

Old Harbor Seeks Funds to Finish Airport Expansion

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Representatives from Old Harbor made a pitch to the Senate Transportation Committee Thursday for a few more million dollars to complete expansion of the airport in the community. Carl Marrs is the chief executive officer for the Old Harbor Native Corporation.

"You may ask, 'Why we are expanding the runway?' Well, the answer to that is that it's been in the works for some time, but it's been too costly. Our community was dying," he said. "When Governor Parnell was running for governor, he challenged rural Alaska to help figure out ways to develop economic opportunities, to build communities and stop out-migration. He challenged us to think about public-private partnerships. To think outside the box, so that's what we did."

To facilitate the "out-of-the-box" thinking, he said the tribe, the corporation and the city had to start working on the same objectives.

Marrs said the community's ultimate goal is the ability to fly fresh fish out of the village.

-- (Old Harbor 2 22 sec "If you know where Old Harbor … DC6 off of there fully loaded.")

He said there has already been interest from processors to come to Old Harbor if the infrastructure, such as the airport, could support it. Cynthia Burns, the vice president of corporate affairs with the Old Harbor Native Corporation said building up infrastructure has lately been the focus of the community:

-- (Old Harbor 3 28 sec "We've been successful … a fish processing plant in our community.")

The project received \$4.4-million last year from the state, and proponents are looking for another \$6.6-million this year. Marrs said the working together and in-kind donations have kept the project cost relatively low. He told the Transportation Committee the cost right now is pegged at \$14.5-million to \$18.5-million, but said the original estimate was \$38-million.

Burns agreed, saying several entities have helped keep costs low:

-- (Old Harbor 4 31 sec “Our village corporation is providing … cost for these tasks in half.”)

Richard Weebee is a civil engineer with Shearwater Systems, who serves as the project manager:

-- (Old Harbor 5 53 sec “The plan for this construction … and part-time, 14 local hires.”)

Project funds like those Old Harbor is seeking for the airport come in the State Capital Budget, which is still being formulated in the Senate. It will likely take until very near the end of the session, about a month from now, for all the projects to be finalized.

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