

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

Michael Brown

BOROUGH ATTORNEY

Nicholas Spiropoulos



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

MEETING MINUTES

ASSEMBLY CHAMBERS
350 E. DAHLIA AVENUE, PALMER

ASSEMBLY SPECIAL MEETING

6:00 PM

THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2020

Budget Public Hearing

I. CALL TO ORDER

The special meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on Tuesday, April 30, 2020, at the Borough Assembly Chambers, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Mayor Vern Halter.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: 7 - Assemblymember Tim Hale, Assemblymember Stephanie Nowers, Assemblymember George McKee, Assemblymember Ted Leonard, Assemblymember Dan Mayfield, Assemblymember Jesse Sumner, and Assemblymember Tam Boeve

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved as presented without objection.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The pledge of allegiance was led by Ms. Lonnie McKechnie, Borough Clerk.

Mr. Moosey spoke to the draft press release and queried if the Assembly would like any changes.

Assemblymember Sumner moved a primary amendment to the press release, second paragraph, by striking the words "While the Assembly chose not to place stricter guidance at this time." The primary amendment passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Hale, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Leonard, Assemblymember Mayfield, Assemblymember Sumner, and Assemblymember Boeve

Mayor Halter queried if there was any objection to the press release as amended.

There was no objection noted.

Mr. Moosey noted that there were five employees who retired from the Borough today and they were: Mr. Ed Bennett, Office of Information Technology; Mr. Ray Nix, Land Management; Ms. Donna Price, Account Payable; Ms. Jo Cassidy, Big Lake Librarian; and Ms. Vickie Lee Fenster, Platting.

Mayor Halter spoke to the draft letter to Governor Dunleavy; President of the Senate Cathy Geisel; and Speaker of the House, Bryce Edgmon regarding the loss of state funding and the loss of school bond debt reimbursement. Queried if the Assembly had any objection to the letter.

There was no objection noted.

Mayor Halter spoke to his fiscal year 2021 budgeting priorities.

V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY (3 Minutes Per Person)

The following persons spoke in support of funding for the Mat-Su Convention and Visitor's Bureau: Mr. Steven Solari, Meier Lake Resort; Mr. Rick Peterson, General Manager McKinley Chalet Resort; and Mr. Sam Dinges, Palmer Museum Executive Director.

The following persons spoke in opposition to the School District absorbing the school bond debt reimbursement: Ms. Kim Strassel; Mr. John Gardner, Knik Elementary Principal; Ms. Mary Fulp, Colony Middle School Principal;

The following person spoke to the possibility of having to raise the mill rate, in support of public testimony, and in support of mail in voting: Ms. Terry Snyder.

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

The meeting recessed at 6:50 p.m. and reconvened 7 p.m.

OR 20-020

An Ordinance Appropriating Monies From The Central Treasury For The Borough Operating Funds, Enterprise Funds, Education Operating Fund And Capital Funds, Establishing The Rate Of Levy For All Borough Functions For The Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2020 And Ending June 30, 2021; And Setting The Surcharge Rate For The Wireline And Wireless Enhanced 911 Systems For The Period Of July 1, 2020 Through June 30, 2021.

Assemblymember Mayfield moved to continue the public hearing for Ordinance Serial No. 20-020, to May 19, 2020, at 6 p.m. The motion passed by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Assemblymember Hale, Assemblymember Nowers, Assemblymember McKee, Assemblymember Leonard, Assemblymember Mayfield, Assemblymember Sumner, and Assemblymember Boeve

VI. RECRUITMENT OF A BOROUGH MANAGER

There was no report provided.

VII. MAYOR, ASSEMBLY, AND STAFF COMMENT

Mr. Spiropoulos stated that he will be contacting the Municipality of Anchorage to get more information on how they intend to approach using the CARES Act funds.

Ms. McKechnie advised that this meeting would be the last night that TEAMS would be used for the public to provide telephonic testimony. Related that staff is working to implement Sonexis, which is a robust teleconference system similar to what the State uses. Stated that until that system is in place, the Borough would be temporarily using Call in Studio for the public to participate telephonically. Thanked Mr. Mike Chmielewski for his help with Call in Studio.

Assemblymember Nowers thanked the public that provided testimony. Spoke in support of the Mayor's letter regarding school bond debt reimbursement. Encouraged residents to call their State Legislators and Governor Dunleavy to speak to the State funding their portion. Spoke to the need to ensure that the CARES Act funds are put to the best use for residents. Spoke to what she had expected to get out of the strategic planning sessions that the Assembly held. Noted that she is not in favor of putting staff to work on a myriad of issues when they are already overburdened.

Assemblymember Leonard thanked staff for their hard work on the teleconference system. Spoke to the recent brush fire at Point MacKenzie. Thanked Mayor Halter for sharing his budget priorities. Opined that the most important thing is to help Borough residents and get small businesses back in operation.

Assemblymember Boeve noted her agreement with Assemblymember Nowers regarding the strategic planning sessions. Spoke to the need to pause long term planning ideas.

Assemblymember McKee spoke to his concerns with trying to prepare a budget for the Borough when it is unknown what support will come from the State. Opined that the Borough needs to figure out a way to fund the budget with little to no state funding. Noted that once you provide a service to the public that it is extremely difficult to take it back even if there is no funding. Spoke to concerns with adding employees to the budget this year that may not be affordable in the future. Agreed that long term planning should be paused at this time. Opined that if the Borough is funding the Mat-Su Convention and Visitor's Bureau, that they should have to be open and transparent with an accounting of those funds to the Borough.

Assemblymember Sumner thanked the public for providing testimony. Stated that he too would like to see an accounting of funds from the Mat-Su Convention and Visitor's Bureau since the funds they receive from the Borough are public monies. Stated that he would like to see the data that supports the need for additional employees. Spoke in support of Mayor Halter's budget priorities. Noted that if the Assembly is looking at a property tax reduction, that he would like to see it in the form of a refund instead of a rebate. Commented that a reduction in property taxes this year could result in an increase next year.

Assemblymember Hale noted that the Assembly will always look at ways to provide funding for the School District. Agreed that a refund would be better than a rebate as it is a more tangible relief for property owners.

Assemblymember Mayfield thanked the public for their testimony. Thanked staff for their hard work ensuring that the public can participate telephonically. Opined that the telephonic testimony went well this evening. Noted his agreement with Mayor Halter's budget priorities. Stated that he is looking forward to understanding exactly what the CARES Act funds may be used for. Spoke in support of a property tax refund instead of a rebate, if it is possible.

Mayor Halter cautioned the body from making any plans on how to spend the CARES Act funding. Noted that all municipalities are concerned with the restrictions placed on how those funds may be used. Opined it is prudent to wait until there is an allocation and more information before the funds are spent. Spoke to the need for Governor Dunleavy to honor the funding split on school bond debt reimbursement. Noted that the Assembly intends to honor the funding for the School District. Spoke to the history of school bond debt reimbursement cuts by Governor Dunleavy. Noted that the Assembly has always supported the School District. spoke to the property tax rebate that was provided to residents in the past.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:24 p.m.