

PLOTTING A COURSE FOR A NEW PROJECT IN ANCHORAGE



Daily News 2-7-86

Anchorage Daily News/Jim Lavrakas

Anchorage officials are envisioning a commercial development in this waterfront area of mudflats.

City mulls waterfront development

By DAVID POSTMAN
Daily News reporter

At the mouth of Ship Creek, just north of the Alaska Railroad Depot, fishing boats, tugs and seagoing construction equipment spend the winter laying on acres of gooey mudflats.

Just north of that, about 10 small boats sit in the mud near the Anchorage small boat harbor — actually a collection of rotting wood pilings and planks.

Overall, the area looks like a seagoing hobo jungle.

But in City Hall, a plan is brewing to transform it into a big residential,

commercial and tourist development.

"We want to make the waterfront a place for people to go," said Community Planning Director Bill Luria. "Right now, it's blocked off and not very accessible to most of the public."

The city's waterfront is home to the Port of Anchorage, railroad yards, fish processing plants and shipping companies.

Mayor Tony Knowles wants to retain all those operations, but he also is pushing for a little shift from cargo to escargot.

Knowles made the first public

mention of the project during a Monday speech to the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce.

What Luria calls "Ship Creek Landing" would be built on 60 acres of mudflats between the train station and the boat harbor.

In addition to a new small boat harbor, the project would include space for restaurants, shops, offices and condominiums.

Luria said that, in later years, the project could be expanded to include an aquarium or docks for large passenger ships.

There are several major questions

that must be answered before the project moves ahead. Knowles is planning to spend money, perhaps as much as \$100,000, to find those answers, Luria said.

The city will know in four to six months, he said:

- If it can get the property to put the development on.

- If people would visit it or businesses would locate there.

- How much the development would cost.

- If the property is particularly

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WATERFRONT: Anchorage officials envisioning 'Ship Creek Landing' project

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prone to earthquake damage.

Depending on what those answers are, a decision to move ahead with the project could be made by August.

"At that point, the mayor would appoint a citizens' committee to put together a prospectus and look for a developer," Luria said.

The city has \$5 million in port improvement bonds and

state money appropriated for a new small boat harbor that could be used for the project.

The city probably would pay for filling the site — perhaps with gravel extracted from the new city dump site — and installing roads, bridges and utilities.

That would cost from \$20 million to \$40 million.

Everything else could be built by a private developer, perhaps in partnership with city and the Alaska Railroad,

which owns the 60 acres.

The land is now leased to Anchorage Dredge and Dock Company Inc. The company has erected several temporary structures on the site and uses it for ship repair and storage, according to Harvey Sullivan, a representative of the company.

The city has exercised an option to take over the lease from the company. The parties are now negotiating to

determine how much Anchorage Dredge and Dock should be paid for its interest.

"Everything is for sale for the right price," Sullivan said. But the company has plans for the site if it is able to hold on to its lease.

Sullivan said Anchorage Dredge and Dock would build docking facilities to compete with the Port of Anchorage.

He said there is a need for more dock space, and it

would be a mistake to build an "artsy, tourist-type place down there."

But the Port of Anchorage is only operating at about 40 percent capacity, said port director Tyler Jones. There is also ample cargo storage area at the city port.

In his speech to the chamber, Knowles said the project would be a "major economic development."

"From Baltimore's Harbor

to Boston's Faneuil Hall to New York's South Port, cities are finding new economic life in their waterfronts," the mayor said.

But Sullivan said cities that have redeveloped waterfronts, did so after "those facilities were used up from an efficient cargo handling standpoint."

"Anchorage, as opposed to those areas, has yet to achieve its potential. I think they're jumping the gun by 50 years."

Mayor Knowles seeks railroad's backing for waterfront project

By DAVID POSTMAN
Daily News reporter

Mayor Tony Knowles is turning up the heat on his plan to transform Anchorage's waterfront into a large residential, commercial and tourist development.

Thursday, just two weeks after he first publicly mentioned the project, Knowles asked the Alaska Railroad to endorse the development, which would be built on land owned by the state-owned rail line.

After a brief presentation by Knowles and other city officials, the railroad's board of directors said they needed a day to research the project and would vote today on forming a partnership with the city.

There are also "two very large private corporations who are extremely interested in participating" in the waterfront development, according to Community Planning Director Bill Luria. He would not say which companies those are.

Knowles envisions stores, restaurants, offices, a small boat harbor, homes and perhaps a "theme park" on 61 acres of mud flats at the mouth of Ship Creek.

"We're interested in working with you," railroad president Frank Turpin told the mayor. "It doesn't hurt our surrounding property values."

Knowles and several of his top aides have been working on the project at least since the middle of last year when a \$29,000 contract was awarded to Sverdrup/SPCM to develop "conceptual" plans for waterfront developments.

The city has between \$5 million and \$7 million that could be used for the project. Knowles said the city could also contribute about 2 million tons of gravel — that needs to be removed from the new city dump site — that could be used to fill the mud flats.

The railroad land is now leased to Anchorage Dredge and Dock Company Inc.

Railroad wants to hear more about waterfront plan

By DAVID POSTMAN
Daily News reporter

The Alaska Railroad board of directors said Friday they need to know more about Mayor Tony Knowles' plan for developing Anchorage's waterfront before endorsing the ambitious project.

"They were unanimous in their interest, but they didn't feel that they had enough information," said Vivian Hamilton, spokeswoman for the state-owned rail line.

Knowles asked the railroad Thursday to form a partnership with the municipality to build what the mayor calls "Ship Creek Landing."

The project would be built on 61 acres of railroad land at the mouth of Ship Creek.

Knowles and other city officials Thursday

showed the board conceptual drawings of shops, restaurants, a small boat harbor, offices and a cruise ship dock.

"All the board had was what Tony Knowles gave them the other day," Hamilton said. "We need to look at that property and see what would be best for us."

The board did agree to appoint two people to a city committee that will soon begin researching the project.

Knowles was pleased the railroad agreed to join the committee, according to spokeswoman Dee Frankfourth.

She said the city will work with the railroad board to help them make up its mind.

Thursday, Knowles told board members he wants to move quickly on the project and needed their approval as soon as possible.

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