
Kenai Peninsula Borough

Central & South Kenai Peninsula Hospital Service Area Common Boundary Expansion O2016-22 ~ Public Hearing Summary

June 16, 2016 – 6:00 p.m.

Assembly Chambers, George A. Navarre Borough Administration Building, Soldotna, Alaska

CALL TO ORDER

In accordance with KPB 16.04.040, a public hearing was held in Soldotna, Alaska on June 16, 2016, in Assembly Chambers at the George A. Navarre Borough Administration Building, Soldotna. Assembly Member Johnson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to hear comments from interested persons favoring or opposing Ordinance 2016-22 which proposes a common boundary amendment to the Central and South Kenai Peninsula Hospital Service Areas.

There were present:

Brent Johnson, Chair
Wayne Ogle
Willy Dunne

Assembly appointed members of the public hearing special committee.

Also in attendance were:

Johni Blankenship, Borough Clerk
Michele Turner, Deputy Borough Clerk

OPEN REMARKS

Chair Johnson provided information regarding the service area boundary process, proposed expansion boundary and the purpose for the service area expansion.

PUBLIC HEARING

Chair Johnson called for public comments.

The following people spoke in opposition to Ordinance 2016-22:

Eric Ogren, Sterling Highway
Roberta Highland, Homer
Derotha Ferraro, Homer
Jacque Lenew, Homer

The following people spoke in support of Ordinance 2016-22:

Kathy Wallace, Sterling Highway
Michelle Ogren, Clam Gulch
Janet Lucas, Sterling Highway
Steven Webb, Kasilof
Darwin Wallsmith, Sterling Highway
Debbie Cary, Ninilchik
Jim Kenshalo, Corea Bend
Dennis Ogren, Sterling Highway
Debbie Blossom, Sterling Highway
Martha Ogren, Clam Gulch

There being no one else who wished to speak the public comment period was closed.

CLOSING REMARKS

Assembly Member Ogle thanked everyone for attending on such a beautiful day. He stated the testimony provided for Ordinance 2016-22 had put a face with the issue, unlike last year's ordinance that was trying to accomplish a similar boundary change and no one appeared. Mr. Ogle stated this was local government at its best.

Assembly Member Dunne thanked everyone for attending and those who drove up from Homer. He stated public participation made all the difference. Mr. Dunne encouraged everyone to stay engaged with the process through eComment, and emails. He stated there was still information forthcoming from the administration and he looked forward to learning more regarding the issue.

Chair Johnson stated he intended to amend Ordinance 2016-22 at public hearing on July 26, 2016, which would move the boundary line to Oil Well Road. He requested those who lived south of Oil Well Road to attend and provide their testimony at the assembly meeting on July 26, 2016.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Johnson adjourned the meeting at 7:28 p.m.

[Clerk's Note: Chair Johnson's public hearing special committee report is attached.]

Ordinance 2016-22
Public Hearing Special Committee Report
Brent Johnson, Chair

We had a very fruitful public hearing. I counted at least 17 people in the audience, most of whom testified in favor of moving the boundary to south of Ninilchik. There was only one person there though who lived south of Oil Well Road. I don't believe the line will be moved south of Oil Well Road without a big turnout from people in that area at the July 26 assembly meeting.

Homer Hospital had 3 members in attendance, one who was an employee. They testified against the ordinance in general, but conceded reluctantly to moving the line to Barbara Drive. They want to wait until the Heath Care Task Force finishes meeting before making any change. Unfortunately, the Task Force has chosen not to take the matter of this boundary up. If they now do so because they realize that this isn't going to be ignored, it will be very hard for them to make any recommendations in time for the assembly to consider their advice and still get a proposition on the October ballot.

The Task Force meets next on June 29 and I kind of expect them to discuss this. To be sure, they are fast becoming too late to offer advice on an issue about 35 years old.

Assembly members Willy Dunn and Wayne Ogle asked good questions and were a great help with the meeting. The Borough Clerk and Deputy Clerk attended and were splendid help. They made an audio recording and will make a written report for the other assembly members and for the public.

There were also several emails of support sent for this public hearing.

- The main issues brought up by testifiers were:
- They live closer to Soldotna Hospital. Very effective testimony was given on this issue.
- The Senior Center sends a van to Soldotna every Tuesday for seniors to shop, visit medical facilities, etc. They are willing to send the van to Homer too, but in the past year have only been requested to do so one time.
- Some people testified that they do their "town business" in Soldotna, not Homer. To that end it made sense that their hospital business would also be most convenient in Soldotna.
- By email one person pointed out that their mother had used a doctor in Soldotna for many years. She trusted this doctor and would not chose to drive farther to Homer and deal with doctors she doesn't know.
- Homer Hospital service board members were disappointed because they had not received official notice of this public hearing in a timely fashion, in their opinion. However, the Borough Clerk had posted the public notices via all the correct protocol. The Homer Service Area Board (or board president) sent an email to the June 7 Assembly meeting opposing Ordinance 2016-22 and the Chief Executive Officer attended the June 7 Assembly meeting where ordinance 2016-22 was introduced. Furthermore, the Clarion, on June 10, ran a front page article describing Ordinance 2016-22 and mentioned the June 16 public hearing.
- Homer is long-distance via phone from Ninilchik, while Soldotna is not.
- At least one testifier had talked to his neighbors and reported they were unanimous in wanting the line moved.
- A testifier was unhappy because she didn't have the numbers from the Mayor regarding the bond issue effect on the future mill rate. However, those numbers came out only the day before yesterday, if I recall right. I passed them on via my emails to you in a timely fashion and have sent them to this testifier now as well.

- A couple testifiers said that their mother had sat on the Homer Hospital service Area board. She was involved in getting property for the Ninilchik Clinic. John and Marion Hyland actually donated that property. Highlands lived just north of Oil Well Road, off Kingsley Road.
- There were questions about what would happen if the line was moved south of Ninilchik Clinic. Would that mean that Homer Hospital could no longer do “imaging” there? Would they have to discontinue sharing doctors? Those questions will be answered by a borough attorney, asap.
- Numbers were quoted regarding the cost of moving the line to various locations. Those numbers had not been corrected for the bond issue mill rate effects. I hope to post those numbers at the next opportunity.
- One member stated that moving the boundary would require work and change is somewhat difficult. But he noted that the Borough of Anchorage and the City of Anchorage merged years ago. That merger was difficult but in the end it eliminated duplicate services and was a very good thing for the public.
- A member of the public informed us that Ninilchik School sends children to Ninilchik Clinic. These kids usually will see doctors in Soldotna if an illness or checkup is needed when they are home.
- One person said her parents had been patients at Soldotna hospital numerous times and had gone by ambulance at times. Thus, her family had extensive use of Soldotna Hospital, but paid taxes to Homer Hospital. She said that an ambulance ride can be a matter of haste and Soldotna is much closer for them.
- Homer Hospital does have a toll-free number.
- The current relationship between Ninilchik Clinic & Homer Hospital took a long time to figure out and no change should be made that would jeopardize that relationship. This whole thing should be put off for a while.
- A testifier asked which comes first, the October bond issue or the line move. Answer: they will be simultaneous and if the bonds pass—the folks who become Soldotna Service Area members will have to help pay off the bonds.
- Will this line affect the Road Service Area? Or any other Service Area? Answer: No.
- Oil and Gas properties are assessed by the state, not the borough. Therefore it has been difficult to find out exact values. We do know the State applies a tax rate of 20 mills to oil and gas properties. The borough taxes at a much lower rate and whatever is left goes to the State.
- Some testimony expressed disappointment that oil tax revenue would be lost if the line is moved, perhaps even suggesting it shouldn’t be done for that reason.
- A testifier then expressed dismay that “we the people” are going to get drowned out by oil & gas property. She made a strong point that “we the people” should be considered foremost.
- Wayne Ogle noted that the consultant hired to help the Task Force had rejected consolidating the hospitals. This had been a big disappointment to the Mayor. Some members of the audience had expressed much interest in combining the service areas of the 2 borough-owned hospitals.

That is my brief report. The above opinions about what was said are mine only and do not reflect other assembly members’ opinions and may not be accurate.

Thanks to everyone who participated!

Brent Johnson, Assembly Vice President
Special Committee Chair