

Ski resort project at Hatcher Pass advances

ASSEMBLY OK: Negotiations continue with borough manager.

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PALMER -- Negotiations between the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and JL Properties to build a ski resort at Hatcher Pass can begin in earnest, following a unanimous decision Tuesday night by the Borough Assembly.

The Assembly acted after more than two hours of public testimony. More than 40 people spoke, most advocating a careful, analytical review of the development proposal and asking that special attention be paid to the environmental effects of the proposed development.

JL Properties in September presented a \$41.25 million proposal to build an alpine ski area and day lodge at Hatcher Pass, coupled with a 450-lot residential development and commercial village just north of Edgerton Parks Road, near the pass. More than half the development would be backed by loans from the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority.

Although the Export Authority representatives have said they are interested in the proposal, the agency board must first approve the plan and sign off on JL Properties' credit. The borough hopes to gain another \$10 million for the development through federal grants to build a day lodge, Nordic ski trails and a bridge across the Little Susitna River.

With Assembly approval, Mat-Su Borough manager John Duffy can now respond to JL Properties' proposal. In an Assembly work session last week, Assembly members supplied a litany of suggestions for Duffy's negotiations, such as spelling out exactly how much money the residential property might bring to the project coffers. More suggestions, such as developing an exit strategy for the borough in case the project turns sour, were added Tuesday night.

Duffy said negotiations might be complete in as little as four months, although the quickly approaching holiday season may cause delays. He told the Assembly he would provide regular progress updates.

Many of those updates, he said after the meeting, may take place in closed-door briefings. Discussing strategy matters in an open forum could jeopardize negotiations, he said.

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