.
- OR 26-044** An Ordinance Appropriating The 2026 Series A General Obligation School Refunding Proceeds For Issuance Costs.

OR 26-045 An Ordinance Changing The Exemption To Weight Restrictions On Borough Roads For Essential Purposes Only.

Sponsors: Sumner and Bowles

OR 26-046 An Ordinance Amending MSB 3.28 To Increase The Property Owner Ballot Threshold For Contiguous Local Improvement Districts From 54 Percent To 75 Percent.

Sponsors: Bowles

B. INTRODUCTIONS (For Public Hearing 05/19/26, Assembly Chambers)

OR 26-041 An Ordinance Creating Republican Way Natural Gas Local Improvement District No. 672, Approving The Improvement Plan For The District, Authorizing The Manager To Proceed With The Improvement, And Assessing Equally Among The Properties Within The District The Costs Of The Improvement.

Ms. McKechnie read the legislation into the record.

Assemblymember Bernier moved to introduce the legislation as read into the record and to set the public hearings for April 21, 2026, and May 19, 2026, respectively.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

Assemblymember Fonov moved to divide the question to take the introduction of Ordinance Serial No. 26-045 separately.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

No: 2 - Assemblymember Nowers and Assemblymember Gamble
FIRST SEGMENT: Assemblymember Bernier moved to introduce the legislation as read into the record by the Clerk and to set the public hearings for April 21, 2026, and May 19, 2026, with the exception of Ordinance Serial No. 26-045.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

SECOND SEGMENT: Assemblymember Bernier moved to introduce Ordinance Serial No. 26-045 and set the public hearing for April 21, 2026.

Assemblymember Fonov moved a primary amendment to strike "April 21" and insert "June 16" in its place.

The primary amendment failed by the following vote:

Yes: 1 - Assemblymember Fonov

No: 6 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, and Assemblymember Bernier

The main motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 5 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, and Assemblymember Gamble

No: 2 - Assemblymember Fonov and Assemblymember Bernier

C. MAYORAL NOMINATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

1. VACANCY REPORT

26-058 Mayoral Requests for Confirmation

MSB Fish and Wildlife Commission
Terry Gorlick

Assemblymember Bernier moved to confirm the appointment requested by the Mayor.

The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

D. OTHER NEW BUSINESS

There was no other new business.

E. REFERRALS (For Referral To The Planning Commission For 90 Days Or Other Date Specified By The Assembly)

There were no referrals.

XI. RECONSIDERATION

A. MOTION TO RECONSIDER PUBLIC HEARING DATE

OR 26-036 An Ordinance Changing The Exemption To Weight Restrictions On Borough Roads For Emergencies Only.

Sponsors: Nowers and McKee

[Clerk's Note: Ordinance Serial No. 26-036 was removed from the agenda at approval of the agenda and reconsideration was not moved.]

XII. MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, AND STAFF COMMENTS

Assemblymember Bernier said a prayer.

Assemblymember Nowers spoke to concerns with damage to roads due to the exemptions for seasonal road restrictions.

Assemblymember Nowers moved to direct the Manager to suspend the issuance of exemption to weight restriction permits until after April 21, 2026.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Yes: 1 - Assemblymember Nowers

No: 6 - Assemblymember Bowles, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Sumner, Assemblymember Gamble, Assemblymember Fonov, and Assemblymember Bernier

Assemblymember Nowers acknowledged testimony provided in opposition to school closures. Stated a preference to postpone any closures for one year. Commented that enrollment capacity varies by site, with one school at or near capacity and another operating at a lower level. Stated that the nursing issue has been resolved and noted cost savings resulting from the bus strike. Further stated a desire to understand the cost of maintaining operations at the three schools under consideration. Added that, if closures proceed, the facilities should be repurposed in a manner that benefits the impacted communities. Expressed concern regarding the School District's budget, including approximately \$8 million allocated for supplies, and noted a need for greater understanding of the reported budget shortfall.

Assemblymember Bowles urged residents of Assembly District 1 to review Ordinance Serial No. 26-045, a recent measure addressing exemptions to seasonal road weight restrictions. Stated that he considers it a more effective solution. Expressed appreciation for the discussion held this evening and noted that it is a privilege to serve on the Assembly.

Assemblymember Fonov spoke to his allegiance to the United States of America and shared his immigration history. Spoke to the weight restriction exemption permit, noting that Borough laws apply equally to all residents. Acknowledged that, while differences of opinion may exist, the body must work collaboratively. Stated that it is a privilege to serve his constituents.

XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

There was no executive session.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:54 p.m.



Mayoral Signature and Clerk Attestment

For

April 7, 2026, Assembly Regular Meeting Minutes

(16 pages)


EDNA DeVRIES, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:


LONNIE R. McKECHNIE, CMC, Borough Clerk

Minutes Approved: 05/19/26