

## **Chugiak/Eagle River and the Great Anchorage Divorce. Can this Marriage be Saved?**

Anchorage, like Topsy, has ridden a dramatic economic expansion in many directions simultaneously. Without a lot of thought, this expansion has engulfed many communities and provided many resources and benefits for those it has absorbed. Girdwood, Hillside, and the communities of South Fork, Eagle River, Eagle River Valley, Eagle River, Chugiak, Birchwood, Peters Creek, and Eklutna come to mind.

It is healthy for us to periodically revisit these “absorbptions” and decide if there is a better way. That is the discussion that is happening now and will continue for several years.

First to clear the air and establish some common basis for the discussion.

- For most of us this is not about building a new high school. It is about making local government local, and self-determination for a distinct and separate community. Those in the media and others who think this is about sour grapes over not getting our own way are attacking a straw man of their own making.
- This is not a new effort. We came very close to having our own community government in 1974 and there has been a large group of local leaders who have continued to hold the position that we have the capacity to govern ourselves very well. A group has been meeting for the past two years and Assemblyman Dan Kendal has championed this cause for nearly a decade.
- This effort is not because we think the people of Anchorage are evil and plotting against us. By and large we are very satisfied with the imperfect but useful Municipal Government. We just want self-determination and a local government that is much more local.

## **This Problem Doesn't Have to End Up in a Divorce Court**

A wise Anchorage person has suggested an ideal solution. If Anchorage would go back to being a Borough under State Law, we then could allow Chugiak/Eagle River to become a first class City in the Borough and Girdwood and perhaps Whittier could also become cities also within the Anchorage Borough. These "cities" could then contract with Anchorage for any and all of the services that they chose not to provide themselves. This should allow those cities all of the self-determination they want and not produce the unnecessary duplication that we used to have. AND WE COULD STAY TOGETHER!!!!

Within this solution, wise city elders like Mark Begich and Robert Gotstein have suggested subsets of the Anchorage School Board that would provide subordinate area school boards within the Anchorage area that would have significant authority over; budgets, curriculum, school construction, and bonding. The other solution would be to divide up the Anchorage School District in to smaller and perhaps more manageable regional school districts.

I think these are both excellent ideas for us to work on. I think we can work together and figure out ways to make local government work better for all of us. It will only require that we be respectful of differing opinions and be capable of thinking outside of the boxes and ruts we all tend to get in.

### **Join Mat-Su Borough**

Another option for the Chugiak/Eagle River area is to secede from the Municipality of Anchorage and Join the Mat-Su Borough. This would be interesting. Many folks in Mat-Su, like our area, commute to Anchorage for work. Similarly most of us travel to or through the Mat-Su area to find some of our recreational opportunities. The two areas have much in common and are the areas of Alaska that are growing and expected to grow the fastest.

I have not discussed this concept with any leaders or groups in Mat-Su, but I expect they will be willing to discuss it.

**Let the discussions begin.**