

TIMES

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SLUSH CUP WINNER!



Photo courtesy of Ben Napolitano

Jack Stahla back flips his way to victory in the 39th Annual Slush Cup. Stahla took home a 2016/17 season pass for his efforts. See more Slush Cup photos on page 2.

Q&A with the Seward Highway “Windy Corner” project manager

The Alaska Department of Transportation has been holding public meetings to discuss a new design of Windy Corner on the Seward Highway from milepost 105 to 107. The design changes are being implemented to make this section of the highway safer. Windy Corner is well known

as a treacherous corner for drivers to navigate in wet and icy conditions, and even in dry conditions has been the site of many highway crashes and head on collisions – some fatal.

The Windy Corner project will be one of the largest undertaken by the DOT on the

Seward Highway since the new highway section between Bird Point and Girdwood was constructed.

The Turnagain Times asked Tom Schmid, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities project manager, to answer some questions about the Windy Corner project.

See Page 11, Windy Corner Project Q&A

Proposition 9 narrowly passes by two votes

By Jon Scudder
Turnagain Times

It came down to two votes, but Proposition 9 narrowly passed, paving the way for Girdwood police services to be provided by the Whittier Police Department and paid for by an increase in the local property tax. The final vote count was 410 to 408 with 46.3 percent of Girdwood residents eligible to vote turning out for the April 5 Municipal Election.

The vote was certified on Tuesday evening by the Anchorage Assembly allowing the Girdwood Board of Supervisors to pursue a contract with the Whittier Police Department. Whittier is scheduled to begin services on July 1, a day after the Alaska State Troopers vacate their Girdwood Post.

Girdwood Board of Supervisors co-chair Sam Daniel sat down for an interview with the Turnagain Times last Saturday afternoon to discuss what citizens might expect of the new

local police services.

Daniel’s said he recognizes the narrow margin of votes that separated the votes reflects a divided town on the issue of local police services being provided by Whittier, a fact that GBOS members will take into account.

“The GBOS recognizes Proposition 9 passed by the slimmest of majorities,” said Daniel. “I was surprised. I really kind of assumed the questioned and absentee ballots would run right along in tandem with how the actual vote count went and the proposition would fail by at least a handful of votes. I’m mindful this is anything but a mandate. We will move forward mindful of this and take a close look at the concerns that citizens have voiced regarding public safety and with the Whittier option.”

One public concern commonly expressed concerns the competency of the Whittier Police Department to police Girdwood and its nearly 2,000 residents – much more than the approximately 200 resi-

See Back Page, Proposition 9 Narrowly Passes

Local police protection dominates GBOS meeting

By Jon Scudder
Turnagain Times

As the British adage goes “you can see the light at the end of the tunnel”. And the light is becoming a bit brighter for the Girdwood Board of Supervisors as they address the future of police protection for the Girdwood Valley Service Area.

A standing-room audience brought a full blitz of public testimony along with several Municipal of Anchorage officials

who consumed the vast majority of Monday’s GBOS meeting that lasted until 11:30 p.m. Diverse opinions covered a gamut of policing options, although most in the audience were in favor of a decreased level of police protection and a possible alternative to Whittier Police – revisiting the trooper option.

Also on the agenda, the GBOS heard reports along with special presentations about pending development of the Girdwood Industrial Park Sub-

division Park, Library Report, Girdwood Health Clinic, Forest Fair, two marijuana retailers and drafting of a Special Land Use Permitting Conditional Use Standards guidance.

GBOS co-chair Same Daniel opened the two-hour discussion on Proposition 9 by informing the audience of its narrow win by two votes, 410-408, and that it was certified at last Tuesday evening’s Anchorage Assembly meeting, pending any recount.

Detailing information on a recount were Anchorage Assembly Members from District 6, Jennifer Johnston and Bill Evans, who was a former police officer. “If Girdwood wants to have a recount, we do have the forms here,” she said. “If you want a full recount of all



Jon Scudder/Turnagain Times

Sam Daniel, GBOS co-chair, right, passed a resolution at Monday’s Girdwood Board of Supervisors’ meeting honoring Erin Eker, GBOS co-chair, on her final meeting after eight years of elected service to the community. Eker has served in the positions of Roads Supervisor, Utilities Supervisor, Land Use Supervisor, Parks and Recreation Supervisor. Daniel said Eker’s commitment to the community and service benefited the citizens of Girdwood and illustrated the duties and commitment that all board members should strive to uphold.

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Police Protection Dominates GBOS Meeting

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three districts, Girdwood absentee and questioned ballots, it's \$300."

She explained further that "If the results change, you get your money back. If it doesn't, the \$300 is gone. The sooner the better. The MOA Clerk's office is ready to do the recount," which she estimated would only take a few days. She added that procedures would start as a machine count verification and if a ballot was not read, the ballot would be done by hand.

"It was a very close vote," added Daniel. "I really appreciate the efforts of our Assembly to bring down this form," referring to MOA Assembly Members, MOA Attorney Bill Falsey and MOA City Manager Mike Abbott.

Daniel requested clarification from Abbott that no municipal funding could be used to finance the recount, meaning it would have to come from private cit-

izens, 10 of which must sign a petition. "I would encourage the public to move forward with a recount," said Daniel.

Following the meeting, this reporter checked the petition and noted that there was a lack of sufficient funding and signatures at the time.

Falsey said during the meeting that if the community wants to do a recount, it must start within 16 days after the within the election certification. "The sooner the better," he said.

Testimony and discussion further ensued about taxation and potential other police options. "The Girdwood Valley Service Area is now empowered to provide police services in the same way it is to provide fire, cemetery and library services," said Falsey. "So you would be able to raise an additional amount of money through a bill levy, and the GBOS would come up with some strategy to actually bring

law enforcement to the community. That is not limited to Whittier, that is whatever option is recommended by the GBOS and the MOA."

GBOS supervisor of Public Safety, Tommy O'Malley, stated that based on the certification, "We should go ahead with finding a police department for this community. That is what the voters have told us to do."

As the meeting was coming to a close, the GBOS acted on a Public Safety Task Force recommendation to renegotiate with the Alaska State Troopers and submit a letter to the troopers' director Col. James Cockrell seeking a possible alternative to the Whittier Police Department

During public testimony at the meeting, the troopers were the preferred option. The resolution passed 4-1 with O'Malley the lone no vote.

A Public Safety Task Force

Meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 25 at 7 p.m. in the Girdwood Community Room to further address the issue and to make additional recommendations to the GBOS.

Speaking on the Girdwood Industrial Park Subdivision project was Anchorage Waste and Wastewater Utility, Stephen Nuss, P.E., Engineering Division Director, who provided an update on the Heritage Land Bank project progress located off of Ruane Road.

The project, which includes five leased lots, is slated to begin this summer, according to Nuss, who expects each of these stages to occur over time largely due to the cost of the infrastructure. He said several project alterations, including paving and lighting, have been made to the road since 2015 based on community input. Several other concerns from Jerry Fox, GBOS Land Use Su-

pervisor, Land Use Committee vice chair Lewis Leonard and the audience addressed the sewers, grade, platting, leasing and existing water quality.

"Right now, there will be restrictions on what can be put on these parcels until we can get the flood plain mapping modified by FEMA," said Nuss. The development of the sewer system and the necessity to put in lift stations depending on the building costing from \$5,000 to \$10,000 dollars to construct and install will be needed by prospective leasers."

"We have been working on some financial issues and some of the permitting technical issues because a lot is going to be within the flood plain area of Glacier Creek and California Creek," he added. "We are at a point to finalize paperwork and subdivision agreement and get out on the street and bid on construction."

Windy Corner Project Q&A

Continued from page 1

Who is the main contractor hired to do the construction project?

The project is currently in design. Once this phase is complete, a contractor will be selected to build the project through a competitive bidding process.

What is the anticipated start date of the project and how long is the entire project going to take? Will it be done in phases?

As noted above, we are in design development. We also need to complete our environmental document, obtain permits and secure the right-of-way for the project. At this time, the earliest we believe construction could begin is in 2017. As we get closer to the construction date and identify funding for construction we will have more information about length of construction and phasing potential.

What are the priorities of the project?

The first priority for the project is to improve safety of the Seward Highway corridor. DOT&PF wants to eventually remove the safety corridor designation between Girdwood and Anchorage. The Windy Corner area sees a lot of conflicts during peak hours due to wildlife viewing where stop and go traffic competes with the traffic that is trying to get to Anchorage or points south on the Kenai Peninsula. The speed differential contributes to the high number of major injury and fatal crashes in the corridor.

What is the estimated budget and where are the funds coming from?

The project is being completed with a combination of state and federal funds. We estimate the total project cost at \$80 million.

Why is Windy Corner receiving such a large design change?

Seward Highway between Mileposts 105 and 107 (commonly known as "Windy Corner"), sees over 10,000 vehicles on average per day and over 22,000 vehicles per day during peak summer weekends. The entire Seward Highway from Girdwood to Anchorage is a designated safety corridor, but the Windy

Corner segment is particularly problematic due to the curvature of the roadway and vehicles stopping and turning to view the scenery and/or wildlife. The through traffic is traveling faster than these recreational users, which contributes, to the elevated crash rates and crash severity. In addition, this roadway segment does not meet current design standards for road curvature and sight distance.

What kind of traffic delays can drivers expect and for how long? And what mitigation measures are going to be used to alleviate congestion during construction?

We don't have answers to these questions at this time. We will be developing specifications that will provide guidance to the contractor on acceptable delay and closure requirements for the project.

Windy Corner has had it's share of accidents, do you have the number of crashes, and if any, fatalities that have occurred on that section of highway?

A figure in our online meeting (www.windycorner.info) shows over 30 crashes in this 2-mile segment between 1977 and 2007. Approximately 8 were fatalities and the remainder major injury crashes. Remember that a major injury crash is one where transport to a hospital was necessary.

When was the original work on the highway done at that section and has there been work to upgrade it since that time?

In general, the roadway has not moved or been improved since it was originally built in the early 50s.

What will be the benefits to the drivers going through that section after construction is completed?

To answer this question, let's separate the users. Those Seward Highway drivers heading between Anchorage and Seward or Kenai will be able to continue at highway speeds through the corridor because the turning vehicles will have a place to decelerate and leave the highway. The planned two

lanes in each direction provides for this. For Seward Highway users wishing to view wildlife or recreate in the area, they will have an area on both the north and south sides of the highway where they can pull off the road, park, picnic and play. The biggest benefit for all is that the various users will be separated and will no longer be in conflict.

From the railroad perspective, what will the greatest changes and benefits be?

The project provides room for the expanded highway by moving the railroad further out into Turnagain Arm. The railroad has ongoing concerns about trespass in the area when people cross the track to view Turnagain Arm, vistas and wildlife. The team is coordinating with the Alaska Railroad to create a place on the south side parking/recreation area where users can go under the track to get to the Turnagain Arm. This is a huge safety benefit for the Alaska Railroad.

What will be the environmental impacts of the changes both along the Turnagain Arm waterway and the cliffs above highway? Will it impact Dall sheep habitat, which tend to meander and feed along the cliffs and highway between MP 105-107?

We anticipate an impact to the wildlife during construction activities. In the long term, we believe moving the highway away from the cliffs and providing an area for the viewing public will be good for the area's wildlife.

How many public meetings will have been held prior to construction, and will the public testimony likely affect the final design?

Public input is always important to our design process. To date we have had 2 public meetings in Girdwood, and presented the project at the 2015 and 2016 Anchorage Transportation Fair. We are hosting two meetings this week – one in Girdwood and one in Anchorage. We also have an online meeting underway that began on April 5 and will go until May 6. Anyone can log onto the website and participate in the discussion.