

Jacques Norvell

PO Box 83
Elfin Cove, Ak 99825
(907) 209-8649

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LBC ALASKA
Jedediah Smith

To whom it may concern,

This letter is in reference to the proposed Hoonah Borough and the inclusion of the Community of Elfin Cove.

I have been working or living in and around Elfin Cove for the past 50 years. My wife and I now live in the cove year round since 2021 when I retired from flying. I spent most of those years serving Elfin Cove as a bush pilot as well as a few years in the commercial fishing industry. My father and family built a house here in 1976. A few years later, dad sold the house to a man who turned it into the first sport fishing lodge in the cove. Dad foresaw the development of this community as a strong mix of users with fishing lodges being a significant part.

There have been changes good and bad with this growth, but regardless of the changes, the people that live and work here have always found solutions to the problems that arise and implement them in an efficient and cost effective manner. Efficiency and cost effectiveness, in my opinion, would be a thing of the past if we were to be forced into a borough. With most of our outside needs and wants being supplied from Juneau, it just doesn't make sense at all.

As you surely know, flying and boating are the only means of transport in and out of the cove. There are no commercial aircraft operators based anywhere on Chichagof Island. Juneau is the hub for the region's flying needs. Flights between Elfin Cove and Juneau are expensive, but flights between small communities like Gustavus, Hoonah, Tenakee add additional legs and considerably more expense and time. The cost, energy, time, and insecurity related to air and water transportation makes a powerful case against the standards required to approve this borough application. Elfin Cove is a challenging destination in all seasons. Weather delays are common for flights year round and in winter months those delays for passengers, freight, and mail are often 1-3 weeks. When problems occur and we need help, the fastest response will always be from Juneau.

Personally, I think we are able to provide for our needs with the systems that are in place quite well. Apparently the writers of the proposed borough application think the same.

There is little if any mention how the Hoonah Borough would be a benefit to Elfin Cove. This leaves me thinking that the only benefit to either community would be a relatively small tax flow in one direction.

One simple problem that concerns me is the loss of independence and close knit decision making that adding another layer of government will cause. In addition, Elfin Cove would have very little power or influence in this borough due to the considerable imbalance in voting population. Self governing and fewer layers of government is a good idea that I applaud.

Perhaps the most glaring conflict of this proposal with the state standards is the exclusion of other similar communities on Chichagof Island; Tenakee, Pelican, and the mainland community of Gustavus. It may be explained that these are not enclaves, but the effect is identical. I'm sorry, but that is one conspicuous boundary! They have literally "skirted" around the issue. Let me ask, does this tell you anything about how the residents of these communities might feel about being included in the borough? And why is Elfin Cove not due the same consideration?

I am not aware of anyone that resides or owns property in Elfin Cove that is in favor of this action. This has been stated very clearly through our organization. There are multiple places in the standards concerning the state's best interest that show this action is not well thought out.

Finally, if it ain't broke, don't fix it! I know there are a few issues presently in Elfin Cove that need to be addressed and resolved in due time, but becoming part of this borough isn't the solution for any of them. Please let us work it out the way we always have with the tools that are now available to us. We appreciate the support of the great State of Alaska and we can and will continue to thrive right here in Elfin Cove!

Sincerely yours,

Jacques Norvell