

# MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

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

Tim Hale, District 1  
Stephanie Nowers, District 2  
George McKee, District 3  
Robert Yundt, District 4  
Mokie Tew, District 5  
Jesse Sumner, District 6  
Tam Boeve, District 7



Thomas Bergey, District 1  
Jim Hart, District 2  
Ole Larson, District 3  
Sarah Welton, District 4  
Ryan Ponder, District 5  
Dwight Probasco, District 6  
Jeff Taylor, District 7

## MEETING MINUTES

ASSEMBLY CHAMBERS  
350 EAST DAHLIA AVENUE, PALMER

JOINT ASSEMBLY/SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

6:00 PM

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2020

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

The Joint Assembly/School Board meeting was held on Tuesday, September 8, 2020, 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:** 5 - Assemblymember Stephanie Nowers, Assemblymember George McKee, Assemblymember Dan Mayfield, Assemblymember Jesse Sumner, and Assemblymember Tam Boeve

**Excused:** 1 - Assemblymember Ted Leonard

**Telephonic:** 1 - Assemblymember Tim Hale

### **SCHOOL BOARD ROLL CALL**

School Board President Thomas Bergey, School Board Member James Hart, School Board Member Ole Larson, and School Board Member Sarah Welton.

Telephonic: School Board Member Ryan Ponder and School Board Member Jeff Taylor.

Excused: 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. Luke Fulp, Assistant Superintendent of Business.

#### **V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

The following person thanked the Assembly for their thoughtful approach to the CARES Act Funding. Advised that he has received a lot of positive feedback about the learning options available to children. Noted that there is a \$2 Billion Dollar Deficit at the State level this year: Mr. Todd Smoldon, Executive Director of Governor Dunleavy's Mat-Su Office.

The following person spoke to concerns with the public process: Mr. Eugene Carl Haberman.

#### **VI. JOINT ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

##### **A. Building Construction Progress (MSB 2.12.075(A))**

Mr. Jude Bilafer, Capital Projects Director, reported on the need to condemn Houston Middle School due to significant damage that was not anticipated during the preliminary investigation.

##### **B. Review Capital Construction Plan (MSB 2.12.075(A))**

Dr. Randy Traini, School District Superintendent, reported on the capital construction plan.

##### **C. Restructuring Operational Funding of Schools (Requested by Mayor Halter)**

Mr. Halter requested that a committee be formed to look at restructuring operational funding for the School District. Requested that the members be Assemblymember Leonard, Assemblymember Hale, Assemblymember Boeve, Ms. Cheyenne Heindel, Mr. Nicholas Spiropoulos, and Mr. George Has.

There was no objection noted.

##### **D. School Year Start Up (Requested by the School Board)**

Dr. Randy Traini, School District Superintendent, reported on the school year start up enrollment being 17,816.25 students with a combined learning style.

##### **E. Houston Middle School Retrofit Resolution (Requested by the School Board)**

There was no discussion on this topic.

[20-121](#)

School Board Resolution Regarding Houston Middle School Retrofit

## VII. INTRODUCTION (For Public Hearing on 09/15/20)

### [OR 20-089](#)

An Ordinance To Condemn Houston Middle School As A Fire And Health Hazard.

Ms. McKechnie read the legislation into the record.

**Assemblymember Mayfield moved to introduce the legislation as read into the record by the Clerk and to set the public hearing for September 15, 2020. The motion passed by the following vote:**

**Yes:** 6 - Assemblymember Hale, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Mayfield, Assemblymember Sumner, and Assemblymember Boeve

## **VIII. MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, SCHOOL BOARD, AND STAFF COMMENT**

Dr. Traini stated that he appreciates the opportunity to address the bodies. Thanked them for their patience while he attended telephonically. Noted he is adhering to travel guidelines regarding Covid-19.

School Board Member Larson spoke to his appreciation of the joint meeting. Related that there have been concerns that children have not been in school since March and that they will lose interest and drop out. Opined that the School District is setting appropriate standards for kids. Stated that he appreciates that the Assembly has been supportive of opening up schools.

School Board Member Welton spoke to her appreciation of attending a meeting in-person. Noted that Zoom meetings have been the bulk of the way she has been attending meetings lately. Noted that she is home schooling her grandchildren. Spoke to the possibility of parents opting out of sending kids back to brick-and-mortar schools in favor of online learning. Noted that teachers have been very innovative in their teaching styles and creating activities for children. Related that teachers are working very hard and putting in over-time to make things happen. Stated that she would like to see Houston Middle School rebuilt. Related that she understands the concerns regarding funding for that, but stated that she is not willing to put funds into the current building, as it is not safe for students and teachers. Spoke to her appreciation of the joint meeting.

School Board Member Ponder thanked the Assembly for their consideration of the needs of the School District. Stated that he appreciates the joint meetings. Stated that he would like to see the body work together to get the message across to FEMA that Houston Middle School must be rebuilt.

School Board Member Taylor stated that he appreciated the information shared in the meeting. Spoke in support of the condemnation of Houston Middle School.

School Board Member Hart thanked the body for the meeting. Spoke in support of the condemnation of Houston Middle School. Spoke to the current fiscal crisis the School District and the Borough are facing.

School Board President Bergey thanked staff for their diligence regarding Houston Middle School. Opined that more safety issues will be discovered. Noted that the body was all hopeful that there would be a quick resolution to the replacement or reconstruction of Houston Middle School. Commended staff for pressing forward on this issue. Opined that children and teachers

need a safe learning environment. Noted that these are unprecedented times for the current fiscal crisis. Spoke to safe guards that are in place for budget crisis but noted those safeguards cannot predict everything that could arise. Thanked everyone for their patience.

Ms. McKechnie advised that a number of years ago, the Assembly and the School Board used to alternate hosting the joint meeting. Queried if this is something the Assembly would like to start doing again.

Mayor Halter queried if there was any objection.

There was no objection noted.

Assemblymember McKee opined that the history of moving quickly on school building needs is terrible. Spoke to concerns about where funding to rebuild Houston Middle School will come from. Spoke in favor of the School District and the Borough combining services to save funds.

Assemblymember Boeve noted that Houston Middle School is in her district. Related that there have been a lot of unanticipated delays. Spoke to the need to get children into a safe learning environment as soon as possible.

Assemblymember Sumner noted that the fiscal situation for the School District does appear bleak, but that operationally, they are doing great. Related that his son started kindergarten and loves it. Opined that the Borough is doing much better than the rest of the country at this time.

Assemblymember Nowers stated that she listens to many School Board meetings. Noted that it is nice to see everyone in person. Spoke in support of the committee Mayor Halter requested. Opined that online learning opportunities are a great thing, but that they are not substitute for students being in class with a teacher. Spoke to her appreciation of all the hard work teachers have done. Spoke to having attended Harvest Fest at the Alaska State Fairgrounds. Noted that it was very nice and well attended.

Assemblymember Mayfield spoke to concerns for funding to rebuild Houston Middle School. Related that his personal concern is the safety of students and teachers. Opined that condemnation is the only option. Thanked the School Board for attending the meeting. Spoke to his appreciation of joint meetings. Spoke to concerns with the decline in enrollment.

Mayor Halter stated that he always enjoys meeting with the School Board. Spoke in support of Houston Middle School being condemned and rebuilt.

Related that during his walk-through the day after the earthquake that he thought it would have to be condemned. Spoke to concerns with the lack of the State holding up their end of the bargain on school bond debt reimbursement. Stated that he would like to see the Borough have a sales tax, but a proposal is always voted down by the voters. Stated that he is looking forward to the School District hosting the next meeting.

## **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.