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*Building Sustainable Communities – The Galena Imperatives*

Good morning! When Barb Sheinberg asked me to speak on building sustainable communities, I don't think she realized how passionate I am about this topic. I firmly believe the future of Alaska will rise or fall with the viability of our communities, and that planners play a key role in determining our future.

I grew up just north of Vancouver, Washington. My second-story bedroom window faced south towards the advancing lights of Portland. My parents told me that one day we would lose our cherry trees, orchard and field to inevitable development, and sure enough, we have home movies of my brother Jim and I throwing dirt clods at bulldozers as they destroyed our cherry trees. Our farmhouse in Hazel Dell is now part of Interstate 5, a motel, and a gas station. It was the trauma of my childhood. And I resolved that we should have a more rational process so that other kids wouldn't have to go through similar struggles.

I studied under Ian McHarg at the University of Pennsylvania. When Ian wrote *Design with Nature* in 1969, he believed cities were serious contributors to our social ills. But much later when he penned his autobiography, *A Quest for Life*, in 1996, he mused that we now had the technology and the will to heal the earth. In fact, he wished he could be a 21<sup>st</sup> century astronaut in orbit observing the earth beginning to heal itself.

In 1975 I arrived in Juneau as a planner for the Department of Community & Regional Affairs. I could not have had a better introduction to this magnificent place we call Alaska. Byron Mallott and Lee McAnerney had established a special department of state government to advocate on behalf of over 200 remote communities from Metlakatla to Point Hope. I learned about the power and wisdom of local decision-making, and the sanctity of the public process. I learned about listening and I first gained an appreciation for the diversity of cultures here. And I learned about the need for advocacy for our rural communities.

My first business meeting was in Tenakee Springs. I flew over in a float plane, met Mayor Rod Pegues on arrival, and expected to walk to City Hall for our meeting. Instead, we walked right into the hot springs bath, stripped, and conducted our business immersed in steaming hot water. I thought what an amazing state that we can conduct our business with such informality and quality of life. This is worth protecting!

Barb provided me with several working definitions of sustainability from the American Planning Association. Each of these definitions speaks to balancing a community's demand on environmental, economic and social systems. I know that we need to consider sustainability holistically. It's not a one dimensional concept. In fact, the test for sustainability with me is whether we can provide future generations with greater options, or fewer options than we enjoy.

Judith Crotty is here from Wells Fargo. I would like to imagine that her granddaughter might one day be bounding up Mons Olympus as one of our first Mars explorers, and on vacation, returns to Alaska for a wilderness backpacking trip, fishing, hunting, etc. And if she finds communities that are vibrant and living in harmony with their environment, then we've succeeded.

I am very concerned about the viability of Alaska's special communities. Last month, I was the guest speaker in Galena at their annual fiddler sobriety festival. I spent a sleepless night at Roger & Carol Huntington's B&B fronting the Yukon River. I kept waking up and staring out at the dark current flowing by. I pondered what would it take to really make our villages, towns and cities sustainable. Alaska has over 200 communities, most off the road and power grid systems. They are special places, beset with challenges....and phenomenal opportunities.

I came up with my own "top ten" list of sustainable criteria, and even gave them a name – *the Galena Imperatives*. You may debate my list as a work in progress, and I'd be interested in yours. Here they are:

### **Leadership**

Leadership tops my list every time. With caring, informed, decisive, compassionate leaders, everything else is possible. Without it, nothing good happens. You've seen this at work in your own families, in companies small and large, in government bureaucracies and in the board room. Those organizations that succeed over the long term always have good leaders at the top. Communities that suffer from family feuds and incessant politics are dysfunctional and the damage can be long lasting. Talent flees, no one is mentored and opportunities are lost.

The most difficult situation, however, is when you're faced with average, mediocre leadership, the C+ or B- kind. You can easily go with the flow, but you know things could be better. I strongly advise to work quickly with your leaders to see if they can rise to the occasion. If so, wonderful. But if not, I would advise you to move quickly to vote them out, to replace them. We have no time to waste.

How many planners here remember Tom Gallagher who used to teach at the University of Alaska Southeast? I rediscovered Tom, who is running the Ford Family Foundation in southern Oregon. They are moving strategically to develop leadership across Oregon. In fact, they divided the state into 88 pieces, and are moving aggressively to train local leaders in each area. In 10 years, they intend to have 1,000 Oregonians trained and

prepared to lead civic life. We have nothing like this in Alaska. Leadership requires training.

Good leaders are also champions. They mentor. They are intelligent risk-takers. They apply politics to accomplish the public good. And they promote causes that would otherwise not happen. Governor Jay Hammond and Senator Hugh Malone championed the Permanent Fund. Mayor Bill Overstreet here in Juneau rallied Alaskans to support this city as our permanent capital. You know who they are.

Our state also needs champions in the private sector. Bernie Kyle, the owner of Chena Hot Springs, combined forces with United Technologies, and created the world's first geothermal electric generator powered by water at only 165 degrees Fahrenheit. This technology can be powered by geothermal sources, waste heat or biomass. Senator Stevens told me to look hard at the numbers, and if they're valid, replicate it! Without a champion like Bernie, this wouldn't have happened.

## **Vision**

Joel Barker once said that "Vision without action is merely a dream; action without vision merely passes the time, but vision with action can change the world!" Whistler, British Columbia is one of the best examples of a community with long-term vision and action. Over 30 years ago, city leaders decided to become the continent's premier destination winter resort. They began with a single hotel, a conference center and a golf course. Whistler-Blackcomb is now recognized worldwide as North America's best all-season resort, and they will be hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics.

The City of Galena also has a powerful vision, now also about 30 years old, to become the preeminent education center for rural Interior Alaska. I'm told this dream began with Sidney Huntington, now 94 years young. Galena has an excellent city school district, and a cutting-edge boarding school, the Galena Interior Learning Academy (GILA), located on the former Air Force station. GILA has about 100 students from across the state, and offers a diverse high school curriculum to include computer science, cosmetology, aviation and culinary arts. Where else in the country can a high school student earn his private pilot's license for free?! GILA follows in the tradition of Alaska's early boarding schools, but with a significant difference – here, diverse Alaska Native cultures are celebrated, not stifled.. Galena also hopes to attract the proposed Interior campus for the Alaska Military Youth Academy, sharing former base facilities with GILA.

Each of our communities and every region in the state need a vision of its own...and so does the State of Alaska.

## **Collaboration**

My definition of collaboration covers a lot of territory, but it begins and ends with trust. Alaska is both the largest and the smallest state in the Union. Everybody knows

everybody. Untrustworthy people don't last long leading organizations, and often end up disappearing from public life and/or leaving Alaska.

Trust is a precious commodity that takes time to develop. Trust requires carefully building relationships. It requires spending time in a community, not hopping in and out, or even worse, having the charter aircraft wait for you! In Alaska, building a relationship means breaking bread together at the same table.

Collaboration means being inclusive. I've had the greatest professional joy involving both elders and youth in planning projects across the state. The kids give you original fresh ideas, and the seniors are astonished to be asked for their professional opinion. In Unalaska, for example, we engaged a classroom on the question of needed capital projects for the community. They had one – a dry level place to skateboard. We never would have thought of it – but clearing the foundation of a WWII building and covering it with a wooden roof was an easy step to take.

Collaboration means listening, appreciating and respecting Alaska Native culture, and all our diverse cultures in this state. Alaska Natives, in particular, as Alaska's first people, have critical perspectives on life and public policy issues that most non-Natives have never experienced. To gain a basic perspective, for example, I've had the Denali Commission staff study this year with Father Mike Oleksa, and with the Alaska Native Heritage Center in cross-cultural communications and Alaska Native history.

Collaboration means working together to move paradigms forward. Gene Peltola, for example, who leads the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, tells me that twenty years ago if someone had a health emergency, the answer was to fly the patient into Bethel for treatment. Now, thanks to effective partnerships, the Denali Commission has helped construct primary care clinics in over 60 communities across Alaska so that basic health care is now given at the point of service. Gene says, however, the next collaborative step is to shift the emphasis to prevention.

### **An Economic Reason to Exist**

Our communities must have sound economic reasons to exist, or they will not prevail over the long run. Historically, most of our rural Native communities were seasonal, moving from one subsistence location to another. Missionaries, or the BIA, typically "discovered" them during the summer, concluded that this must be where the village was, and plunked down the church or the school. If this site happened to be on the outside bend of a meandering river, sustainability was greatly compromised.

Bethel is a great example. The Moravians arrived in the 1880's to a summer camp of a Yupik tribe on the outside bend of the Kuskokwim River, and the rest is history. Bethel is now the regional center for 56 villages, and is the transshipment point on the river between ocean-going barges and mid-river craft. The airport serves the entire region, the economy is gradually becoming more diversified, and the Corps of Engineers has spent millions of dollars protecting the town from the advancing river.

Last month I had the privilege of accompanying Senator Ted Stevens and Matt Nickolai, President of Calista, to Donlin Creek, a major gold mining prospect, located in the hills about 25 miles north of Crooked Creek above the Kuskokwim River. Donlin Creek is the best example of local/shareholder hire I've ever seen. Over 90% of the employees, from supervisors to apprentices, come from the region, to include the distant coastal villages. Donlin is a partnership between Calista Corporation and Barrack Gold, the world's largest gold mining company based in Toronto. Significantly, Barrack's core values include community involvement and family. They are willing to work with Calista to make the venture a win-win both financially and socially.

If Donlin's resources are proven and the mine is permitted, it will provide a badly needed private sector anchor to help the region for the next thirty years and beyond. Each region of our state needs a Donlin Creek to provide economic opportunities for local residents.

A topic for another day is the rise of China and India. If we're not careful, rural Alaska risks economic marginalization. Fortunately, we have some excellent training programs underway to teach rural residents to market high quality arts and crafts on the Internet. We need to use every tool at our disposal to stay relevant in the global economy. We also need to provide transportation options, like NANA flying workers to and from the Red Dog mine in northwest Alaska, giving people the option of living in our smaller communities.

A key part of a sustainable economy is job training, another core program for the Denali Commission...and another topic worthy of much discussion.

### **Adequate Government Revenues**

Our cities and towns require sufficient public revenues. State revenue sharing, once a stable source of local funds, must be reinstated. The Alaska Municipal League strongly advocates the principle that local leaders know best how to spend resources for the betterment of their communities. Governor-elect Sarah Palin stated during the campaign she would reinstate the program.

At the same time, however, each community must do what it can to raise its own revenues, through a combination of taxation, bonding and user fees. People are not truly invested in local government if everything is provided for them. As our congressional delegation works hard in Washington DC to secure funding for Alaska, to include the Denali Commission's programs, their job is much more difficult when the State of Alaska and our local communities are not contributing their share financially. We need a balanced effort. With the global war on terror, national budget deficits, and ongoing hurricane recovery, securing federal dollars for Alaska is becoming more difficult.

The Alaska Constitution wisely emphasizes the need for effective local and regional government. Borough government has proven to be a good model for many regions of

Alaska, and the concept should continue to be tested in additional areas of the state, perhaps, for example, in the middle Kuskokwim region if Donlin Creek proves feasible.

It's also okay to review our own history for lessons learned, provided we apply them positively. In my view, a tremendous missed opportunity for a borough occurred in 1979 when we looked at the Yukon Flats region for a potential new regional government. This region could have captured hundreds of millions of dollars from the then new pipeline and associated pump stations. Regional leaders declined, however, viewing the model as not culturally appropriate for their villages. History sometimes repeats itself and the proposed gas line may offer another opportunity.

### **Basic Community Infrastructure**

Every community needs its own basic set of community infrastructure to be viable. This includes utilities like water and sewer, energy generation and power distribution, public facilities like health clinics, government offices, schools, housing, solid waste disposal, etc.

This is one of the core reasons the Denali Commission exists – to partner with local government to provide the right mix of public facilities that make sense for each location. We have invested over \$800 million in eight years in towns and villages across the state.

Our most important contribution, however, has been to advance the doctrine of sustainability. We have given extensive thought to providing facilities that are affordable, well designed, easy to operate and maintain, and culturally appropriate. We will not invest unless a proposed project has the broad support of the public, is part of an adopted community plan, supported regionally, and passes muster in a business plan that gives us a high level of certainty of who will own it, who will operate it, where the funds are coming from to operate and maintain it, and how it might ultimately be replaced.

Our job training programs are focused primarily on the construction trades, facility operation and maintenance and the health professions, to complement our infrastructure programs.

Overall, together, we've made significant progress....but we have a long way to go until our communities have an adequate suite of public facilities.

### **Affordable, Reliable Energy**

The Denali Commission has invested close to half our funding to solve the energy crisis in rural Alaska. The Commission partnered early with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Alaska Energy Authority in a bold program to replace all the old bulk fuel storage systems which are essential for each community's winter supply of diesel fuel. Eight years ago, the Coast Guard was about to declare these systems unusable given their deteriorating condition and lack of safety mechanisms.

I'm pleased to report we have replaced about 75 such systems, and are about half done with the program. With the current level of funding from Congress, we will need another 6-8 years to complete this effort.

The Commission also realized that it would do little good to provide a safe storage system for fuel, if it was then wasted in inefficient power generation. Partnering with the Energy Authority and with the Alaska Village Electrical Cooperative, we are engaging in a comprehensive effort to upgrade village power plants using the latest technologies and best practices. We are about 25% complete.

High energy prices are crippling our rural communities. Demographers are witnessing in-migration to regional hubs and to Fairbanks and Anchorage. One of the important strategies to lower long-term energy costs is to invest aggressively into renewable and alternative energy.

The Commission has invested in hydropower, primarily in Southeast Alaska and south central Alaska for several years. In 2006, we helped co-fund a biomass boiler to heat municipal buildings in Craig, the geothermal power plant at Chena Hot Springs, supported a proposed wind farm on Fire Island, and a feasibility study for coal gasification. We're aggressively supporting wind-diesel integrated systems in western Alaska, recently completing projects in Toksook Bay and Kasigluk.

We hope to promote a few energy demonstration projects this year. Since we can't predict which technology might provide the tipping point for our rural communities, we need to pursue multiple strategies simultaneously.

### **Marketing and Branding**

Telling stories effectively is essential for attracting talent, securing financial investment and support, and mobilizing a constituency. Communities may have the best idea or situation, but without appropriate marketing and branding, it may not be sustainable.

Last month at the National Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian, Mary Lu and I admired the only Leonardo Da Vinci painting known to exist in the Western Hemisphere. We couldn't see a single brushstroke; she was so life-like. Our guide asked us if we knew why Leonardo, Michelangelo and other Renaissance painters and sculptors focused on the figure of David for Florence, Italy. We didn't. As emerging Florence struggled to distinguish itself from more powerful surrounding city states, city leaders seized upon the theme of David and Goliath. It worked. Bankers, merchants and artisans attracted to the David theme helped Florence become the center of the Renaissance, thanks partially to smart municipal branding.

Alaska has trouble telling our story successfully to Congress and the administration in Washington DC. The secret is to find the right combination of genuine human interest stories, combined with real quantifiable data. The power of story telling is immense

when done correctly, and is important to the long-term viability of our state and our communities

### **A Safe Location**

Number nine of my Galena Imperatives is another basic one – each community needs to be sited in an environmentally safe location. The most critical issue facing residents and policy makers is the impact of climate change. Over 20 communities in western Alaska, for example, are at risk from erosion, flooding, and damage from fall storms.

Shishmaref and Kivalina are especially at risk. With the late arrival of onshore ice, these communities are battered by fall storms that normally would blow over with little harm. The Denali Commission and the State of Alaska responded to an emergency request by the Northwest Arctic Borough for funding for a temporary, emergency seawall at Kivalina. The structure was almost complete when the first fall storm hit. Sadly, the structure has failed. Senator Stevens appealed to the Corps of Engineers to release \$1 million in emergency funds, and equipment is arriving in Kivalina to attempt to protect the community's infrastructure.

The larger question is whether and how a community like Kivalina can successfully fight the Chukchi Sea, or relocate to safer ground. Who decides? And where does the funding come from? The Commission opposes merely relocating a community to another location using the same old technology as the existing location. We need to focus on best practices and innovation to create a model community for the future. We face some extremely complex public policy decisions to ensure our communities are situated in safe locations.

### **A Vital Role for Alaskans**

Twenty years ago, if a community needed expertise in Arctic engineering, winter city design, comprehensive planning, architecture, landscape architecture or construction, they often had to rely on professionals from outside Alaska. In a competition, the lower zip code usually prevailed.

I'm happy to report this is no longer the case. Only rarely do we need to secure outside expertise anymore. Across the disciplines, Alaskan firms and professionals are top rate, and in fact, export their craft throughout the Polar Regions and even to Antarctica.

The Denali Commission also promotes excellence in design. Our cities and towns do not have to be ugly or dysfunctional. Examples of Denali Commission projects that reflect design excellence include the Nolan Community Center in Wrangell and the community library in Haines.

Our communities are blessed with dedicated citizens who are willing to serve on planning commissions, city councils and tribal governments. With the right combination of local

talent, and the use of Alaskan professionals, I'm optimistic our communities can reach their full potential as very special and sustainable places.

### **The Galena Imperatives in Action –Igiugig!**

I asked my staff for an example of an Alaskan community that is doing everything it can to be sustainable...and they said look at Igiugig! Igiugig is a very successful Alutiiq village of about 50 people located on the shore of Illiamna Lake in southwest Alaska.

The village has a track record of excellent tribal leadership, sound fiscal practices, and collaboration with regional organizations, the school district and several businesses. The community turns out to welcome new teachers, focuses on student performance, and properly maintains village infrastructure and utilities. They regularly set aside funds for maintenance and repair. The economy is a combination of subsistence, commercial fishing and businesses like eco-tourism.

### **In Conclusion**

So these are my top ten, my Galena Imperatives, with a real example, as well. I hope they've given you some food for thought, and maybe even some inspiration to set forth your own criteria.

One of my mentors, Mort Hoppenfeld, was the designer of Columbia, Maryland, and Executive Director of the New Capital Site Planning Commission. Mort admonished me that planners come in two types: analysts and recorders, and agents of change. He urged me to be the second type, to use my planning talents to bring about lasting change. I've kept his wisdom foremost in my mind as I've moved along in my eclectic career, and I urge you to do the same.

You could not have a more challenging or more rewarding place to practice the art and science of planning than Alaska. I'm pleased to be among so many dedicated planners and planning commission members. I'm especially pleased to meet several new planners to Alaska. I've enjoyed talking to you today, and I look forward to a chance to work with you on behalf of our special state and communities.