

Tuesday May 17, 2005

To: Honorable Mayor Dale Bagley

Re: Resolution 2005-44, Supporting the Funny River Bridge

CC: Assembly members.



Dear Mayor Bagley:

I want you and the assembly members to know that I am vehemently opposed to the construction of a bridge across the Kenai River from the Sterling area to the Funny River side. This issue has come up at least twice since I have been a resident of Sterling. On both occasions, the opposition was so great that the proposal was dropped. I was somewhat astonished to learn that this proposal was once again on the agenda. As a compromise after the last defeat, it was agreed that Funny River Road would be paved and the area residents would be provided with better access to emergency services. Both of these items have been accomplished.

Let's face the facts. I can not think of any logical reason why a person who lives in Sterling would have a desire for this bridge. It certainly can not be considered as a short cut to Fred Meyers, Deep Creek, or any other place to which we may need to travel. Any supporters of this bridge that reside in Sterling must have some other motive. Construction of this bridge will only lead to more congestion and associated problems in what should remain a quiet, peaceful neighborhood.

Now, let us look at the costs involved. I would like to call your attention to both a memo you received from Gary Davis, Roads Director, and a Fact Sheet dated November 24, 2004. The author of the Fact Sheet is not identified. In his memo, Director Davis states that he has seen estimates of over \$11,000,000 for construction of this bridge. The Fact Sheet estimated the cost to be \$11,200,000 in 2004. Today these costs will be even higher. The memo also states in paragraph 2.(1) and (2) that "Huske Street will need major improvements since it is currently a narrow road, and it intercepts Scout Lake Loop at a dangerous curve and on the side of a hill. Spring Street is currently not constructed, and would be over one-half mile from Funny River Road." The acquisition of property to construct Spring Street will require exercise of eminent domain by the Borough. Is the Borough willing to undertake such a task? If so, at what cost? None of these costs are reflected in Resolution 2005-44.

The previous Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) cost more than \$750,000 and has expired. It will have to be completely redone at a cost that is estimated to exceed "several million dollars" (Ref. Fact Sheet P. 3). This cost is also not included in the bridge construction estimates. A new EIS may determine that construction of this bridge is not possible or practical. Is the Borough willing to pay this much of tax payers' money just for an EIS?

The State of Alaska has received a \$5,000,000 congressional earmark to begin the Funny River Bridge Project. This earmark requires a 20% match from the Borough. The State DOT has offered to pay one-half of this match, but only if the Borough agrees to assume management of the project and maintenance of the connecting roads forever. How much will this cost? The match only applies to the congressional earmark, most of which will be eaten up by the new EIS. All costs in excess of the \$5 million are solely the responsibility of the Borough. As both the Gary Davis memo and the Fact Sheet question, where will the remaining funds come from? If one makes a realistic estimate of all the costs associated with construction of this bridge, the total will likely exceed \$20 million. **We can not afford this bridge!**

I have a copy of one letter you received in support of the bridge. I do not know where the gentleman got his information, but he lost all credibility when he stated “this bridge does not need any Borough money.” The residents of Sterling and the Funny River area do not in any way overwhelmingly support this bridge. He states that this bridge would make residents of the Funny River area our neighbors. This is hardly a rational argument to spend millions of Borough dollars, and I already have all the neighbors I might want or need. His reference that a Soldotna contingent wants to funnel all traffic through their town is an admission that many Funny River property owners reside in the Anchorage area and only drive out on weekends and only during the Spring and Summer. If they don’t want to shop in Soldotna, they can, as some do now, buy everything they need in Anchorage. It’s not likely any food will spoil on the drive out here. Again, this is a completely invalid reason to either support or oppose the bridge.

Evidently a petition has been circulated at some local Sterling businesses, with the intent of showing the Assembly support for this bridge. This was done in what I can only classify as a somewhat secretive manner. I have shopped at one of these businesses at least twice recently and never was made aware of the petition. I believe that only a select group of people were made aware of its’ existence. This is not a proper way to learn public opinion on an issue. The petition only mentions Rabbit Run Road on the Funny River Side. It does not mention Scout Lake Loop, Huske, Spring Street, or any of the Borough costs associated with this project. As such, this petition must be considered as being somewhat deceptive. It can not in any way be considered as a legitimate or adequate means of receiving the public comment that the Assembly must have for such a significant decision. Given an equal opportunity, I am confident that I can produce signatures from more people that oppose this bridge than those who might support it. Without even attempting to go door to door, I have a list of 22 people whom oppose this project.

On a personal note, this bridge, and its’ associated projects (i.e. bike path, campground, boat launch, etc.), will destroy the peaceful, quiet neighborhood in which I reside. This is the primary reason why I made Alaska and Sterling in particular my residence. The present extension of Huske from the intersection of Betty Lou Drive and Duncan that proceeds to the river, is already a problem for local residents. We finally got the Borough to post No Parking signs along this stretch. Violators have torn down all the signs, and they now park there with impudence and trample private property. One neighbor has

experienced a tourist parking a motor home in his driveway, blocking access in either direction. We do not need any additional traffic!

The minutes of your last meeting contained no less than three proposals to increase taxes. I have seen many newspaper articles that show what a difficult time the Borough has had to come up with a budget. They also reflect the cut backs in services. My property taxes have increased by an unbelievable amount over the past four years. In the mean time, I have retired and now must live on 29% of my previous income. I can do that without additional taxes.

Construction of this bridge will benefit very few people. It is opposed by the majority of residents, on both sides of the river. This would be an absolute waste of our money.

Please enter this into the public record.

Respectfully, David A. Morris, Sterling