

RESOLUTION #2023-09

A resolution in support of accelerating the transfer of State lands to local governments, completing the municipal lands program, and waiving additional survey costs.

WHEREAS, local governments are responsible for more land management than the State of Alaska, with the bulk of these lands found within borough boundaries, and

WHEREAS, boroughs have the statutory responsibility for planning and platting of not just their lands but State lands as well, and local planning commissions are also responsible for working with federal land managers; and

WHEREAS, borough planning and platting authority is a power devolved from the State, and is a responsibility, then, that the State no longer performs, thus saving the State costs involved; and

WHEREAS, increasing local control of lands within municipal boundaries has a significant impact on their ability to promote economic development and may contribute to cost savings for the State; and

WHEREAS, the Municipal Land Entitlement Program provides Alaskans local governance by determining municipal land entitlements and transferring lands to municipalities under the Municipal Entitlement Act; the program is housed in the Department of Natural Resources and is governed by AS 29.65.010-29.65.130; and

WHEREAS, about 1.35 million acres of State land will eventually be transferred to municipal ownership through this program; and

WHEREAS, of the land transferred to date, municipalities have sold about 140,000 acres to private owners – that means that local governments have been able to move about 22% of their lands into private hands; and

WHEREAS, survey costs are high, requirements are onerous, and agency work slow; it is difficult to move from land approved by the State to land available for sale and streamlining this process, reducing barriers and costs, and increasing timeliness would facilitate development; and

WHEREAS, there remain 136,000 acres of land waiting for entitlement, which is land that local governments are depending on to develop, and which would increase their land available to meet a variety of needs; and

WHEREAS, there is an insufficient amount of vacant, unappropriated, unreserved (VUU) lands available for new borough formation; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Lands Act requires some portion of this land to be available for borough formation, and the State may not have allocated enough of this for the remaining unorganized boroughs; and

WHEREAS, the State may need to consider a set aside, now, to benefit those areas of the state that may have an interest in borough formation but no available VUU lands; if the State has insufficient land available for these purposes, it may need to compensate unorganized boroughs accordingly; and

WHEREAS, local governments are the most direct beneficiaries of private development, have the most at stake and therefore the most interest in a process that works well; and

WHEREAS, political subdivisions of the State determine appropriate levels of service and infrastructure maintenance responsibilities for residential and commercial properties, ensuring a uniform level of platting that corresponds to planning, zoning, and the needs of the local governments and property owners, accomplished in cooperation with developers; and

WHEREAS, there exist numerous options for strengthening State-local cooperation on lands development, including:

- Lease-share agreements for large tracts
- State seat on planning/platting commissions and/or Joint Lands Commission
- Streamlined planning/platting processes between local governments
- Cost-share for access improvements
- Long-term planning processes
- Remote access requirements – waiver on standards within State Statute and Code
- Include boroughs as part of Agency review
- Municipal Entitlement Lands transfers
- State to complete surveying process
- Sale/lease of state lands for disposal to private owners

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Municipal League supports the State establishing ways in which lands may be transferred more expeditiously to local governments and in support of future organization; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a joint, high-level collaborative effort between local governments and the State may facilitate this process, and will require active engagement by the Legislature.