

Mayor's Minute

Economic development is important in Cordova. I think everyone would agree to that statement. If the economy falters or stalls, many people start losing their jobs and then move away, which then results in a loss of students in the school, which reduces state funding and then we lose teaching jobs and the cycle continues. So how do we keep the economy going?

The city is seeking funding for the Cordova Center which will create a whole new industry in the winter months. A recent study found that there are over 300 organizations in Alaska of 200 people or less that have meetings each year. These organizations require the infrastructure in a city to be capable of hosting their meetings. These organizations require that a meeting facility is available that has a good sound system and video equipment. They also look at the number of available rooms to rent as well as catering services and restaurants and transportation. Cordova has everything except the meeting facility.

A few years ago I organized a meeting of the Alaska Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. The meeting lasted four days and had just over 200 people attend. We spent over \$24,000 just on the meeting rooms and catering services. That does not count the lodging, car rental, restaurant trade, local transportation and other purchases made by the travelers, which when added in would more than double that amount. All Cordova needs is the facility to bring that business here. If Cordova had just two meetings a month from November through March (10 meetings a year) we could bring in over \$500,000 of new money to town. The hotels and B&B's would have winter time business. Restaurants would stay open in the winter. Our economy would grow and jobs would be created.

The Cordova Center is not another oversized public facility. Our current museum, library and city hall were built after the 1964 earthquake. The city has outgrown both and the buildings are costly to heat and maintain. Yes, we could fix the roof, insulate the buildings, rebuild the interior to meet ADA standards and we would have very expensive retrofitted buildings that are too small, and located in the tsunami zone. The Cordova Center will be built with a minimum 50 year life expectancy that has fuel and electric efficiencies in mind. Moving the library, museum and city hall into this new building above the tsunami zone will provide for multiple uses and the city will dispose of one if not both of our existing buildings.

The city is seeking grants from different agencies and foundations to construct this facility as we cannot do it alone. There are several existing and prospective businesses in town that have received grants to expand or start. The state recently supplied funds for processors to improve their products in order to expand their markets; the building of the Ilanka Cultural Center was done with Denali Commission grants and Rasmuson Foundation funds. All of these grants have produced businesses that contribute to the economy. Getting grants for the Cordova Center is no different and it too will contribute to the economy.

On May 1, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council (EVOS TC) will be in Cordova to hear public testimony on the Cordova Center. We are asking for \$7 million dollars from the Trustee Council to help with the construction of this building. We know

that human services were damaged from the Exxon spill. We also know that fisheries have disappeared or were depressed from the Exxon spill and we will never be able to re-coop those lost revenues. The EVOS TC can only spend money on projects that will help restore damaged resources and human services. The Cordova Center is one method to restore the damaged tourism industry that was greatly reduced after 1989 and is only now recovering. Seward received funds for the Sealife Center, Kodiak received funds to build a museum and a research center, Homer received funds for a recreation park, but Cordova, which has suffered more than any other community has nothing to show for our loss. If the EVOS TC agrees to fund a portion of this facility it will help us move forward from the process from the Oil spill. We do not know what the Supreme Court is going to do, but the EVOS TC money is available now. Sooner or later we will need to replace, expand or do major repairs on our existing city buildings. Funding the Cordova Center with grants from agencies like the EVOS TC will reduce the city's cost to maintain, repair and operate our existing facilities. So, if you agree that economic development is good for the city, if you believe Cordova deserves to be considered equal to other oiled communities and if you want to keep the costs of operating our city buildings down by consolidating our buildings into one that is energy efficient so we can sell the surplus buildings then you can see why I think that the Cordova Center is good for Cordova. We need a unified show of support to the EVOS TC on May 1 to convince them that Cordova is ready and willing to look to our future and start to put the past behind us.