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Jedediah Smith
Local Boundary Commission
550 W 7th Ave Suite 1650
Anchorage, Ak. 99501-3510

Dear Mr. Jedediah Smith and Boundary Commission,

I strongly oppose the proposed Xoonah (Hoonah) Borough on multiple counts. It is not an appropriate fit for cities and communities within the proposed boundary, and therefore does not meet the requirements for boroughs in Alaska. Furthermore the proposed borough would cause undue economic harm via taxation and restricted growth, now and into the future, for all communities in the proposed area, and stands only to benefit Hoonah.

Hoonah claims to be the cultural, economic, and social hub for the proposed area. This is not the case. Gustavus has little connection to Hoonah culturally, economically, or socially. I attest to this as a lifelong resident of the area, and a business owner in Gustavus for 15 years. Gustavus exists as the natural and logical hub for Glacier Bay National Park, and in fact, we have been called “The Gateway to Glacier Bay” for many years.

The Hoonah Borough request may be based on false premises. Hoonah claims that the lands within the proposed borough, “comprises the ancestral lands of the Huna Tlingit.” The truth of this statement is debatable, however, we may set that aside and look to the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Act which settled all Alaska Native “homeland” claims. Hoonah Tlingit were signers of the ANCA agreement. If they have disputes with the settlement, the Local Boundary Commission is not the appropriate place to seek remedy. Likewise, “homeland” claims are not a justification for boroughs under the Local Boundary Commission.

The proposed borough deprives Gustavus and other small communities of future revenue, growth, and opportunity by buttonholing the communities in the proposed borough. This not only runs counter to the purpose of a borough, to support the communities that reside within, but it would be irresponsible for the State to grant such a borough, leaving the State with the potential obligation to support these communities in the future. Despite the fact that I wish Gustavus wouldn't grow, it is and will continue to! We must reserve the opportunities to remain self-supporting. Hoonah's Borough would not only rob us of the future opportunity, but could potentially tax the seasonal businesses that Gustavus' economy is built upon.

Hoonah proposes a 1% tax on all retail sales within the proposed borough. There is no reason to assume this tax will not grow, and unlike our own city tax, the citizens will have no recourse to adjust the tax. Additionally, we will benefit nothing from the tax. While this tax would not affect my business directly, since I am doing business in the buttonholed community of Gustavus, it could indirectly affect the multitude of costs associated with transporting people and goods through the proposed borough waterways, which would affect my bottom line, my livelihood, and that of my employees.

This is an ill conceived, overreaching attempt that appears to be fueled by financial motivation on Hoonah's part, and does not give due respect to the culture, history, or economic livelihood of the many existing communities and cities within the proposed boundary. It does not serve the best interests of the area in question, nor of the State of Alaska. I request that this proposal be rejected.

Please see the resolution and comments provided by Mayor Shelley Owens of Gustavus, AK for further explanation and detail.

Thank you for your time,
Kelly McLaughlin

