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Commission, Boundary (CED sponsored)

From: Russell Thynes [rdthynes@gci.net]
To: Commission, Boundary (CED sponsored)
Cc:
Subject: Emailing: Proposed Petersburg borough commentary
Attachments:  [Proposed borough.wps\(30KB\)](#)

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Proposed borough

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Russell Thynes
Southeast Instruments
Box 2047
Petersburg, Alaska 99833
907-772-3899

REC'D OCT 24 2011

October 24, 2011

Brent Williams
Division of Community & Regional Affairs
Department of Commerce
550 West 7th Avenue
Suite 1770
Anchorage, AK 99501-3510

Mr. Williams,

As a Petersburg business owner and Petersburg property owner I wish to voice my sincere opposition to the proposed Petersburg borough plan. My opposition to this plan is based on a broad range of issues, but I will try narrow my arguments to those that should concern the boundary commission.

3ACC 110.045 (Relationship of Interests)

A comparison of the lifestyles of the average Petersburg resident with that of someone residing at a homestead on Kupreanof Island, Farragut Bay, or Keene Channel yields a "study in contrasts". Take, for example, the statement published by the Petersburg Chamber of Commerce on their national website...

"Most residents [of Petersburg proper] are active in some aspect of Petersburg's community life, and become involved in non-profit groups, Sons of Norway and other fraternal organizations, city boards and commissions, and in groups that have grown out of common interests. Athletic teams are available for the young or young-at-heart through the Petersburg's Parks and Recreation Department, the Petersburg Little League, and other organizations."

This citation provides a useful template for the purposes of determining if Petersburg shares a common interest with those off-island inhabitants that the current Petersburg City Council wishes to subsume. Petersburg, by its own declaration, prides itself, and rightly so, on its community spirit and the active participation of its local residents in sustaining a vibrant village atmosphere.

In contrast, the off-island inhabitants have deliberately sought the kind of lifestyle diversity that is not possible in this village setting. They generate their own

electrical power, supply their own water, and some subsistence-fish or raise livestock. Without exception they value distance, privacy, and self sufficiency. Some off-island inhabitants may not even visit Petersburg or Wrangell for weeks at a time. Many are retired and have chosen to step back from public service in their later years. Younger families with children at home often choose to home-school their children for lifestyle as well as practical reasons.

Off-island inhabitants willingly support local business in Petersburg and Wrangell and contribute generously to sales tax revenues through legitimate commerce. None are clamoring for government services or have any wish to be maintained by the City of Petersburg.

While a Petersburg resident on Mitkof Island actually has a legal claim on public utilities, fire protection, and emergency services, those outside the geographical area don't expect or desire these benefits. If they did they would simply move to town.

So, when you juxtapose the lifestyle, living standards, community expectations and vocational activities of Petersburg community members (as defined by their own Chamber of Commerce) with those of off-island inhabitants, the contrast is clear and distinct.

3ACC 110.045 (c)(2) Representation

Southeast Alaska, unlike the vast mainland region of the state, is separated into islands. For a local government to be truly representative there needs to be fair and equal opportunity for those residents to attend local council meetings and to install true advocacy on the local council. A Petersburg resident, for example, can watch the local council meeting on cable television. If he chooses, he can attend the council meeting in person. Typically he would arrive at a 7:00PM council meeting via automobile, in dry clothing, and safely return home at 10:30 PM...even in snowy weather. Citing the Petersburg Chamber of Commerce national website...

"On Mitkof Island there are fishing, hunting, and hiking areas that are accessible by automobile and trail. There is an intricate road system on the island ..."

Year-around transportation in order to attend local council meetings is not possible for inhabitants of the surrounding islands. During the dark months, between October and March, it is not only inconvenient but often hazardous to navigate Frederick Sound, Greenrocks Pass, or Scow Bay. To think that off-island inhabitants inside the proposed Petersburg borough would receive equal and fair representation on a borough council is not realistic.

Unwelcome Proposal and Dubious Process

The notion of borough formation is not a popular idea in Petersburg. Especially among those residents employed in the private sector. For example, in order to submit its proposed borough plan to the Alaska State Boundary Commission the city had to obtain a minimum number of signatures from residents living outside the current city limits. Based on our local population at that time, that number was 21 signatures. In April 2011, after six months of aggressive promoting, the city finally managed to obtain the last signature.

It is interesting to note the demographic composition of those signers. Most are couples residing in the same residence, and thus do not represent distinct households. One couple does not actually own residential property outside the Petersburg City limits, but is living in housing provided by the State of Alaska. It is also interesting to note that the signers are overwhelmingly government employees.

In March 2011 CCUB (Concerned Citizens of the Unorganized Borough) circulated a grass-roots petition declaring opposition to the proposed Petersburg borough. This petition accumulated over 300 signatures in less than 5 weeks. The idea of altering our current form of local government is not popular among the citizenry of Petersburg.

3 AAC 110.060 (a)(7) (Economics)

As a Petersburg business owner I believe that the proposed Petersburg borough plan is short sighted and will have a net-negative impact on our local economy. The plan does nothing to improve our business climate and will actually diminish discretionary spending by transferring more private money to the public sector.

When stripped of all its decorations and vague promises, the proposed Petersburg borough is accurately viewed as just another tax mechanism for the purposes of growing and maintaining our unusually large local government. This is no time to lay additional taxes on off-island inhabitants of Southeast Alaska and it is certainly no time to burden the citizens of Petersburg with conflicting outside interests.

Conclusion

When the Alaska State Constitution was ratified the regional delegates had decided against the "county" form of government that is common to the "lower 48". But they did not anticipate that massive portions of our state would be mothballed and rendered economically inert by outside interests.

Today the regional economy of Southeast Alaska is being held in stasis by federal regulations, federal dependency, and powerful environmental forces. Until we can gain release of our regions natural resources we will never enjoy a

reasonable expectation of building a stable and diversified economic base. Until the region has a stabilized private sector economy we simply cannot afford to grow the local government sector.

Sincerely,

Russell Thynes