Assembly Postpones CIP List Approval

Friday, 20 September 2013

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/stories-2-mp3/130920.boro_cip_vote_postponed.mp3{/audio}

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Last night the Kodiak Island Borough Assembly decided to postpone a vote on its capital improvement projects priority list. An eight item list was before the assembly as a resolution, but concerns over one of the projects on the list, and the absence of three assembly members, led to its postponement until the October 3 regular meeting.

Assemblyman Mel Stephens took issue with the third project on the list, which asks for $500,000 from the state to look at extending public utilities to swampy acres. The thought is that more Coast Guard housing will be built in the area, which currently has no water or sewer lines. Stephens said it didn’t make sense that public money would be put toward a private property owner.

But Borough Mayor Jerome Selby said the hope is that the project would be a pubic/private partnership, and help soften Kodiak’s housing crisis. In fact, he said the item was put on the CIP list at the request of the housing committee.

“It’s a joint city, borough, Coast Guard housing committee. It is on here at the request of the Coast Guard because they are interested in doing a joint public/private construction of housing for the Coast Guard, since the probability of them being able to get funding for housing through the federal system is slim to none, given the federal budget picture. So the whole idea behind this was to be able to get some housing constructed for the Coast Guard so that they can have the option of bringing additional vessels. Because of the Arctic effort that’s now a Coast Guard responsibility, there is an opportunity to bring another vessel, I believe one C-130 and two helicopters to Kodiak, if there was housing available for them.”

He said the money the borough would get from the state would only be for design and cost estimate, and help fully explore whether or not a project like that would be feasible.

Assemblywoman Carol Austerman sits on the housing task force and said the housing problem in Kodiak is multifaceted and will take a lot of work from a lot of different entities to fully solve. However, she said additional Coast Guard housing would certainly help.

“We have to start somewhere to work on the problem with housing that we have in our community. This is an opportunity to work with the Coast Guard and hopefully provide some housing for Coast Guard members that then those people would move out of rental housing in town and be able to free up rental opportunities for locals. So I think that we do have an obligation as a borough to start to work on solving this housing problem in our community and this is one way to start that.”

In the end the item was postponed so a full assembly could further discuss keeping the item on the borough’s CIP list. Once approved, the list will be sent off to Governor Sean Parnell and Alaska legislators for the 2014 legislative session. The list will also be used for various grant applications in the upcoming year.

Another resolution on the agenda passed the assembly unanimously. That resolution requests the governor to include $100 million in his FY 2015 capital budget that would be put toward a vessel replacement fund for the ferry Tustumena. The resolution’s passage was rather timely, as Selby announced yet another delay for the ship.

“And so now it’s to go back into service on October 20. Now it’s going to start to get pretty interesting here because the Kennicott will go into the shipyard on October 17. That is the mandated shipyard visit by the Coast Guard. They don’t have the option of continuing to use the Kennicott to come down here until it goes into the shipyard. So if they don’t get the Tusty up and running, we may be without ferry service for a bit.”

The ship has been out of service for almost a year, undergoing repairs at Seward Ships Drydock. Inadequate material and poor workmanship have caused several months of delays in the Tusty’s return to service.