

ALASKA HIGHWAY COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

CONFERENCE CALL MINUTES

Date: June 17, 2005

Time: 12:30 p.m. (Alaska)
1:30 p.m. (Yukon and British Columbia)

Participants:

City of Dawson Creek	Mayor Wayne Dahlen, Interim Chair Councillor Bud Powell
City of Fort St. John	Mayor Steve Thorlakson
Town of Watson Lake	Councillor Nancy Moore
City of Whitehorse	Sheila Dodd, Economic Development & Tourism Dept
Village of Haines Junction	Mayor John Farynowski
Village of Teslin	Mayor Clara Jules
Teslin Tlingit Council	Bev Morris
City of Delta Junction	Mayor Pro tem Mary Leith Dowling
City of North Pole	Councillor Doug Isaacson
City of Fairbanks	Deb Hickok, Fairbanks CVB

Coordinating Body: Northern Rockies Alaska Highway Tourism Association
April Moi, Executive Director
Erma Stanonik, Special Projects Coordinator
Lisa Hildebrandt, Assistant Project Coordinator

Regrets: District of Taylor
Northern Rockies Regional District/Town of Fort Nelson
Marsh Lake Local Advisory Council

1. **CALL TO ORDER** 1:40 p.m.

2. **ADDITIONAL ITEMS** None

3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

MOTION to adopt agenda as presented

1st – Mayor Pro tem Mary Leith Dowling, City of Delta Junction

2nd – Mayor Clara Jules, Village of Teslin

Discussion: None Carried.

4. **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

MOTION to adopt minutes of April 5, 2005 conference call

1st – Mayor John Farynowski, Village of Haines Junction

2nd – Mayor Pro tem Mary Leith Dowling, City of Delta Junction

Discussion: None Carried.

5. OLD BUSINESS

April Moi thanked all participants for taking time to join the conference call discussions.

Conference Reports: April Moi reviewed the conference outcomes.

- a) **Alaska/Canada Rail Corridor Conference:** The Alaska Highway Community Initiative sponsored the luncheon at which Minister John Les, Ministry of Small Business & Culture presented. Part of the sponsorship of \$1000.00 included a booth, four registrations, and an opportunity to showcase the Alaska Highway House historical banner display in the main conference area. The initiative was well represented with an impressive showcase display. NRAHTA Team representatives included April Moi, Erma Stanonik, Sennen Charleson, and Lisa Hildebrandt. Team members met with MP Jay Hill (BC) who indicated he was supportive of the initiative and cooperates with MP Larry Bagnell (Yukon) on areas of common interest. The Team also met with Jeannette James (Alaska) and Eric Morris (Yukon, First Nations). The NRAHTA Team welcomes suggestions of inter-jurisdictional conferences and events that will benefit the Alaska Highway Community Initiative.
- b) **Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon – Spring Conference:** April Moi thanked John Farynowski for hosting the event in Haines Junction. The conference was a great success that offered an opportunity for many meetings with key individuals/organizations regarding the Community Initiative. Meetings included: Sally Sheppard, Deputy Minister, Yukon Territorial Government - Patti Bailsie, Executive Director & Noel de Chambeau, President, Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon - Mayor Clara Jules, Councillor Nancy Moore & Mayor Ernie Bourassa - Tom Patterson, Executive Director, Association of Yukon Communities - Tom Sparrow, Public Works & Government Services Canada - Dennis Barry, Regional Advisor & Dennis Zimmerman, Senior Business Development Advisor, Tourism & Culture, Economic Development - Donna Larsen, Transportation Museum Society, Whitehorse - Lori Stepanksi, Director of Tourism, Haines Convention & Visitor Bureau – Ian Robinson & Clint McCuaig, Champagne Aishihik First Nations.

Mayor Ernie Bourassa suggested the vision statement be changed to include the concept of the Scenic Byway program. This would encourage greater buy-in from the Community Initiative.

A thank you letter was sent to Minister Elaine Taylor to request direction regarding suggested method to collaborate with the Yukon for the benefit of the Alaska Highway.

Discussion:

Steve Thorlakson asked if there was any clear indication from officials regarding the identification of a lead organization in the Yukon.

April Moi responded that there was no clear indication given. She added that it is important for an organization/body to be identified to manage the Yukon portion of the initiative.

Doug Isaacson asked for an update on Noel de Chambeau.

April Moi responded that Noel is the President of Tourism Industry Association (TIA) of the Yukon and is now the head of marketing for Holland America out of Seattle with a focus on Yukon and Alaska.

John Farynowski commented that he is not surprised that there has not been a coordinating body identified in the Yukon as it is a challenge to get commitment. John recommended that we continue discussions with TIA Yukon because the organization would be a good partner.

April Moi mentioned that Patti & Noel are scheduled to attend the Scenic Byways Workshop in Fort St. John on June 28 – 29.

Wayne Dahlen commented that the Scenic Byways program will be a vehicle to cross the boundaries of BC, Yukon and Alaska. The program is a great way to break barriers and to get everyone on the same page.

John Farynowski agreed that the Scenic Byway program will bring the jurisdictions closer together. TIA Yukon is already stretching its boundaries with memberships in Alaska – we only need to stretch a little more.

Phase I - Activities Update

April Moi gave an update on activity developments with Phase I. BC Ministry of Small Business & Economic Development and Western Economic Diversification Canada contributed \$30,000 to Phase I of the Initiative. Three contract positions were filled including First Nation Advisor (Sennen Charleson), Scenic Byway Advisor (Dan Marriott) and Assistant Project Coordinator (Lisa Hildebrandt). The timeline was extended to September 9, 2005. The Team is moving ahead as efficiently as possible and will provide recommendations for Phase II.

- a) **Aboriginal Tourism Framework:** The Aboriginal Tourism Framework was developed with the recommendations for a Treaty 8 Chief. The Framework will be presented to the North East Aboriginal Business Centre, North East Native Advancing Society, and Treaty 8. The Framework will then be taken to the Chiefs, communities and families. The goal is to enable communities to develop tourism through building and showcasing the stories they wish to share.
- b) **Treaty 8 MOU:** An MOU will be developed for Treaty 8 and presented to administrative staff and Treaty 8 Chiefs.
- c) **Communications Strategy:** A communication strategy is being developed to facilitate effective distribution and sharing of ongoing activities.
- d) **Fact Sheet & Banner:** A one page Fact Sheet was developed as an overview of the Initiative. An extended Fact Sheet will be prepared. A Banner was developed to complement the two banners developed for the 2004 Alaska Highway Legacy Tour. The updated banner is a tribute to the 13 community signatories of the MOU.
- e) **Scenic Byway Workshop:** The Scenic Byway Workshop will be held in Fort St. John on June 28 with an experiential field trip on June 29. The Team is enthusiastic about the workshop. Discussions will focus on success stories of other roadways and how to adapt them to the Alaska Highway. We are expecting approximately 30 participants including representatives from First Nations, Tourism BC, Yukon Government, BC Ministry of Small Business & Economic Development in addition to representatives from BC & Yukon communities. The Team has requested current and historic photos from the communities for the Byways Workshop as well as a few short lines about what the Alaska Highway means to each community.
- f) **Yukon & Alaska Partnerships:** The NRAHTA Team continues to build relationships and partnerships with Yukon and Alaska partners.

Discussion

Clara Jules mentioned that she and Bev Morris will be attending the Scenic Byway Workshop and requested details on the best options to travel to Fort St. John.

John Farynowski asked if there was a commitment from Whitehorse to send a representative to the workshop.

Sheila Dodd replied that there will not be a representative from Whitehorse due to a busy summer. Sheila mentioned that Whitehorse is supportive and will financially contribute to the Community Initiative upon receipt of an invoice as discussed.

April Moi requested to add a few further items:

- a) Canadian Rural Partnerships:** The NRAHTA Team is reviewing inter-jurisdictional programs that will support the Community Initiative. Tom Sparrow suggested the Canadian Rural Partnership program as a strong vehicle to pursue funding opportunities. The program supports Rural Teams in both BC and Yukon who review models that build capacity and strengthen communities.

- b) Community Collaboration Project:** The Community Collaboration Project (CCP) is a model through the Canadian Rural Partnership program that focuses on community capacity building and empowerment. The Alaska Highway Community Initiative is being examined as a potential project to implement the model. Key representatives are interested in outcomes of the Scenic Byway Workshop and upcoming fall meetings in BC and Yukon. The project chosen to implement the CCP model will be selected by January 2006.

- c) Tourism BC Funding:** As a result of increased funding for Tourism BC, the organization has enhanced the Community Foundations Planning & Development Program. The Scenic Byway program will provide a strong focus for community planning within Northeastern BC.

Discussion

John Farynowski mentioned that he spoke to Nat Olsen, regional representative for BC/Yukon for Canadian Rural Partnerships during the recent TIA Yukon Conference. The program supports partnerships between provinces and interested partners. Nat expressed interest in supporting a conference in the Yukon and indicated their willingness to cover basic costs. John affirmed his support for the conference.

Wayne Dahlen stated his thought that we must have a strong vision to bring all politicians on board. Members of the Community Initiative must start convincing tourism partners and ministers to focus on the Alaska Highway corridor. It is important to spend more time on the political front. It is slow moving and it can be frustrating, but we must continue. We need another conference to focus senior levels of government to the importance of the Community Initiative and the significance of the Scenic Byway program as a vehicle to bring jurisdictions together for a common vision. To show how important we think this Initiative is, Steve Thorlakson and myself are part of the Regional Advisory Committee for the Northern Development Initiative Trust. The Trust has invested \$15 Million and its interest will be offered to regional projects. The Committee is prepared to fund the Alaska Highway Community Initiative as one of those projects. We recognize the significance of tourism contribution to economic development. We hope others are as passionate about this project and us willing to contribute to the Initiative and to continue talks with Ministers.

Steve Thorlakson added that there is now a new cabinet in Victoria and that this may move talks forward. Steve asked for clarification regarding the Community Collaboration Project, whether the definition of community is narrow or includes the length of the highway corridor.

April Moi replied that the Community Collaboration Project can be fit to meet our needs. Their main focus is for the benefit of local communities; they are intrigued with the concept of the communities working towards a common vision and purpose. There is another program called Tourism North that has been a vehicle to bring jurisdictions together. We have learned that senior levels of government are open to grass-roots partnerships if recommendations come from recognized tourism departments, i.e. Tourism

BC. The Community Development Foundations program through Tourism BC is an exciting opportunity to bring communities together with a focus of Scenic Byways.

Steve Thorlakson reinforced that we must show levels of bureaucracy our financial support for the Initiative in order for them to take us seriously. We have a unique funding vehicle with the Northern Development Initiative Trust. Yukon and Alaska likely have other funding opportunities unique to them. The more supportive we are the more credibility we will have.

John Farynowski stated that we need to influence the Provincial governments to buy into the Initiative. The Federal government is helping the communities more than the Provincial.

Doug Isaacson mentioned that he is meeting with Senator Stevens, Foreign Affairs & Banking and it would be useful for Deb Hickok to join the meeting. It is an opportunity to provide Senator Stevens with information about the Initiative. Doug continued that he must first understand what actions the Initiative is undertaking, what activities the money is used for – more specifically that the money is not simply for administrative purposes.

Wayne Dahlen replied that the benefit of NRAHTA coordinating the Initiative is that there is effective administration already in place. The association is committed to the Initiative and has undergone a large amount of work with bare bones staff. Money is being directed to coordinate communities and develop a common vision for the highway.

Doug Isaacson replied that there is resistance felt in Alaska. The State works with Tourism North – BC pulled out for a period of time and there is fear to contribute to partners that have a history of pulling out of projects.

Deb Hickok added that BC has rejoined the Tourism North program. Tourism North is a marketing based program and the Alaska Highway Community Initiative has more focus on infrastructure and development. The Community Initiative could provide good input to Tourism North. Deb continued that the United States has the Scenic Byway program that comes with financial contributions. The State of Alaska is a supporter of the program and aims to have all roads designated over time. Deb concluded that the Fairbanks Borough (consisting of City of Fairbanks and City of North Pole) have limited staff and resources. The Borough is happy to be informed about the Community Initiative; however, they are not interested in committing funds.

Steve Thorlakson highlighted that the reality is that BC is envious of what Alaska has achieved and strives to be part of that success. Visitors travel the Alaska Highway through BC and Yukon to get to Alaska; therefore, the jurisdictions must work together to enhance the visitor's full experience.

Deb Hickok replied that Fairbanks Borough is supportive of the Community Initiative; however, they are involved in many projects and the Initiative is not seen as a valuable project that validates a financial contribution.

Steve Thorlakson stated that he appreciates the honesty and sincerity of Deb's statements. He asked Deb if she would give some thoughts to send to Wayne and April about how they are willing to participate in the Alaska Highway Community Initiative to demonstrate support.

Deb Hickok replied that the Borough's focus and commitment is on Tourism North and Alaska Travel Industry Association. Perhaps there could be varying levels of participation and support. When all partners are on a more level playing field, we could become more active partners.

April Moi commented that she appreciated the dialogue. The Scenic Byway program is US based and miles ahead of Canada's position. Carl Ekstrom has indicated support to make an application for State Scenic Byway designation of the Alaska portion of the Alaska Highway. Deb's suggestion of various levels of involvement makes good sense.

Doug Isaacson clarified that he mentioned these points last fall when discussing North Pole and Fairbanks as part of the Fairbanks Borough. Doug added that Deb Hickok is a significant player in determining how the Fairbanks Borough will participate – a new structure to allow for various levels of involvement is a relevant concept at this time.

Wayne Dahlen explained that Minister Emmerson and Minister Owen are scheduled to stop in Dawson Creek. The venue will be reviewed and a message will be sent to mayors if they wish to attend. Alaska Highway House is progressing well and tourism in Dawson Creek is excellent.

Steve Thorlakson added that there is a positive change in Fort St. John. The Visitor Information Centre which has been managed by the Chamber is now operated by the City.

6. CORRESPONDENCE - None

7. REPORTS

April Moi asked if there were any questions with the Balance Sheet as presented. There were no questions.

MOTION to approve Balance Sheet as presented

1st – Mayor John Farynowski, Village of Haines Junction

2nd – Mayor Clara Jules, Village of Teslin

Discussion: None Carried.

8. NEW BUSINESS

- a) **Vision Statement Change:** April Moi stated that the association is looking for comments and suggestions for the vision statement. It has been suggested by Ernie Bourassa to include the Scenic Byway concept in the statement to gain greater support from grass-roots communities and partnering jurisdictions. The revised statement is: *“To ensure that the Alaska Highway corridor is recognized as the most important international historic, cultural and wilderness highway in North America by working towards designating the Alaska Highway as an International Scenic Byway.”*

MOTION to accept the vision statement as presented

1st – Mayor Steve Thorlakson, City of Fort St. John

2nd – Deb Hickok, Fairbanks Convention & Visitor's Bureau

Discussion

Doug Isaacson suggested that the vision statement should be a broad statement that implies an on-going vision. A statement that speaks to the implementation of the Scenic Byway program should be added.

Steve Thorlakson added that a vision statement should be permanent and speak to core values.

Mary Leith-Dowling agreed that the vision statement should be broad in scope.

Wayne Dahlen suggested that the NRAHTA staff revisit the vision statement and distribute to community signatories for comments and approval.

b) Community Roundtable, Fall 2005: NRAHTA suggests a community roundtable be held just prior or following the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon Fall Round-up October 28 - 29. A notice will be sent to community signatories to confirm the dates. The location is yet to be determined.

c) Co-chairs for each jurisdiction: The suggestion for co-chairs for each jurisdiction is based on various discussions – this development would be viewed positively by senior levels of government.

Discussion

Steve Thorlakson commented that this is a wonderful idea. The co-chairs could deal with issues and present their suggestions to the community signatories.

Wayne Dahlen asked if there were any further comments. Hearing none he asked if John Farynowski would be willing to be the co-chair for the Yukon.

John Farynowski said he is willing to take the position. He asked Clara if this would be all right.

Clara Jules responded that this is okay.

Bud Powell suggested that Mary Leith-Dowling represent Alaska as the co-chair.

Doug Isaacson commented that City of Delta Junction is right in the middle and is the best community to represent Alaska in this manner.

Mary Leith Dowling replied that the idea of co-chairs for each jurisdiction is a good one and accepted the position.

MOTION to select John Farynowski as co-chair for Yukon and Mary Leith-Dowling as co-chair for Alaska

1st – Mayor Steve Thorlakson, City of Fort St. John

2nd – Mayor Doug Isaacson, City of North Pole

Discussion: None Carried.

9. NEXT MEETING

Next meeting to be at the discretion of the co-chairs

MOTION to Adjourn

1st – Councillor Doug Isaacson, City of North Pole

2nd – Mayor Pro tem Mary Leith-Dowling, City of Delta Junction