



KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH

144 North Binkley Street • Soldotna, Alaska 99669-7520

Toll-free within the borough: 1-800-478-4441, Ext. 2150

PHONE: (907) 714-2150 • **FAX:** (907) 714-2377

www.mayor.kenai.ak.us

Mike Navarre
Borough Mayor

October 23, 2017

Bear Creek Fire Service Area Board Members
Anchor Point Fire and EMS Service Area Board Members
Kachemak Emergency Service Area Board Members
Seldovia Recreational Service Area Board Members
Seward-Bear Creek Flood Service Area Board Members

Re: Appointed vs. elected service area board members

Dear Service Area Board Members:

The Kenai Peninsula Borough is one of the few boroughs in the state — if not the only one — with elected service area boards. Unfortunately, elected service area boards create significant administrative burdens, especially during municipal elections, and I believe the elected seats may dissuade residents from serving on the boards. This letter is to inform your board of these issues and request that your board consider transitioning from an elected to an appointed board.

Service area board ballot splits

The Kenai Peninsula Borough has one of the most complicated election processes in the state. In this month's municipal election, the borough clerk's office managed 26 different ballots for Kenai Peninsula voters. Voters must receive the correct ballot that allows them to vote only on the issues and candidates within the specific geographic region where they reside. Due to the numerous elected service area boards in the borough, there are multiple "service area splits" within voting precincts, requiring more than one ballot even within the same precinct. Though most candidates for service board seats ran unopposed, the borough clerk still had to prepare and administer separate ballots within the same precinct. The vast majority of service area board candidates (88 percent in the past 17 years) ran unopposed, and approximately 20 percent of positions were filled by appointment after the election because no candidate filed for the office.

The precincts split by service area boundaries are:

Anchor Point - 4 ballots
Diamond Ridge - 3 ballots
Kasilof - 2 ballots

Ninilchik - 2 ballots
Salamatof - 3 ballots
Seldovia/Kachemak Bay - 4 ballots
Tyonek - 4 ballots

In addition, some voter precincts are also split by borough assembly district, further compounding the confusion and number of ballots required.

It is not difficult to quantify the administrative burden caused by these service area splits. If the borough did not have service area board splits this year, the voter pamphlet would have been 20 pages shorter. The clerk's office produces 25,000 voter pamphlets for each election. Switching to appointed boards would have saved more than \$4,000 in printing costs alone. However, printing costs are only one small element of the problems these splits cause. One of the most significant impacts is the extensive staff time required to process questioned and absentee ballots.

Processing questioned and absentee ballots

For every absentee ballot, election officials must determine which service area and assembly district the voter resides in. Election officials then have to determine which ballot the voter is entitled to receive. The Canvass Board then has to repeat the exact same process in its audit of the election. If a voter received a ballot for the wrong area, a facsimile ballot has to be created in order to allow only the correct portions of the ballot to count. This year, a two-person team of the Canvass Board had to go through that process for more than 250 ballots, one ballot at a time.

Ability to fill seats

Historically, there have been numerous vacant seats for service area boards, as well as seats where only one person filed to run for office. Frequently, boards must be filled by appointment because no candidates filed for election. Along with significant savings in administrative costs, switching to appointed boards could, I believe, increase public interest in serving as a board member. Residents may be willing to volunteer time to serve on a board, though they would be wary of participating in a campaign and navigating the election process requirements.

Appointed boards could actually result in more candidates; and the public would be able to provide input on multiple occasions during this process. This may result in an appointment process that allows the public more choices than unopposed elections. Appointed boards have functioned well for the road service area and throughout many other service areas in the state.

Transitioning to an appointed board

I ask that you consider passing a resolution requesting that your service area board be transitioned to an appointed board. The appointment process is a public process in which the service area recommends candidates, the mayor appoints a candidate, and the assembly confirms the appointment. The public would be able to provide comments during all phases of this process. Historically, Kenai Borough mayors have always followed service area board appointment

recommendations. In the past 17 years, over the course of four different mayoral administrations, every candidate recommended by the service area board has been appointed.

In 2012, the borough assembly considered transitioning all of the service area boards to appointed boards. At the time, the ordinance under consideration would have changed every service area board in the borough. While this would have been the most financially beneficial, not all boards were in support of the transition. The Anchor Point Fire and Emergency Service, Central Kenai Peninsula Hospital, Seldovia Recreational Service and Kachemak Emergency Service boards recommended approval by unanimous consent, while the Nikiski Fire Service and North Peninsula Recreation Service boards opposed the ordinance.

We recognize that each service area board is different in its ability to identify and recruit new members to serve. As such, we request that the boards individually consider if transitioning to an elected board makes sense for them at this time, and forward that request to the administration for consideration. This letter was sent to your board because you historically do not have multiple candidates run for a position, and because your board supported the transition when it was last considered.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact Borough Clerk Johni Blankenship for more information at 714-2162 or jblankenship@kpb.us.

Sincerely,



Mike Navarre
Mayor

cc: Service area fire chiefs
Scott Walden, Director, Office of Emergency Management, Kenai Borough
Stephanie Presley, Program Lead, Seward-Bear Creek Flood Service Area