



Municipality of Anchorage

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Mayor Mark Begich

Planning Department

January 20, 2006

Chris Hamre, President
HALO, Inc.
P. O. Box 110098
Anchorage, AK 99511-0098

RE: Hillside District Plan

Dear Chris,

Please accept my apologies for the lateness of this response. We are looking forward to finally getting underway on the much needed Hillside District Plan (HDP). The commitment of funding from several different sources was very critical in allowing the project to get underway. You raised a number of issues in your letter faxed on January 2, to which I wish to respond in hopes of providing some clarification and answers to the questions you posed.

To begin, I would like to clarify the funding picture relative to the Planning Department. We had \$50,000 in the 2005 budget reserved for the HDP. The department has received \$60,000 in this year's budget and plan to receive another \$50,000 in 2007. We did not receive the \$400,000 that you referenced. Besides the \$60,000 Planning received this year, the Department of Project Management & Engineering (PM&E) received \$300,000 to be applied to a comprehensive drainage study for the Hillside area. PM&E is anticipating receiving another \$300,000 in 2007 to finish the study.

During work sessions with the Assembly in November, we indicated the use of our 2005 funds would be for hiring a project manager to facilitate and coordinate the plan development. We did not want to commit those funds unless we were really going to have a project underway, which was uncertain until the Assembly acted on the budget. Since then we have been actively pursuing a project manager, but have had some unexpected delays in that process. However, we expect to have a qualified and experienced project manager on board soon.

The function of the project manager will be to assist staff with the preparation of an RFP for obtaining a lead consultant; and making sure that project timelines and proper coordination occurs among various departments, consultants and advisory groups. Included will be a citizen advisory committee made up of Hillside residents and landowners. Project management is not a policy making, plan preparation or decision making function, but instead is an overseeing/coordinating function.

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The use of the Planning Department's 2006 funds will be for a household survey of Hillside residents. It will be used to analyze a variety of concerns related to land use issues such as commercial development on the Hillside, wastewater disposal practices, public sewer and water extension policies, and residential density. I wish to emphasize that this department has no preconceived ideas regarding the outcome of the plan on these issues. We simply want to see a process used that is fair and representative of the Hillside community. /

In your letter you expressed concern for the western boundary of the study area being the Seward Highway. Contrary to what you state in your letter, the Seward Highway was the western boundary for the Hillside Wastewater Management Plan. It was also the boundary used in distinguishing the Southeast from the Southwest sub-areas in the Anchorage 2020 Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan. The Seward Highway has also been used in several other plans denoting the Hillside area, from parks to transportation. And finally, the highway was the boundary for Area G (Hillside) during the area wide zoning process in the Anchorage Bowl. We believe that the western boundary should remain at Seward Highway.

Having said that, we also want to assure you that we recognize there may be differences within various sub-areas that make up the Hillside area. As such, any analysis will account for differences in the various geographic sub-areas.

From your letter, it appears that you are familiar with the Hillside District Plan Scope of Work Summary that was presented and discussed with the Assembly during work sessions this past October/November. The summary includes a brief narrative indicating key departments and their respective areas of interest, study area map, general timeline, funding summary and a project organization chart. We believe and expect the Citizen Advisory Committee noted on the project organization chart will play a very significant role in the formulation of policy on issues addressed in the HDP. But, as I have said to you and others in previous HALO meetings, the Municipality through its various departments will not abrogate its responsibility for the development of this district plan. A very large portion of this planning effort will be dealing with fundamental issues associated with the provision of basic public infrastructure and services, a municipal responsibility.

The basic tone and substance of your letter implies a lack of trust toward the Municipality in carrying out this planning process for the positive benefit of Hillside residents. Nothing I can convey in this letter will likely provide satisfactory assurances to you that the process will be fair and open; I would rather we be judged by our actions. In that regard, I ask for your patience and cooperation.

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One of the most significant actions to be taken early in this process will be the selection of the lead consultant. The selection committee that reviews proposals and selects a project consultant is typically made up of municipal officials. However, in this instance, we intend to include a resident from Hillside. I believe it is important to have local non-municipal participation with this very important function. One of the benefits will be to help build trust in the planning process.

Like you, I strongly believe that it is important for the planning process to be conducted in a manner that will maximize community engagement and involve the community in a meaningful way.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Nelson".

Tom Nelson

Director

cc: Mayor Mark Begich
Mary Jane Michael, Executive Director, OE&CD
Assembly Member Janice Shamberg
Assembly Member Chris Birch

Attachment: Hillside District Plan Scope of Work Summary