



CITY OF WASILLA

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM NO. 92-03

TO: Council

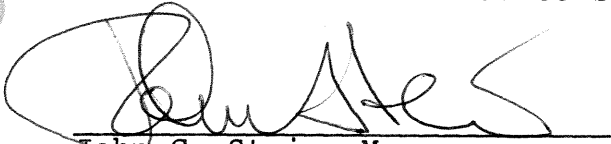
FROM: Mayor Stein

DATE: February 3, 1992

This week I submitted the attached article to the Frontiersman. It deals with City police.

There will come a time for the City to accept the responsibility for police. I believe that it will be soon.

The article is intended to stimulate public discussion.



John C. Stein, Mayor



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February 3, 1992

Editor
The Frontiersman
1261 Seward Meridian, Suite F
Wasilla, Alaska 99654

Re: Spectrum Article

Dear Editor:

The issue that won't die: Wasilla Police. We've experienced denial, bargaining, anger. All but the final response: acceptance.

Public safety, law enforcement, police protection, whatever you want to call it, is one of the traditional community services of the western world. For good reason. Without that element of control, our lives would be chaotic.

To its great benefit and their great credit, Wasilla, during its formative years, has enjoyed the excellent services of the Alaska State Troopers. That relationship is changing as Wasilla matures into a larger first class city. Troopers now face state budget constraints and increased demands from unorganized areas. Their mission is to supplement local law enforcement, not to be the primary provider.

The message has been given succinctly to Wasilla and the Anchorage Hillside. The Hickel administration is pulling the plug on urban police activities. The state legislature is considering HB 350 which will mandate police for cities of 2,000 population or more. The Palmer trooper post has advised that Wasilla residents can expect little response to non-crisis calls. The trooper field office at the old Wasilla School has been vacated. Troopers have rejected proposals to provide contract service within the City. Trooper neighborhood watch programs will come to Wasilla only after outlying areas are served.

Many Valley residents revel in the free-wheeling lifestyle available in the relatively wide-open suburbs. Many resent the intrusion of traffic enforcement. Many lifestyles are not consistent with controls over drugs and alcohol. Many have cavalier attitudes about property belonging to the public and others. The question is do we accept these kinds of attitudes and their resulting destructive behavior? Do we continue to pay for the broken glass, stolen snowmachines, the ruined ballfield and the personal injuries on a random and individual basis or do we demand responsibility and set limits on behavior in our community. The mechanism is law enforcement.

City police is a responsibility that is complex and costly. It not only involves officers, clerks, cars and equipment but jails, office space, prosecuting attorneys and public defenders. It includes training, supervision, performance measurement and boards of review. It can be done. It is done in Sitka and Soldotna, Ketchikan and Kenai, Seward and Skagway.

Once a need is confirmed, how does a community pay for law and order? Property tax is standard and your Council has the ordinance power to levy it. Sales tax can be authorized by a vote of the people and has been approved in 89 other Alaskan jurisdictions. Revenue is also generated through fines and penalties.


The six member Wasilla City Council now has the power to establish a police force. Four votes are required to pass an ordinance. Four votes are required to levy a property tax. Four votes are required to place sales tax on the ballot.

My proposal to fund a police department, should the Council decide to establish one, would be this proposition to the voters: "Should the City of Wasilla establish a maximum 2% sales tax and simultaneously cap the City property tax at 2 mills?". This proposition would provide for general government expenses and allow the Council latitude for tax levies up to 2% and 2 mills. The present City property tax is 4.0 mills. Thorough analysis might suggest different numbers but the concept is sound. Spread tax burden from just property owners to all consumers. Support City services with some non-resident sales tax revenue. Guarantee for as long as possible that property tax rates will not increase. State law says that sales tax cannot be increased without a positive vote of the people. This revenue plan will provide the facilities and services necessary for a growing city.

This administration can only promise that given the authority, a police force will be staffed with professional academy-trained officers, and administered to achieve the greatest benefits for the least cost. Every saving option will be explored including start-up grants, cooperative agreements with the City of Palmer and the Alaska State Troopers. Citizen involvement will be encouraged through Neighborhood Watch, Crime Stoppers and a citizen advisory board.

What is Wasilla to do? If Wasilla is ever to have a police force, it will result from a rising up of residents and the calls from business owners demanding the service and consenting to its costs. The Mayor and Council hear plenty about reducing taxes and cutting local government. Until the public safety point of view is delivered with force, residents of Wasilla can only expect a deterioration in security.

Sincerely,



John C. Stein
Mayor, City of Wasilla