

Road open

West Douglas pioneer route is publicly unveiled

By ALEX MCCARTHY
JUNEAU EMPIRE

When the City and Borough of Juneau began accepting bids to build a road on West Douglas, City Manager Rorie Watt got a phone call from an unhappy resident.

Why build a road that isn't going anywhere in particular, the man asked.

"It's a step," Watt told him, "and you have to make progress when and how you're able."

That progress was on display Friday as a ribbon-cutting ceremony unveiled the 3.5-mile gravel road that city officials hope will serve as the foundation of development on the back side of the island. The road is currently dubbed the West Douglas Pioneer Road.

The \$2.97 million road, funded by a grant from the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic De-



MICHAEL PENN PHOTOS | JUNEAU EMPIRE

Above, Alan Steffert, project manager for the city, closes the gate to the West Douglas Pioneer Road after a ribbon-cutting ceremony to officially open the route on Friday.

At left, a small audience watches as city officials hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony to officially open the West Douglas Pioneer Road.

Trash brains active

Kids hone skills to clean beaches and ocean waters

By KEVIN GULLUFSEN
JUNEAU EMPIRE

Students at Sayéik Gastineau Community School rummaged through trash at a school assembly on Friday. A shark, a dolphin, a salmon and a warrior looked on.

The kids sorted the trash by type, auditing what was in there. The ocean animals and the warrior, those were adults in costumes — employees of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on hand to help Gastineau and Thunder Mountain High School become what're called Ocean Guardian schools.

Friday's kickoff at Gastineau officially starts the first Ocean Guardian program in Alaska. The program helps teach children and teens about ocean stewardship while

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velopment, has been in the works for more than 20 years.

The construction of the road is listed in the 1997 West Douglas Conceptual Plan that lays out a vision of the island's future. The plan refers to West Douglas as a "clean slate" that could be used for housing, industry, commerce or recreation.

The road — which is built totally on CBJ-owned

land — is currently a single-lane gravel road that is not open to motor vehicles. It's open to hikers or bikers, who can now go all the way out to Middle Creek, which is about a half mile inland from the coast. The road's major purpose at the moment is to allow construction and survey crews better access as they evaluate the area for further development.

Construction of the road began in the fall of 2016, and was done in two phases. A 2.4-mile stretch was completed last year.

As he spoke Friday, Watt repeated what he told the man on the phone a

few years ago, that this is just a step in the direction of developing the back side of the island.

The Assembly will likely discuss further funding this coming January, Watt said afterward. During the ceremony Friday, Watt said he hopes the city can find a direction sooner rather than later.

"I hope that it's not 21 years before we take another step," Watt said.

Mayor Ken Koelsch spoke just prior to cutting the ribbon. He feigned confusion about which ceremony he was at, because this is such a busy week for new projects. On Wednesday, Koelsch helped unveil the Jackie Street Cottages, an affordable housing complex that will be built by university and high school students. On Saturday, the city will

unveil the newly rebuilt Project Playground at Twin Lakes.

Koelsch said Friday's ceremony held a great deal of significance.

"The community sees West Douglas as part of our future," Koelsch said. "The road is the first step of a much larger vision."

During this election season, candidates have driven that point home. When talking about the future of Juneau's economy, many of them look to a second bridge to Douglas, a deep water port on the island and the possibility of residential and commercial development on the west side.

At Juneau Chamber of Commerce forums, Assembly and mayoral candidates (almost all of whom were present) unanimously said they

were in support of a second crossing.

The scene Friday included mayors of past, present and possibly future. Two of the four mayoral candidates — Saralyn Tabachnick and Beth Weldon — were present at the ribbon-cutting. Koelsch invited former mayors Mary Becker and Merrill Sanford up to hold the ribbon as he cut it. He also invited up Weldon, among many others, to honor her time on the Assembly.

Jon and Susanne Reisinger, who live at the 8.5-mile point on Douglas Highway, were in attendance. When the first segment of road opened last year, they walked on it and thought it was beautiful. Now, Jon said, they're excited to explore the new 1.1 miles.

Jon said he hopes to see

the city put in a deep water port on Douglas at some point and hopes there's at least "a little more" development on the island in the future.

The Reisingers weren't alone, as a couple dozen people from around town watched and applauded as Koelsch cut the ribbon.

Alan Steffert, the project manager for the CBJ Engineering Department, hurriedly packed people into a van to take them on a tour of the road after the ceremony. Steffert said the reception has been extremely positive from Douglas residents.

"It's always exciting," Steffert said. "Everybody's smiling."

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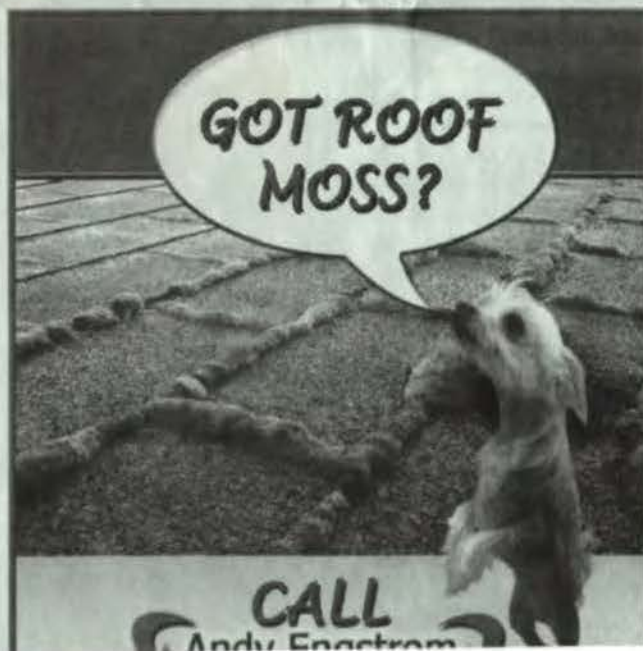


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