



CITY & BOROUGH OF WRANGELL
INCORPORATED MAY 30, 2008

OFFICE OF THE BOROUGH MANAGER

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MEMORANDUM

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

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

SUBJECT: MANAGER'S REPORT

DATE: DECEMBER 12, 2023

11-MILE ZIMOVIA HIGHWAY LANDSLIDE RECOVERY & RESPONSE

CURRENT STATUS:

The ongoing landslide recovery effort, anticipated to continue for several weeks, prompts the Borough to express sincere appreciation to first responders, search and rescue professionals, City employees, and volunteers for their swift and crucial assistance in the aftermath of this tragic event.

For safety reasons, the 11-mile Zimovia Highway landslide site will remain closed on Tuesday, December 12th, and likely Wednesday, December 13th. The Department of Transportation has installed two 36-inch culverts to facilitate debris flow without compromising the road. Subsequent to the inclement weather, a 72-inch culvert will be added, and road resurfacing will be undertaken one lane at a time. Access through the site will be limited to Borough residents with permits, adjusting permitted times based on weather conditions and construction requirements. The schedule for the next phase will be posted by 8 AM on Wednesday, with emergency access available throughout the construction period. This roadwork is expected to persist for an additional three weeks.

Additionally, Geologists continue to develop causation reports and analyze the LiDAR data collected on the 11-Mile slide and the 3-Mile area. They have noted the LiDAR data collected suggests additional activity midway up the south-side of the 11-Mile slide has

occurred, and constituents should be advised that there is increased risk of slide activity when experiencing high volumes and rates of precipitation. Once the report is finalized, the Borough will post it for constituents to read.

Finally, the Borough is hosting SEOC and FEMA this week so that they can conduct their joint Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA). The PDA seeks to assess and validate the cost incurred by the Borough and State agencies to see if a federal disaster declaration is warranted. The primary benefits of a federally declared disaster are access to direct technical assistance and less competitive hazard mitigation funding. The administration will inform the Assembly as soon as a decision is made.



FUTURE DISASTER PREPAREDNESS MEASURES

In response to the recent landslide disaster and with a commitment to enhancing community resilience, the Borough is embarking on several strategic initiatives to better prepare for future disasters. Firstly, recognizing the deficiencies in the current Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), the Borough is leveraging technical assistance from the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), Sitka, and Haines to develop a comprehensive and up to date EOP. The process will involve engaging the community, ensuring a collaborative and inclusive approach to emergency preparedness.

To fortify its resilience further, the Borough is actively seeking funding through FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program to update its Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP). With the current plan set to expire in 2025, the Borough aims to proactively address potential risks, recognizing that HMP approvals typically require 12-18 months.

The Borough's commitment to effective communication is demonstrated through the expansion of its NIXEL campaign, with subscriber numbers rising from 280 to 747 residents over the past two weeks, constituting approximately 36% of the Borough's population. This initiative ensures that critical information reaches a broader audience promptly.



The collaboration between the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Borough is evident in their efforts to install a drone in the box and two weather stations. This enhancement in monitoring capabilities will provide better oversight over landslide risk liabilities within the Borough. Simultaneously, the Borough Fire Department is proactively investing in a drone and training to expand its monitoring capacity, enhancing overall disaster preparedness.

Additionally, in partnership with Lisa Busch of the Sitka Sound Science Center, the Borough is working on creating a platform similar to sitka-landslide-risk.org. This initiative aims to provide residents with an accessible tool to monitor landslide risk based on variables such as geographical location on the island and current weather conditions.


In the event that the landslide disaster escalates to a federal declaration, the Borough is poised to pursue FEMA's 404 and 406 hazard mitigation programs. This strategic approach aims to secure funding for future mitigation efforts at the slide site and across the entire Borough, ensuring a comprehensive and sustained commitment to disaster preparedness and resilience.


PERSONNEL UPDATE & ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING

NEW HIRES:




In a recent series of personnel changes within the organization, Jeanie Arnold has been appointed as the *Nolan Center Director*. Bringing a wealth of experience and a fresh perspective to the role, Jeanie is expected to lead the Nolan Center with dedication and innovation. Her background and skills align seamlessly with the goals of the center, and her appointment is anticipated to contribute positively to the overall success of the organization. The hiring of Jeanie Arnold reflects the commitment to fostering strong leadership and ensuring the continued growth and excellence of the Nolan Center. Jeanie has been able to shadow outgoing *Nolan Center Director*, Cyni Crary, for the past few weeks allowing for some institutional continuity.

The Nolan Center is actively conducting interviews to fill the *Nolan Center Coordinator* position, underscoring the commitment to building a robust and dynamic team to support the center's mission and objectives.

 **Low risk of landslide now**




24 hour forecast
 Low risk for the next 24 hours. [Show chart](#)

3 day forecast

Today	 Low	+
Saturday	 Low	+
Sunday	 Low	+

Last updated 7 minutes ago with data from [National Weather Service](#) and [Synoptic Data](#)

Understanding risk

-  **High** Multiple landslides are very likely to occur in the Sitka area. There have been three storms in the last 20 years with similarly intense rainfall, and all three of them initiated multiple landslides.
-  **Medium** Landslides are possible. Isolated landslides have occurred in Sitka with similarly intense rainfall in the past.
-  **Low** Landslides are unlikely based on historic observations in the last 20 years. Rainfall-induced landslides have not been documented for these rainfall conditions.

Additionally, the Union and the Borough have been working collaboratively to finalize a letter of agreement appointing Dwight Yancy as the *Interim Wrangell Municipal Light and Power Director*. Concurrently, Dwight will continue his existing responsibilities as the *Electrical Foreman*. This arrangement is a strategic move to leverage Dwight's expertise in both roles, ensuring a smooth transition and maintaining operational efficiency within the Municipal Light and Power department.

In addition to these changes, the organization has recently hired Tammy Stromberg as the *Borough Controller*, emphasizing a strategic move to bring in a highly experienced professional for this pivotal role. Tammy, a seasoned accounting professional with a CPA designation, boasts a wealth of experience as a Business Manager for several school districts and has previously served as a financial consultant. Scheduled to assume her responsibilities on February 5th, 2024, Tammy's extensive background in financial management and consulting positions her as a valuable asset for steering the Borough towards effective financial planning and administration.

RETIREMENTS & NEW BEGINNINGS:

Cyni Crary, who has served as *Nolan Center Director* since July 2018, will be leaving her position. Her tenure has been marked by dedication and innovation, contributing significantly to the center's growth. The organization expresses gratitude for her service and wishes her success in future endeavors. The board is currently engaged in the process of selecting a new director to continue the center's mission.

Additionally, we would like to announce the retirement of Rod Rhoades, who has been a part of the Borough since December 2018. Rod's last day will be on December 20, 2023, with his official retirement effective on December 31, 2023. In light of Rod's departure, Dwight Yancy will step into the role of Interim Director. We extend our sincere appreciation to Rod for his dedicated service and wish him a fulfilling retirement.

RESTRUCTURING:

The Borough is proposing a restructuring of the Capital Facilities Department and Parks and Recreation. It is being proposed that the Capital Facilities Department is amended to the Capital Projects and Code Enforcement Department, whereby maintenance and custodial personnel are shifted over to Parks and Recreation. This accomplishes two key objectives: 1) Allows the Capital Projects Director to focus their attention explicitly on projects and code compliance (a new value-add) 2) Allows for redundancy to be developed between the Parks and Recreation maintenance staff and the facilities maintenance staff, allowing for a greater capacity to cover the existing maintenance need of each Borough facility.

Set to begin on December 20th, 2023, union negotiations between the Borough and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) are scheduled for two half days on December 20th and December 21st. Following a break for the holidays, discussions will resume in January. The Borough maintains a steadfast commitment to prioritizing the retention and development of a skilled and dedicated staff. These negotiations underscore the Borough's dedication to fostering a collaborative and supportive working relationship with the union, ensuring the continued growth and satisfaction of its workforce.

GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY'S VISIT TO THE BOROUGH

Governor Mike Dunleavy's visit to the Borough on Friday, November 24th, marked a pivotal moment in addressing the aftermath of the recent landslide disaster. Accompanied by General Saxe (MVA), Commissioner Anderson (DOT), and Commissioner Boyle (DNR), the Governor engaged in a comprehensive debrief with the Borough upon arrival, acknowledging and discussing the overall response to the disaster.

During the meeting, the Borough seized the opportunity to advocate for crucial investments in primary public safety projects, emphasizing the importance of the Dam Rehabilitation Project, Public Safety Building Renovation, and the East Channel Emergency Access Road. Recognizing the essential role these projects play in enhancing the community's safety and resilience, the Borough conveyed the urgency of state support.



To provide the Governor and his commissioners with a firsthand understanding of the impact of the landslide, they embarked on a sight tour, witnessing the affected areas and gaining insight into the challenges faced by the community.

In the subsequent weeks, the Borough Administration demonstrated dedicated efforts to secure funding for the Wrangell Dam Rehabilitation project. Aimed at inclusion in the Governor's Capital Budget on December 15th, the project's significance in the region was emphasized by Tyson Gallagher, *Chief of Staff* for the Governor. Even if not initially included, there remains an opportunity for revision during the 30-day amendment period, with indications that the project is likely to be prioritized given its crucial role in

the community's recovery and safety measures. Governor Dunleavy's visit and the ongoing collaborative efforts underscore a commitment to addressing immediate needs and fostering long-term resilience within the Borough.

WASHINGTON D.C. LOBBYING EFFORT

The Washington DC Delegation visit post-landslide proved to be a valuable opportunity to promote investment into the Borough's public safety projects and initiatives. The Borough's Senior Leadership Team, comprised of Tom Wetor, Kate Thomas, Matt Henson, and Mason Villarma, commenced the day with a focused and productive hour-long meeting in Senator Murkowski's office. The discussions centered around the recent landslide, with a specific emphasis on the critical need for investment in public safety projects, particularly the dam stabilization alternative and the Public Safety Building (PSB). Senator Murkowski expressed her commitment to championing these initiatives, signaling a positive outlook for funding, especially for the Wastewater Treatment Plant secondary disinfection requirement.



In addition to Senator Murkowski's office, the delegation engaged with the Office of Arctic Policy at the Pentagon, exploring potential opportunities tied to the upcoming national defense strategy unveiling in February. While acknowledging that a full-scale military base may not be feasible, valuable insights were gained for future discussions about the Borough fulfilling maintenance and utility functions for the Navy or Coast Guard.

The subsequent day's agenda included productive meetings with USDA-FS, where *Madam Deputy Secretary*, Torres Small, and *Alaska Acting Regional Forester*, Janelle Crocker, were present. Accomplishments included prioritizing the Middle Ridge Slide for clearing/restoration and establishing the East Channel Emergency Access Road as a longer-term goal. Discussions also touched on small timber sales, transparency in the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) process, and potential land swaps to enhance acreage for SRS

formula benefits. Janelle Crocker's upcoming visit to Wrangell was confirmed for formalizing objectives.

Meetings with Rep. Peltola and FEMA followed, addressing the need for further funding of the Dam and PSB through appropriation power and detailing FEMA's response strategies, including potential escalations to the FEMA level and considerations for the Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA). The delegation also explored options for the Dam, discussing the adoption of NFIP code language or applying for BRIC funding through FEMA. Plans for monitoring equipment deployment across the Borough were outlined, and a supplemental emergency appropriation for the emergency access road was highlighted as a possibility.

The visit concluded with a meeting with Senator Sullivan, whose unique influence with Federal agencies facilitated discussions with FEMA and USDA. Senior leadership discussed the need for investment in public safety projects and advocated for Wrangell as a potential service/utility station for the military or Coast Guard. The trip highly increased the Borough's potential for Federal funding and support. Making these trips annually will be key to meeting the Borough's future objectives.

JOINT MEETING WITH USFS/WCA

In a recent meeting between the Borough, the US Forest Service (USFS), and the Wrangell Cooperative Association, various key topics were covered. The meeting commenced with introductions from Forest Service representatives, Assembly Members, and staff. The discussion then delved into an 11-Mile Zimovia Highway disaster debrief, providing insights into the recent events and the Borough's response.

The Middle Ridge Landslide was a focal point of the meeting, with detailed discussions on its prioritization for clearing and restoration. The proposed East Channel Emergency Access Road, considered a longer-term goal, was explored, with receptivity from the Forest Service contingent. Attention was also directed towards decommissioned logging roads in the inventory, addressing their status and potential implications.

Industrial and community infrastructure took center stage, highlighting the interconnectedness of these elements and the need for collaborative efforts. Integrated forest management and ongoing restoration projects were also discussed, emphasizing the importance of sustainable practices. The meeting touched upon the potential for small timber sales, aligning with local logging operations.

The Secure Rural Schools formula was a notable point of conversation, with the Borough seeking transparency in the process and exploring potential improvements. The discussion also opened avenues for collaborative opportunities beyond the immediate concerns, fostering a broader partnership.

The Forest Service's Forest Management plan development was discussed, providing a timeline for development and underscoring the importance of the Tongass being a

multipurpose National Forest. The meeting concluded with discussions around the Chugach USFS Ranger Boat project, and the need for that project to achieve additional funding.

PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING FINANCING

The Borough is actively working on securing a financing package for the \$10.5 million Public Safety Building Renovation. A crucial step involves pursuing the USDA-Community Facilities loan program, and a recent meeting with Director Robert Chambers focused on exploring synergies between this program and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The loan application process is set to kick off once the Preliminary Architectural Report (PAR) is completed by Northwind Architects in January 2024. This strategic approach aims to leverage federal resources to support the necessary renovations and upgrades for the Public Safety Building.

Simultaneously, the Borough is employing a multi-pronged strategy to secure funding, including Congressional Directed Spending (CDS) requests. The senior leadership team has actively sought support from Senators Murkowski and Peltola to include an appropriation for the Public Safety Building in their legislative efforts in FY2025.

Additionally, the Borough has reinforced its commitment by sending a follow-up letter to the Governor, urging further financial support for the Public Safety Building in the upcoming capital budget. This specific request amounts to \$5 million and is distinct from funding sought for the Dam Rehabilitation Project, demonstrating the Borough's dedication to addressing critical infrastructure needs on multiple fronts.

OLD-HOSPITAL SALE PROGRESS – BENNETT MCGRATH

Continued progress has been made toward selling the old hospital. The Borough has been working with several interested parties and Bennett McGrath will provide a verbal update on our progress.

INNER HARBOR CLEAN-UP

The Borough, with the help of Dave Miller and his team, was able to clean-up the derelict personal property at the head of the inner harbor. The Borough incurred no direct cost associated with removal and disposal.

BEFORE:



AFTER:

