

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

February 10, 2026

8:02 a.m.

DRAFT

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Rebecca Himschoot, Co-Chair
Representative Donna Mears, Co-Chair
Representative Carolyn Hall
Representative Ky Holland
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Steve St. Clair
Representative Garret Nelson

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 255

"An Act relating to permanent fund dividend raffles; creating the senior citizen grants endowment fund and the senior citizen grants dividend raffle fund; authorizing donations from permanent fund dividends for grants to organizations that provide support for senior citizens and for entry into the senior citizen grants dividend raffle; relating to transfers from the senior citizen grants endowment fund and the senior citizen grants dividend raffle fund; relating to the duties of the Department of Revenue; and relating to the definition of 'gambling.'"

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 216

"An Act approving the transfer of land owned by the Alaska Railroad Corporation to the City of Whittier; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 255

SHORT TITLE: SENIOR CITIZEN GRANTS DIVIDEND RAFFLE
SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) STAPP

01/20/26 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/16/26
01/20/26 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/20/26 (H) CRA, FIN
01/27/26 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
01/27/26 (H) Heard & Held
01/27/26 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
02/10/26 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 216

SHORT TITLE: TRANSFER OF RAILROAD LAND TO WHITTIER
SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) HOLLAND

05/02/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
05/02/25 (H) TRA, CRA
01/29/26 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
01/29/26 (H) Heard & Held
01/29/26 (H) MINUTE(TRA)
02/03/26 (H) TRA AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
02/03/26 (H) Moved HB 216 Out of Committee
02/03/26 (H) MINUTE(TRA)
02/04/26 (H) TRA RPT 3DP 3NR 1AM
02/04/26 (H) DP: G.NELSON, ST. CLAIR, EISCHEID
02/04/26 (H) NR: MINA, STUTES, CARRICK
02/04/26 (H) AM: MCCABE
02/10/26 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE WILL STAPP

Representative, Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, gave a summary of HB 255 and answered questions.

VIVIAN STIVER, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 255.

AYDEN NICHOL, Staff
Representative Ky Holland
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation on HB 216 on behalf of Representative Holland, prime sponsor.

MEGHAN CLEMENS, Director of External Affairs
Alaska Railroad Corporation
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 216.

JACKIE WILDE, City Manager
City of Whittier
Whittier, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 216.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:03 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Hall, Holland, St. Clair, G. Nelson, Himschoot, and Mears were present at the call to order. Representative Prax arrived as the meeting was in progress.

^#hb255

HB 255-SENIOR CITIZEN GRANTS DIVIDEND RAFFLE

[8:03:33 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 255, "An Act relating to permanent fund dividend raffles; creating the senior citizen grants endowment fund and the senior citizen grants dividend raffle fund; authorizing donations from permanent fund dividends for grants to organizations that provide support for senior citizens and for entry into the senior citizen grants dividend raffle; relating to transfers from the senior citizen grants endowment fund and the senior citizen grants dividend raffle fund; relating to the duties of the Department of Revenue; and relating to the definition of 'gambling.'"

[8:04:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILL STAPP, Representative, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, offered a recap of HB 255, which is designed to create a voluntary non general fund mechanism to set up a raffle, similar to the Permanent Fund Dividend Education Raffle. It would supplement, not replace, existing

services for senior citizens in Alaska. The contribution allocations are as follows: 50 percent to senior grants administered by the Department of Health (DOH), 25 percent to the Senior Citizen Grants Endowment Fund, and 25 percent to the Senior Citizen Grants Dividend Raffle prize pool to encourage participation.

[8:06:23 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS opened public testimony on HB 255.

[8:07:03 AM](#)

VIVIAN STIVER, representing self, testified in support of HB 255. She answered questions posed during the previous bill hearing, explaining that supportive housing includes services, like housekeeping, snow removal, grocery shopping pharmacy pickup, and appointment reminders. She reported that transportation services would help supplement existing services that lack flexibility. She reported that despite receiving \$7,000 from Pick.Click.Give, the Fairbanks Senior Center still has a waitlist for Meals On Wheels and requires fundraising to support the program. She explained that nutrition, transportation, and supportive housing are among the top five concerns for Alaskan seniors, which is why the bill prioritizes these services.

CO-CHAIR MEARS closed public testimony and announced that HB 255 would be held over.

^#hb216

HB 216-TRANSFER OF RAILROAD LAND TO WHITTIER

[8:11:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the final order of business would be, "An Act approving the transfer of land owned by the Alaska Railroad Corporation to the City of Whittier; and providing for an effective date."

[8:12:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOLLAND, as prime sponsor, presented HB 216. He paraphrased the sponsor statement [included in the committee file], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

HB 216 provides the limited and specific legislative authorization required under AS 42.40.285 for the Alaska Railroad Corporation to convey five identified parcels of railroad land within the City of Whittier to the City, subject to fair market value and existing rights.

In November of 2025, the City Council voted to accept the Railroad's proposal to sell three parcels of land, with the option to later acquire two additional parcels. In December, it authorized the city manager to negotiate a final purchase agreement. That same month, the Railroad submitted a conditional letter of intent conveying its agreement with the terms of the transfer.

However, current statute prohibits the Railroad from selling or otherwise conveying its interest in land without express approval from the legislature. This bill satisfies that statutory requirement and allows the Railroad and the City to proceed with a negotiated transfer to be approved through their respective governing processes. The parcel descriptions are provided for authorization purposes and allow for reasonable modification to accommodate necessary surveying and platting prior to final conveyance.

HB 216 does not establish the terms of sale, require a transfer, or direct how the land must be used. It simply removes the statutory barrier to allow the parties to complete a mutually agreed upon transaction.

[8:14:18 AM](#)

AYDEN NICHOL, Staff, Representative Ky Holland, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Holland, prime sponsor, offered a PowerPoint presentation on HB 216 [included in the committee file], beginning on slide 2, "History: Whittier and the Alaska Railroad," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Whittier (pop. 272) connects Anchorage with Prince William Sound shipping and ferry routes, and is a popular cruise destination

For most of its history, the Alaska Railroad was the only land route connecting Whittier with the rest of the state, via the the Anton Anderson Tunnel

The Alaska Railroad has long benefitted from its significant land holdings within the city limits, which constitute 85% of Whittier's developable land

In 1998, the Railroad agreed to lease 250 acres to the City for development

MR. NICHOLE continued to slide 3, "From a lease to City ownership," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The status of the land under the City's lease discourages investment and prevents the City from bringing in tax

revenue from businesses situated on the property. Early in 2024, negotiations began for the transfer of ownership of five parcels of land from the Railroad to the City.

In December of 2025, the City Council authorized the City Manager to negotiate a final agreement for three parcels, and the Railroad submitted a conditional letter of intent to proceed with the sale.

Legislative approval is a critical element required to allow this deal to proceed: under AS 42.40.285, the Railroad is prohibited from relinquishing land without the authorization of the legislature.

[8:16:06 AM](#)

MR. NICHOLE continued to slide 4, which showed a map of the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) Area of Interest (AOI). Slides 5-6 offered a sectional analysis of the bill, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1

Authorizes the Railroad to transfer the five parcels to the city for fair market value per AS 42.40.285

Describes the five parcels authorized for transfer

Recognizes that further platting and surveying is necessary to complete the exchange, subject to agreement by the parties

5

Ensures that this section meets the requirements for dispensation of land under statutes governing the Railroad

Section 2

Establishes an immediate effective date

[8:18:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the committee would hear invited testimony on HB 216.

[8:18:24 AM](#)

MEGHAN CLEMENS, Director of External Affairs, Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC), gave invited testimony in support of HB 216. She noted that selling land is not something that the railroad takes lightly. The process requires both legislative approval and approval by the ARRC Board of Directors with the board obligated to find that the land is not necessary for railroad purposes and that the sale would serve the best interest of the state. She explained that ARRC and the City of Whittier have engaged in ongoing discussions over the past two years that culminated in a proposal at the board's direction to sell three parcels of land in the city's core downtown district at fair market value, as required by statute. Following the proposal, ARRC received a conditional letter of intent from the city and last week, the board passed a resolution approving the sales of AOI 1, 2, and 3. She noted that completing the sale of parcels 1-3 would not preclude a potential future sale of parcels 4 and 5. She added that legislative approval of this sale would expedite the process in the future.

[8:21:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether ARRC has a plan to provide services in Whittier.

MS. CLEMENS reminded the committee that to sell the land, it must not be necessary for railroad purposes. The parcels in question have been under joint master agreement with the City of Whittier for a number of years and already been commercially developed for non-railroad purposes under a lease share

agreement with the city. Given this situation, parcels 1-3 are not deemed necessary for railroad operational purposes, and it was determined that selling these parcels would be mutually beneficial.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether an environmental assessment has been conducted, or whether one is needed.

MS. CLEMENS said HB 216 strictly authorizes the sale of the land and certainly much more is involved in completing the transaction. The conditional letter of intent provided by the city outlines the full scope of the purchase and sale agreement, as well as the required due diligence.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX opined that the legislature should move this bill forward.

[8:25:19 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS asked whether there are any contingencies associated with the sale.

MS. CLEMENS answered no, it would be a complete sale of the land to the City of Whittier.

[8:26:12 AM](#)

JACKIE WILDE, City Manager, City of Whittier, gave invited testimony in support of HB 216. She explained that this sale is almost 40 years in the making because in 1998, the city entered into a master lease with ARRC, which allowed the city to operate the land while paying 40 percent of gross revenues. She noted the need for economic development with the new cruise ship terminal being built and the need for more housing. She added that the city owns very little land, including the Buckner building, which is an abandoned U.S. military building on a large, contaminated site, and the "tank farm" at the head of the bay. She said the bill would be a large first step towards working together for decades to come.

[8:29:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HALL asked whether there are particular economic development projects that the city hopes to pursue.

MS. WILDE said the City of Whittier has already drafted a waterfront economic development plan and is looking to develop a

master transportation plan with Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF). She reported that Whittier receives over 7,000 visitors per year, which drives the need to build additional storefronts, housing, and economic development.

REPRESENTATIVE HALL asked about the timeline for these plans.

MS. WILDE said the city has a 30-year capital improvement plan to use this land in the best way possible for the city, state, and railroad.

REPRESENTATIVE HALL asked about barriers to these development plans.

MS. WILDE said the biggest challenge is that the city doesn't own the land, which makes it hard to apply for federal funding for community block grants. The master lease, she said, while well intended was not a great idea and illustrates the importance of terminating the lease and working with the railroad on this deal.

[8:33:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEARS announced that the bill would be held over.
#

[8:34:33 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:34 a.m.