

7/25/97

Lacher vetoes

By PAUL STUART
Frontiersman reporter

PALMER — Questioning the legality of the action, Mat-Su Borough Mayor Barb Lacher vetoed the unanimous vote of the borough assembly to convey 320 acres of borough land to Homestead Properties Inc. to develop a golf resort and subdivision in the Butte.

Tuesday, July 15 the assembly, after months of controversy, voted 7-0 to convey the land by means of a lease with an option to purchase to developer Victor Trygstad. Attached to the ordinance were 13 conditions that must be met before the deal is closed.

"After careful consideration of all the information brought forth to the assembly," Lacher said in her veto

statement, "for the purpose of justifying execution of a lease/purchase to Homestead Resort Properties, I am unable to conclude that such a lease/purchase is lawful or in the best interest of the people of the Mat-Su Borough."

Lacher cited Article VIII, Section 1, of the Alaska Constitution, which encourages putting public land into private hands. Lacher said the same sec-

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Butte land deal

tion of the constitution cautions disposal of public lands should take into account that "utilization, development and conservation of all natural resources of the state including land and waters, (shall be) for the maximum benefit of its people."

Lacher said the question becomes: "How can setting aside a huge amount of prime public land for exclusive use

by a privileged few benefit the public at large?"

Lacher said for her the answer became obvious, when she considered "the exhaustive testimony of residents proximate to this project, that a minicity built around a country club will increase and forever erode the charac-

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ter of what is now a pristine recreational area, and further, considering the testimony and evidence set out in the public record regarding the high probability of ground and surface water contamination."

Lacher said Wednesday she deliberated long and hard before deciding to veto the assembly's action. She said she got assurances from Borough Manager Don Moore of two things: first, that the veto would not interfere with the schedule for pending negotiations on the conditions of the lease, in the event the veto is overridden; and, secondly, that her action would not put the borough in a position of legal vulnerability.

The mayor added in her veto statement, "Mr. Trygstad has, throughout this process, never exercised good faith. Therefore,

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Borough Mayor Barbara Lacher

I do not believe he can possibly be a good steward of the public lands."

Lacher said Trygstad has continually failed to respond to requests for critical information, and instead "chose an opposite and disingenuous path, that of intense political pressure opportunistically applied in private meetings, without benefit of public discourse.

"Although there is, in my opinion, overwhelming legal and public interest reasons that support rejecting any lease agreement for this."

District 7 Assemblyman Doyle Holmes yesterday labeled the veto message "a cam-

paign speech, pure and simple." Holmes predicted the tactic would backfire on the mayor.

Holmes and District 1 Assemblyman Larry DeVilbiss agreed Thursday the assembly would likely wait until its Tuesday, Aug. 5, meeting to vote on overriding Lacher's veto. The assembly members could call a special session, but borough code allows them 21 days to act.

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