

To the Local Boundary Commission:

When I arrived in Elfin Cove in 1972, you could not tell the place from 1942. The houses and business buildings were of that and an earlier vintage. Services included a well stocked store including extensive hardware and fishing gear stocks, a fuel dock, a U.S. Post Office, and an unsafe and intermittent water system. There was a hospitable cafe. Houses were heated by wood stoves or the kitchen oil range and lightings was by kerosene lamps or candles. This was the technology of the day in the Southeast Alaska bush. Our economy was based on salmon trolling and halibut long lining. There were up to 50 people who wintered here. There were few children and no school. The infrastructure and basic services were mostly due to the leadership of Ernie Swanson who founded the village in 1935 and who died in 1971.

As technologies developed and our collective interest in less hardscrabble and more graceful living grew, we banded together in 1981 under the Community of Elfin Cove Non-Profit Corporation (CECNPC) organized under the laws of the State of Alaska for the purposes of receiving revenues as the oil money began flowing to the sea. In fact, I personally brought out the paperwork to establish this Corporation. We developed by-laws and a Board of Directors and contemplated our needs. We were a thoughtful and careful group and only asked for basic infrastructure that we needed and knew we could use and keep in repair. Primarily a Community Building to house public services and a school for our growing family life and a power house and electrical distribution system.

For over four decades this CECNPC has successfully established, developed, purchased, and maintained a tank farm and fuel dock, an electrical utility, a safe tanked spring water system, a Community Building with a Museum, meeting rooms, office rooms, a small gym, a medical room, and a U.S. Post Office. Also, we have a warehouse with a winter laundry and shower facilities, tool and snowplow storage, and a fire department. All of this mostly through volunteer efforts. I myself spent two years as grant administrator for the Community Building as a volunteer. Another woman spent two years of her life administering the power grant. It appears that the Xunaa Borough petitioners had not idea that we had a local government nor that we have provided these essential services for decades. Just exactly who does Xunaa think will assume the operation and maintenance of these services after a borough formation much less develop more as our needs arise. Actually, their transition plan continually states the expansion of services is not intended at any time.

The petitioner states that “They, (Elfin Cove) do not wish to be actively governed any more than they wish to be actively taxed” which is exactly what they are proposing; to govern and tax Elfin Cove without providing services or maintaining the essential services that are currently in place due to long-time self-government and an active volunteer population. Thanks to long ago State grants, a long-term State loan, and past Revenue Sharing, which we used well and are no longer available, and recent IRIS SOA CAP money, we are now self sustaining. There is no provision in the Petition to make us whole if they take over our assets and any money from the State for our population. Do they have any clue that they would also assume our long-term State debt which we now reliably pay on annually?

Other infrastructure is owned but has only sometimes been maintained by the State of Alaska. The boardwalks are currently in good repair due to our diligence. The front ‘Government’ float and

seaplane base was rebuilt by the State a few years ago and will outlast this generation. The 'Inner Harbor' with two connected floats is older than my memory and its condition was only once addressed in the early 1980s. A new ramp was installed in the late 1990s but last fall it took a volunteer local effort and materials to keep it from collapsing due to rotten wood where it attaches to the pier which accesses uplands. I see nothing in the Xunaa Borough Petition that addresses how it would provide for these vital assets that would become its property and responsibility.

While we function effectively as a community, many of us live 'close-to-the -bone'. We have built what we have from hard work and the bounty of the sea. The proposed sales tax and potential Borough wide property tax would be burdensome with no stated return or improvement to our lives.

We also feel insecure about what a distant Xunaa Borough would do when it acquires the three parcels of State land adjacent to our townsite, USS 12199 Lots 1, 2 and 3. It could develop and establish businesses or enterprises that our existing infrastructure could not support and destroy the balance of responsibility and effort we employ as volunteers to keep our community vital and viable.

Elfin Cove citizens have for decades proven themselves remarkably capable of supporting a full range of municipal services. If Elfin Cove were to be assimilated into the borough, the non-profit corporation would be dissolved. Including Elfin Cove in the Hoonah Borough would diminish the existing level of local government and volunteerism. As of now, Elfin Cove can now make decisions at local CECNPC meetings attended by members and take action according to popular vote. This ability to manage our affairs would be extinguished under Borough management. Management would shift to the Borough assembly located in Hoonah. This overlay by Borough government would eliminate our effective local government and could quite possibly curtail any desire of Elfin Cove residents to engage in active participation with meeting our local needs since we would have no real voice in Borough decisions or lack thereof.

We do not have customary and simple transportation and communication patterns with Hoonah. Hoonah is in no way a regional hub for Elfin Cove. There are no roads, no ferries, no float plane routes between Elfin Cove and Hoonah. There is no economical way to get there from here. All access to Elfin Cove is 'weather permitting' anyway to our service center Juneau from where the mail plane comes and where we phone our grocery orders to be delivered to Alaska Seaplanes for freight delivery on that mail plane. Obviously, there is no communication pattern between Hoonah and Elfin Cove. Hoonah could not even be bothered to insure that Elfin Cove was informed of their Petition filing nor were we offered the opportunity to decline being included as were three other communities which were granted enclave status.

Furthermore, the social, cultural, and economic characteristics and activities of the people in the proposed Borough are not interrelated and integrated. There is no possibility that Hoonah's fire or emergency medical services could reach Elfin Cove in a timely enough matter to make a difference in a life or death situation. Hoonah is a long-time Tlingit town with strong from time immemorial social and cultural traditions. It has a fishing past and a growing economy due to large cruise ship tourism.

We are since 1935 a trolling town with six sport fishing lodges and small cruise ship tourism as our social and economic base. While we may have some common interests within our communities , there are no strong or long-term interaction on these bases. I myself have only been to Hoonah four times in my 52 years of living in Elfin Cove.

Elfin Cove would be better situated within a proposed City of Pelican's concept of a model home rule borough boundary as a straight line from the corner of the City of Sitka Borough located at the head of Tenakee Inlet to Point Carolus located on the west entrance of Glacier Bay proper. Our home waters are Cross Sound, North and South Inian Passes and Passages, Lizianski Inlet, Lizianski Strait, and Yakobi Island. There has been a bit of discussion about this possibility.

Implementation of a Xunaa Borough as filed has the very strong possibility of disrupting Elfin Cove's long history of successful self-governing. That along with taxation without representation endangers our existing and future critical infrastructure and way of life. It is my opinion that being subsumed by Hoonah and a Xunaa Borough would not be in the best interests of the Community of Elfin Cove Non-Profit Corporation, the residents and businesses of Elfin Cove, nor the State of Alaska.

It would be highly distressing to this octogenarian to see five decades of involvement in establishing, developing, and maintaining infrastructure and services to provide for a rich cultural, social, economic, and family life be replaced by a distant and uncaring overlord who has proposed to take our money in the form of taxes but has proposed no plan to maintain our facilities and hence our way of life. We have been highly self sufficient and desire to continue to be so.

I request that at best the LBC reject the formation of the proposed Xunaa Borough and at least exclude the incorporation of Elfin Cove in the proposed Borough.

Mary Jo Lord-Wild
P.O. Box 109
Elfin Cove, Alaska 99825