

Instructions & Tips to Testify: Mat-Su Borough Planning Commission Meeting

When: March 20, 2023 || 6:00 PM

Where: 350 E Dahlia Street, Palmer or Remotely

Background:

In December 2022, a new ordinance (OR-23-002) was introduced to the Mat-Su Borough Assembly, amending MSB 17.55 and MSB 17.80 to allow buildings to be built within 75 feet of a waterbody. The Mat-Su Borough currently requires a setback for structures to be a minimum of 75 feet from the ordinary high-water line. There are currently no habitat requirements in this ordinance.

[Click here](#) to read the proposed ordinance (OR 23-002, on pg. 1) and supplemental handout (IM 23-002 pg. 3) from the Fish and Wildlife Commission and [Here](#) for the original Borough information.

[Click here](#) to read the original Borough ordinance.

[Click here](#) and [here](#) to learn more about riparian zones.

The Susitna River Coalition (SRC) recommends that the Borough NOT repeal this ordinance. The SRC believes the ordinance should remain in place and a mandatory 25-foot vegetated habitat buffer should be added to strengthen the ordinance. In addition, the Borough should assist existing landowners repair their buffers to bring properties into compliance.

Attend:

IN PERSON:

Assembly Chambers

350 East Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, AK

ONLINE: observe the meeting via the live stream video at:

* <https://matanuska.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

* <https://www.facebook.com/MatSuBorough>

How to Testify:

IN WRITING:

* You can submit written comments to leg.com@matsugov.us

TELEPHONIC TESTIMONY:

* Dial 1-855-225-2326

* You will hear “Joining conference” when you are admitted to the meeting.

* You will be automatically muted and able to listen to the meeting.

* When the Mayor announces audience participation or a public hearing you would like to speak

to, press *3; you will hear “Your hand has been raised.”

* When it is your turn to testify you will hear “Your line has been unmuted.”

* State your name for the record, spell your last name, and provide your testimony.

Potential Points to Consider Using for Testimony:

- 1.** Riparian zones are vegetated areas separating bodies of water from the upland habitat. Healthy riparian zones prevent erosion. When riparian vegetation is removed, stream banks are open to erosion from normal water activity like rainfall, snowmelt, and boat and aircraft wakes. These water activities can negatively impact property owners by causing streambank erosion, destruction of property, and existing infrastructure if a buffer does not exist.
- 2.** Riparian zones help to lessen the effects of flooding. Riparian vegetation provides a buffer that reduces the speed of water flow and the potential damage to buildings and property within the floodplain. This protects landowners, and their neighbors, from the costly repairs that can accompany flood events.
- 3.** Riparian habitat acts as natural fire breaks by slowing the spread of flames. These areas conserve moisture and the plants contain higher levels of moisture, causing the fires to spread more slowly and allowing for more time to get flames under control.
- 4.** The Mat-Su Borough has invested heavily in our salmon runs which are important to both our commercial and subsistence economy. Maintaining a setback ordinance in the Borough helps maintain this investment in healthy Mat-Su Salmon runs.

5. Northern fish species require cooler water to thrive. Research shows that warming water temperatures have a negative effect on salmon and other aquatic species. The significant fish die-offs during the summer of 2019 were due to warm temperatures with lower levels of dissolved oxygen. In Alaska, aquatic species require vegetation in riparian areas to keep water temperature cool, contributing to places where aquatic species can retreat from warm waters.
6. Riparian zones provide nutrients and habitat. Vegetation along stream banks not only provides safe habitat for juvenile fish and the immature insect life that they eat, but also introduces nutrients for aquatic insects to subsist on. These aquatic insects are important for a thriving ecosystem and fish survival.
7. Vegetation along stream banks provides aquatic habitats and important corridors for both migratory and localized species. The Mat-Su's population is expected to grow by 35% by 2050. As the vibrant Mat-Su Borough continues to develop, maintaining wildlife corridors for birds and small mammals is essential to maintaining wildlife numbers for all Alaskans to enjoy.
8. Riparian vegetation is an important tool in decreasing urban pollutants from entering the water supply. Plant roots and shoots filter the water, increasing water quality in our wells and for aquatic life.
9. Riparian Zones along a streambank make for more valuable recreation. Floating, skiing, or snowmachining down a waterway and seeing only buildings takes away from the outdoor experiences that we can experience close to home. Maintaining buffers preserves these fulfilling recreational experiences.

Preparing your Testimony:

1. Testimony is limited to 3 minutes per person. Make notes or write out your testimony before the meeting starts.
2. When it is your turn to testify, state your name and spell your last name for the record. Identify your connection to the area and if you know your Assembly district or Representative make sure to include that. Find out which Assembly district you are in and who your Assembly Representative is [here](#).

Ex: Hello my name is Susitna River R-I-V-E-R, I am a business owner in District 7 and I am here to encourage the Assembly to keep the Setback Ordinance in place and consider strengthening its requirements because...

3. In your testimony, include your connection to the area, what you would like them to do, what you are concerned about and why, repeat what you would like them to do, and thank them for the opportunity.

Ex: I ask the Assembly not to repeal the Setback Ordinance. I would ask you to consider strengthening the ordinance instead. I am against the repeal of the setback ordinance because my property is next to a river. Many of my neighbors have cut back all of the vegetation along the streambank. Their property along the bank has eroded, and has affected my property. This decreases my property value and places my infrastructure at greater risk. As the Borough continues to grow, this will become a greater issue. Please do not approve the repeal of the ordinance, and consider strengthening it. Thank you for your time.

If you'd like us to review or help you draft your testimony, we are here to help. Please email us to schedule a time to talk or send us your testimony for review at melissa@susitnarivercoalition.org and margaret@susitnarivercoalition.org.