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Soldotna, AK 99669

February 22, 2020

Local Boundary Commission staff  
550 W. 7th Ave., Ste. 1640  
Anchorage, AK 99501

Re: Comments about Soldotna Annexation Petition

Dear Local Boundary Commission staff,

The residents of the Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB) have been adamantly opposed to forced annexation every time the City of Soldotna has tried to annex. Public testimony during the past five years has proven that over 90% of all public testimonies are against this money grab by the City of Soldotna.

When this annexation attempt first began, the city chose a group of 12 people to select areas for annexation. The public was never made aware of this process or the people selected by the city manager, nor were there any minutes kept of any meetings. They met quarterly for a year before the public became aware that the city had resurrected another annexation attempt.

The Local Boundary Commission (LBC) recommends that a transparent process for selecting property for possible annexation include those who may be impacted and provide a mix of people, both from the city and those who reside in the borough.

Not one person on that committee was opposed to annexation. In fact one person owns a large commercial tract of property that was kept just out of the selected area. City council members who own properties in the areas definitely had conflicts of interest. One of the council members was deemed "not having a conflict of interest" by the city mayor on one occasion, and was allowed to vote on an annexation matter. Months later, this same council member, who was actively campaigning for a Borough Assembly seat, was now determined to have a conflict of interest, and was not allowed to vote on an annexation matter.

This incident shows the extent of manipulation the City Council would go through in order for them to justify their stance on annexation. That should have nullified the process and hopefully the LBC will consider this in making their recommendation. You cannot have a council member free of a conflict of interest on one occasion and not later, on the same issue.

One of the city's chief complaints is their perceived loss of sales tax revenue from businesses that have been established outside the city limits. The fact is, the City of Soldotna collects more in sales tax each year than any other city on the peninsula. Soldotna is second only to the Kenai Peninsula Borough in the collection of sales tax, so that reason has no merit.

The city also holds up their lower mill rate on property tax as a reason residents outside the city limits should want to be annexed. Time and time again, the borough residents have explained that the short term lower mill rate on property taxes is not something they want in lieu of the freedom to live outside the city limits. The city could change the mill rate at any time.

The city claims they can provide services that are not available to Borough residents. Again, property owners outside the city limits are not interested in these services. For example, water and sewer. Currently, there are Soldotna city residents that do not have water and sewer services provided by the city. Borough residents have stated they are happy with their own wells and septic tanks and are not interested in hooking up to the city's water and sewer. The city currently dumps their sewage into the Kenai River and from the reports I have seen, this practice is currently an issue and may have more problems in the future due to release of heavy metals and other contaminants.

Another service the city gives as a reason for annexation is animal control. The borough residents that are opposed to annexation have provided many hours of public testimony stating that is not something that merits forced annexation. In fact, the City of Kenai has recently entered into an agreement with the City Soldotna for animal control, so that should no longer be one of their reasons of annexation.

The City of Soldotna has stated another reason for annexation is for police control. The record shows only ONE individual out of the hundreds who have provided testimony was in favor of this. The other KPB residents are just fine with the law enforcement protection we currently have.

The city also states a reason for annexation is for environmental protection. The federal, state, and borough laws already provide for this.

Annexation is nothing more than a money and land grab by the City of Soldotna.

The few people in favor of annexation realized that their only hope of annexation is through the Legislative Review Process (LRP) due to the overwhelming majority of borough residents that are adamantly opposed to forced annexation without a vote.

The city has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in studying annexation. Every report, every meeting, every discussion, has consistently shown that over 90% of all participants do not want or support annexation unless they are allowed to vote.

The city was asked numerous times in the beginning stages of this process to use the Local Option. This is the only fair and democratic way to allow annexation. The LRP is forced annexation against the will of property owners and is no longer allowed in most other states.

The legislative review method was put in the statutes early on to allow cities to expand for the much needed infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, prisons, etc. when there were few built up areas outside the city boundaries.

But in 2020, this is no longer the case. Citizens have purchased properties either within the city boundaries or outside the boundaries based on their own personal needs and wants. Those who choose to live in the city have their reasons, those who live outside of the city have their reasons, too.

In this day and age, NO property owner should be forced into taxation without representation. Our forefathers fought a long and bitter war over this.

Our Borough Assembly has listened to its constituents and passed a resolution against annexation by the City of Soldotna.

In closing, please note that the Borough Assembly is against this, over 90% of ALL borough residents are against this, our state legislative representative is against this and countless hours of public testimony have made strong arguments against this. Those few in favor of annexation have not proven their case sufficiently to allow this petition to move forward and my hope is that the LBC will listen to the will of the people and vote no on annexation.

Sincerely,

Brian Olson