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Time to recall DeVilbiss

On July 31, I submitted to the Mat-Su Borough Clerk's office an application for petitions to recall Assemblyman Larry DeVilbiss. I don't know Mr. DeVilbiss personally, but it is my understanding that he is an honorable, well-respected member of the community. However, his steadfast support for Victor Trygstad's attempt to acquire 320 acres of borough land on a non-competitive basis leaves even his friends dumbfounded.

Those following this controversy may recall that Trygstad originally stated he needed the land for a "World-Class Destination Resort," bringing tourists to the Valley in "glass-domed railroad cars."

After successfully baiting the Planning Commission with the tourist angle, the promises switched to a "Private, Member's-Owned, Non-Profit Country Club."

He has failed to submit in writing anything of substance, including references, a resumé or financial information providing the slightest indication he will be able to raise the \$15 million he claims he will invest. He maintains his investors wish to remain secret.

Nevertheless, the Mat-Su Borough Assembly voted unanimously, amid extremely heavy and sustained public opposition, to transfer the land to Trygstad as a lease with option to purchase. Mayor Barbara Lacher is the only elected official to have a problem with Trygstad's blatant (and very successful) attempts to circumvent the public process by engaging borough officials in private meetings.

Mr. DeVilbiss has apparently been a party to those private meetings.

The Nov. 20, 1996 edition of the *Frontiersman* says DeVilbiss "was favorably impressed with both the planning and money already available to back up the project."

This information was officially requested by

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the borough months ago, but still has not been submitted. Logically, one assumes Trygstad has made private presentations to DeVilbiss in order to successfully advance his agenda to acquire the 320 acres non-competitively. That is the basis of the recall effort.

Nobody believes Mr. DeVilbiss intended to do anything wrong. One does wonder, however, why a man of his character has associated himself so closely with someone who Mayor Lacher accurately stated shows no conscience and has never exercised good faith.

Moreover, I can't imagine how the amateurish, nearly comical promotional material Trygstad has submitted as "plans" and "economic studies" can be taken seriously by anyone with a minimal level of sophistication.

Just the fact that secret investors are trying to acquire a popular piece of recreational land should be setting off loud warning sirens in the assembly chambers.

But the days have arrived when anyone with access to a cell phone, a personal computer and an answering service can set himself up as a "developer" in Alaska and pull a fast one on unsuspecting local governments, overcome with zeal to "dispose of land."

On Aug. 5, the assembly ignored Mayor Lacher's informed insight into this deal, and overrode her veto. However, if assembly members take the time, as Mayor Lacher did, to dig into the shady background of this deal, they have a chance to avoid another typical borough debacle.

Jim Courtney lives in the Butte.