

**National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Kenai Fjords National Park
Alaska**

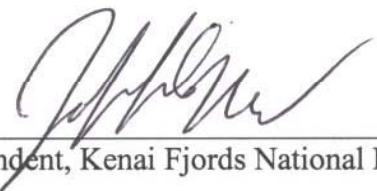


Finding of No Significant Impact

Development of a Multi-Agency Center in Downtown Seward, Alaska

September 2005

Recommended:

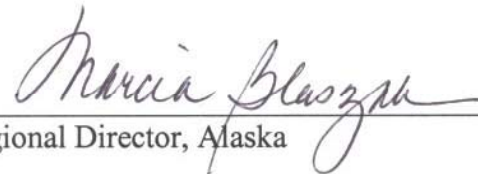


Superintendent, Kenai Fjords National Park

9/7/05

Date

Approved:



Regional Director, Alaska

9/7/05

Date

Finding Of No Significant Impact
Development of a Multi-Agency Center
In Downtown Seward, Alaska

The National Park Service (NPS) prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate a proposal to develop a multi-agency administration and visitor facility in downtown Seward, Alaska. The Center would include space for administration, education programs, interpretive exhibits and programs, visitor information, and conference facilities. Six individually owned properties comprising a total area of approximately 1.3 acres were considered as potential sites for the Multi-Agency Center (Center).

The purpose of the action is to develop a Center to provide for co-located administrative and visitor facilities for both Kenai Fjords National Park (KEFJ) and Chugach National Forest (CNF) that meets the current and future needs of both agencies in a location that is visible and readily accessible to the public. The Center would also incorporate conference facilities managed by the City of Seward to accommodate conference activities by various groups and organizations. The Center would provide KEFJ and CNF with a visitor contact facility with adequate space to conduct public business, where visitors can become informed about the varied recreational opportunities and resources available on federally owned public lands in the region at a single unified location...The Center would reduce agency costs and improve operating efficiencies by allowing shared reception services, mailroom functions, phone systems, and other necessary services combined to improve visitor service. Administrative and visitor service space requirements for both agencies currently exceed the capacity of the existing facilities, resulting in reduced visitor service capabilities and inefficient operations and maintenance.

Section 344 of the 2005 Interior Appropriations Act directed the NPS to purchase seven parcels of real property in Seward, Alaska for an administrative complex, visitor facility, plaza and related parking for the KEFJ and CNF. The complex would be known as the Mary Lowell Center. The NPS purchased four properties in 2005 for development of the Center.

The NPS has selected a modification of Alternative 2 (Single Site, Railway and 5th Avenue Parcel) with the mitigation measures. The modified Alternative 2 would not include the Arcade site for facility development and includes parking on the Harbor Dinner Club site and Mai property. The impacts of this alternative modification would not be substantially different than those identified in the EA.

Public Involvement

The EA had a 30-day public comment period beginning July 13, 2004 and ending August 11, 2004. Public Notice of the availability of the EA was published in the Anchorage Daily News, Seward Phoenix Log, and Kenai Peninsula Clarion. The EA was mailed to 68 agencies, organizations, and individuals. Comments were received from the City of Seward and five individuals. The City's primary concerns related to parking in the downtown area and the potential impact on City utilities from the proposed vacation of Washington Street for facility development. Individual commenters were generally concerned about the effects on the aesthetics and character of downtown Seward, the loss of private land in the downtown area for business purposes, parking, traffic, and the closure of Washington Street.

The public comments received did not change the conclusions in the EA about the environmental effects of the action.

Alternatives

The EA evaluated the no-action alternative and four action alternatives.

No-Action Alternative. Under the no-action alternative the KEFJ and CNF would continue to use existing administrative facilities in the City of Seward. The KEFJ would maintain an information center and administrative building at Seward's small boat harbor while the CNF would continue to use its offices in Seward and at the Kenai Lake Work Center for administrative purposes.

Alternative 1: Single Site, Mid-Block Parcel. Alternative 1 would use the three parcels mid-block on the east side of 5th Avenue (Johnson Property, Harbor Dinner Club, and Mai Property) to make a single site. A single, two-story building would be constructed on the site; the building would have a footprint of approximately 22,800 square feet and would incorporate areas of outdoor "green space". The visitor service and conference functions would be located on the building's first floor and the administrative and staff functions would be located on the second floor.

Alternative 2: Single Site, Railway and 5th Avenue Parcel. Alternative 2 would use a combination of the three parcels on Railway and 5th Avenues (Arcade Building, Old Solly's Building, and Legend's Restaurant) and a portion of Washington Street to make a single site. A single, two-story building would be constructed on the site; the building would have a footprint of approximately 19,800 square feet and would incorporate areas of outdoor "green space". The visitor service and conference functions would be split between two floors with most of the visitor services on the first floor and the conference facilities on the second floor. The administrative and staff functions would also occupy two floors and would be located primarily within the former Arcade and Old Solly's sites.

Alternative 3: Two Sites, Railway Avenue and Mid-Block Parcels. Alternative 3 would use a combination of two of the three parcels mid-block on the east side of 5th Avenue for one building, and the Arcade Building and Old Solly's Building lots to create a parcel for a second building along Railway Avenue. Of the mid-block parcels, either the Johnson Property and Harbor Dinner Club lots would be combined (Alternative 3a), or the Harbor Dinner Club and Mai Property lots would be combined (Alternative 3b). A two-story building with a footprint of approximately 12,900 square feet would be constructed on the mid-block site, and an additional two-story building with a footprint of approximately 10,800 square feet would be constructed on the Railway Avenue site. The mid-block building would incorporate areas of outdoor "green space". The visitor service and conference functions would be located at the mid-block site with visitor services on the first floor and the conference facilities on the second floor. The administrative and staff functions would be located on two floors within the former Arcade and Old Solly's sites.

Alternative 4: Two Sites, Railway and 5th Avenue and Mid-Block Parcels. Alternative 4 would use a combination of two of the three parcels mid-block on the east side of 5th Avenue for one

building, and the Old Solly's Building lot, Legend's Restaurant lot, and a portion of Washington Street to create a parcel for a second building. Of the mid-block parcels, either the Johnson Property and Harbor Dinner Club lots would be combined (Alternative 4a), or the Harbor Dinner Club and Mai Property lots would be combined (Alternative 4b). A two-story building with a footprint of approximately 11,000 square feet would be constructed on the mid-block site, and an additional two-story building with a footprint of approximately 9,000 square feet would be constructed at the former Old Solly's and Legend's sites. The combined sites would be larger than the area needed for the buildings; therefore, outdoor park space and on-site parking would be incorporated into the design. The administrative and staff functions would be located at the mid-block site with visitor services on the first floor and the conference facilities on the second floor. The visitor service and conference functions would be located on two floors within the former Old Solly's and Legend's sites. This alternative would also allow the visitor/conference functions and administrative/staff functions to switch sites if necessitated by design criteria.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Development of a Multi-Agency Center under any of the four action alternatives is environmentally preferred. The differences between impacts of the four action alternatives are minor, and the improvements of each alternative to the visitor experience and NPS and USFS management over the status quo are substantial. None of the action alternatives would have a long-term impact to visual resources, land use, or cultural and archaeological resources. Under normal conditions, each action alternative would result in traffic trips per day that would be comparable to existing conditions and parking spaces that would adequately accommodate normal Center usage. The new conference center built under the action alternatives would bring visitors to Seward throughout the year, benefiting the local economy in the long term. Each action alternative would result in some lost property tax revenues for the City of Seward and Kenai Peninsula Borough. The action alternatives would provide a greater degree of environmental safety than the no action alternative because they are all located outside the area of high seismic risk.

Mitigating Measures

Contaminants and Hazardous Substances: If evidence of any soil and/or groundwater contamination by pollutants, contaminants, or hazardous substances were encountered during demolition and construction, appropriate notification and remedial action would be taken to ensure compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local government environmental statutes and regulations.

Cultural Resources: The proposed project will proceed in compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA of 1966, as amended. As lead federal agency, the NPS has initiated the Section 106 consultation process with SHPO for the development of the Multi-Agency Center. In accordance with 36 CFR 800, the NPS, in consultation with SHPO, will identify historic properties within the Potential Area of Effect and make an assessment of adverse effect on any identified properties (see the Cultural Compliance Schedule attached as Appendix D of the EA). The views of the public have been solicited and considered throughout the process.

If historic properties are discovered or unanticipated effects on historic properties found after the completion of the Section 106 process without an agreement document, the NPS will apply the requirement of 36 CFR 800.13(b), Discoveries Without Prior Planning. If the Section 106

process results in a Memorandum of Agreement, that agreement would define a process to resolve the discovery of historic properties or the unanticipated effect.

Land Use and Building Codes: Any potential development would meet all City of Seward Planning and Land Use Regulations in Chapter 15.10 of the Seward Zoning Code (City of Seward, 1999) and the International Building Code (Seismic Zone 4). Parking for the Multi-Agency Center would meet Seward parking guidelines for office and public assembly buildings, as approved or amended by all municipal regulatory bodies, and would comply with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

Decision

The National Park Service's decision is to select Alternative 2 with a modification to facility locations. This alternative modification will use the Legend's Restaurant lot, Old Solly's Building lot, and a portion of Washington Street to create a parcel for a multi-story administration/visitor center and conference center complex (about 40,000 ft² in total building space). The Mai Property and Harbor Dinner Club parcels on the east side of 5th Avenue will be used for parking (about 62 spaces)(Figure 1). The Arcade site would not be used under this alternative. Open space will be incorporated into the design. The visitor service and conference functions will be located on both floors while administrative functions will occur only on the upper floors. This alternative is contingent on the City of Seward and Kenai Peninsula Borough approval of the vacation of Washington Street for facility development.

If the vacation of Washington Street is not approved, the NPS would select Alternative 4b with a modification that would not require the use of Washington Street.

The Alternative 4b modification would use the Mai Property and Harbor Dinner Club lots on the east side of 5th Avenue for an administration building (8,766 ft² in building footprint) and parking (about 41 spaces) and the Legend's Restaurant lot for a visitor center and conference center complex (11,206 ft² in building footprint). The visitor center and conference center complex would contain 2 floors and the administration building would contain 2 or 3 floors. This alternative modification would not require the vacation of Washington Street and the Old Solly's site would be used for open space (Figure 2).

The decision includes potential mitigation on contaminants and hazardous substances if any are encountered and mitigation on cultural resources, and land use and building codes as identified in the FONSI.

Rationale for the Decision

The development of a multi-agency center in downtown Seward to provide a co-located administrative and visitor facilities for both Kenai Fjords National Park and Chugach National Forest will meet the current and future needs of both agencies. The multi-agency center will greatly expand visitor opportunities to obtain information about local public lands, facilities, and programs. The center will improve the efficiency of both agencies, foster better interagency coordination and communication, and provide operating efficiencies through co-operated office and visitor services. The proposed facility sites provide a greater degree of environmental safety than the existing administrative offices.

Alternative 2 with the modification was selected because it represented the best value for the partnership when compared to the other alternatives. Alternative 2 provides:

- the optimal potential for management of shared space was best achieved in a manner that is most consistent with the desires of the NPS, USFS and City of Seward (the “one-stop” shopping scenario);
- benefits to the commercial zone defined by the one block “downtown” district along 4th Avenue between Adams Street and Railway Avenue. The alternative would most greatly increase property values, economic development, and tax base;
- the strongest visitor connection to other facilities in the downtown district;
- the optimal accessibility to the area’s waterfront;
- the co-location of visitor and administrative functions for optimal benefits; and
- a minimized vehicular and pedestrian interaction on a vacated Washington Street.

Significance Criteria

The modifications of Alternative 2 and 4b will not have a significant effect on the human environment. None of the impacts will rise to the level of significance given the significance criteria defined in 40 CFR Section 1508.27. The significance criteria are as follows:

(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

The modified alternatives can be implemented with no significant adverse effect to natural resources, land use and land-use plans, parking and local transportation, cultural resources, visitor experience, and park and forest management. The alternatives will be consistent with the Seward Comprehensive Plan that zoned the properties as Central Business District. The purchase of two residential properties will remove them from Seward’s housing market.

(2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The proposed facility sites provide a greater degree of environmental safety than the existing administrative offices. The properties are not located within the fractured ground or area of wave run-up associated with the 1964 earthquake.

(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetland, wild and scenic rives, or ecologically critical areas.

No unique characteristics are present on the project site.

(4) The degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The vacation of Washington Street for facility development is controversial among residents of the City of Seward. However, this alternative would only be selected after approval by the City of Seward and the Kenai Peninsula Borough to vacate Washington Street.

(5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The impacts to the human environment do not involve highly uncertain, unique or unknown risks.

(6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent of future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The action would not establish a precedent for future actions.

(7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

The development of the multi-agency center is not related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts.

(8) Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The action would not affect any properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

(9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

No threatened or endangered species occur within or adjacent to the development site.

(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The action would not violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment

FINDINGS

The preferred alternative complies with the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and Executive Orders 11988 and 11990. There will be no significant restriction of subsistence activities as documented by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Title VIII, Section 810 (a) Summary Evaluation and Findings. The project is located outside Kenai Fjords National Park and will not result in any environmental impacts to park resources and values and thus will not violate the NPS Organic Act.

I find that the preferred alternative does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for the project.

Figure 1

Alternative 2 (Modification)



Figure 2
Alternative 4b (Modification)

