

# CITY & BOROUGH OF WRANGELL

## BOROUGH MANAGER'S REPORT

Tuesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024



### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE  
ASSEMBLY OF CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL

**FROM:** MASON F. VILLARMA, *INTERIM BOROUGH  
MANAGER/FINANCE DIRECTOR*

**SUBJECT:** BOROUGH MANAGER'S REPORT

**DATE:** Tuesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024

### ONGOING LANDSLIDE RECOVERY & RESPONSE

The City and Borough of Wrangell remains committed to providing Wrangellites with the most up-to-date information so they can be informed of making personal decisions regarding their safety.

The Borough has had a series of meetings with the Alaska Department of Geological and Geophysical Surveys (DGGs) and Alaska Department of Transportation (ADOT) to streamline the process for disseminating information to the public. The Borough shared the preliminary interpretive report (PIR) on February 6<sup>th</sup> that highlights the conditions and variables pre and post landslide at MP 11.2 and at Middle Ridge Cabin road. The PIR does not establish what caused the landslides, but rather offers an analysis of the data collected leading up to landslide activity occurring. In response to the release of the PIR, the Borough released a statement to the community on the measures we are taking to better understand these disasters and how we can monitor and mitigate risks to public health and safety. Both the PIR and letter to the community can be found on the Borough's official website here: <https://www.wrangell.com/community/112-mile-zimovia-hwy-landslide-preliminary-interpretive-report-pir>

Additionally, the Borough received a briefing from ADOT on Friday, February 9<sup>th</sup> where ADOT staff presented the process for data collection using the drone-in-the-box and weather stations. The drone will fly once weekly on Wednesdays (weather permitting) and analyze the orthoimagery collected from the drone. This data is overlaid and will have a 4-dimensional model composed that shows erosion and deposit activity as well

as movement on the slope. The one weather station that has been deployed is tracking data and logging it into a CSV file that will provide valuable information to ADOT as they understand the changes in the landslide area and marry them up with the observed weather conditions. This data will also help the Borough have data sets to aid in the construction and implementation of a landslide advisory platform. The weather station data will eventually be transmitted to the weather service so that data can be viewed by the public in real time. The Borough will share when this transition is executed. ADOT will also release a monthly report that comments on their analysis for the preceding month. The first report will be issued around March 1<sup>st</sup>.

In the event that there are significant changes in conditions that pose a threat to public safety, ADOT will contact the Borough and the Borough will relay that information via Nixel, the Borough website, Borough Facebook pages, and inform the media.

As noted in the letter referenced above, the Borough is working with Alaska Municipal League to build an advisory platform that is not only focused on landslide risk but also avalanche risk too. As partners, we believe this will serve a broader range of municipalities which will allow for costs to be absorbed by all users instead of that responsibility being placed solely on the Borough. A representative of the Borough will attend the landslide work group in Sitka on March 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> to better understand the steps needed to create a platform.

## **STATE LOBBYING AND DELEGATION VISIT**

On January 29<sup>th</sup> - January 31<sup>st</sup>, Mayor Gilbert and I participated in multiple meetings with State officials and members of the State Delegation. The following is a summary of the trip:

### **Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys:**

Met with DGGGS to review preliminary interpretive report draft and to discuss additional study moving forward. We talked about submitting an application together for the FEMA-Cooperative Technical Partnership grant program that will allow DGGGS to collect data across the entire Borough.

### **Senator Stedman:**

Met with Senator Stedman and *Chief of Staff*, David Scott, to discuss the Borough's forthcoming CAPSIS priorities. Securing the FY 24 supplemental appropriation for the Dam Rehabilitation Project and the Public Safety Building were the two top priorities conveyed to the Senator.

### **Commissioner Boyle (DNR):**

Discussed the need for an easement for the Emergency Access Road, the tideland clean-up needed at the landslide site, Petroglyph beach major maintenance, derelict vessel disposal and entitlement land status.

**Christy Colles, DNR Director of Mining, Land, and Water:**

Further discussed entitlement lands, timber harvest jointly being pursued with the state, and the emergency access easement application. We have a goal of obtaining an easement in the next 4 months for the emergency access road. The Borough has also followed up with Greg Staunton regarding the 2025-2026 timber harvest of Earl West and how the Borough could start planning for a joint timber harvest.

**Representative Ortez:**

Met with Representative and advocated for our CAPSIS priorities and the funding the DEED CIP major maintenance program to aggregate spending of \$42M+. We also offered our support for SB88 and the Alaska Marine Highways.

**Chris Goins, Southcoast DOT Director:**

Discussed completing the airport runway back-up generator work needed, the DOT bluff project status (and synergies with our sanitation facility), coordinating strategic painting and paving activities, and disseminating critical information regarding the MP 11.2 landslide.

**Governor's State of the State Address:**

Mayor Gilbert and myself attended the reception for the Governor's State of the State and had good follow up conversations with many of the commissioners and staffers who offered their support during the landslide response effort. On behalf of the City and Borough of Wrangell, Mayor Gilbert was honored by Governor Dunleavy. We thanked the Governor for his support during the tragic landslide and noted we will be continuing to work with members of his cabinet and our representation on the Hill to make headway on addressing our public safety concerns and projects.

**SEALASKA:**

Met with representatives from Sealaska Corporation to discuss business opportunities and community initiatives to reindigenize Wrangell and do a better job of showcasing our rich Native culture to visitors. We will host the Sealaska Board on March 8<sup>th</sup> for a work session at City Hall to focus on collaborative opportunities.

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As a reminder, the Borough Assembly adopted State CAPSIS priorities last December. From recent conversations with legislators, the Borough will strategically submit the priorities highlighted in blue below:

<u>Priority</u>	<u>Project Name</u>
1	Dams Stabilization and Improvements
2	Public Safety Building Rehabilitation
3	Wrangell School Facilities Improvements
4	Wastewater Treatment Upgrades to Address Disinfection

- 5 Eastern Channel Emergency Access Route
- 6 SEAPA Transformer Power Upgrades
- 7 Barge Ramp Replacement
- 8 Inner Harbor Replacement
- 9 Deep Water Port Brownfield Assessment and Cleanup
- 10 Zimovia Highway Sewer System Upgrades
- 11 Zimovia Highway Feeder Three Upgrades
- 12 Diesel Generation Power Plant Replacement
- 13 Low Pressure Water Main System Replacement
- 14 State Parks Funding for Petroglyph Beach State Park Improvements
- 15 Swimming Pool Roof Replacement
- 16 Community Center Life and Safety Upgrades
- 17 School Access Road Improvements
- 18 M/V Chugach USFS Ranger Boat Display

## **MILL PROPERTY STRATEGY**

The Borough would like to consider making the mill property as productive as possible in the short term. We have received a proposal to lease a larger tract of land at the mill property in exchange for work services being performed on behalf of the Borough. The agenda has an item to discuss our approach to the mill property.

## **STATE AND BOROUGH LOGGING PARTNERSHIP**

Borough administration discussed the possibility of a joint timber sale effort between DNR and the Borough. The State of Alaska has included Earl West in its 5-year plan for timber harvest and has it listed as a project for 2025-2026. With the Borough having complete management rights to all entitlement lands, we reached out to Greg Staunton, DNR Forester, on the steps to pursuing a joint timber sale.

The first step is forming a land management plan. Typically, a land management plan would be developed prior to inventorying timber. The plan would consider several uses and would advisably have a forestry component. The land management plan would set out your priorities and best use of the land.

The second step is establishing an inventory. Scoping during this phase may involve some level of timber cruising to document or indicate the timber potential but not necessarily. Once land is deemed appropriate to manage for timber it may be inventoried to portray it more accurately at that point in time and project its potential. A “timber cruise” is a sample method used to estimate the timber in a forest involving some number of measurements. The type and variability of the timber influence the timber cruise design along with the purpose. A timber cruise for a timber sale is typically done more intensively than for an inventory. Tolerance for risk, the values present, and available funding also contribute to the design.

The third step is to form an MOA with the State. The State has a history of partnering on timber sales with trusts and universities, but municipal partnerships are a bit more uncommon. That said, just because they are uncommon does not mean they are possible and productive agreements to accomplish shared goals and enhance profitability of a timber venture.

The Borough will begin this lengthy process and report as milestones have been achieved. The following link will take readers to the 5-year timber sale schedule that DNR has published: <http://forestry.alaska.gov/timber/ketchikan.htm#fiveyear>

### **COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT & NON-UNION PLAN**

The IBEW membership voted down the proposed plan that was tentatively agreed to back in early January. The Borough will continue to seek solutions to get the collective bargaining agreement for FY25-27 across the finish line.

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As always, I am at the Assembly's disposal. I look forward to continuing the meaningful progress we are making.

Sincerely,

*Mason F. Villarma*

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