

# Assembly OKs plans for Native Heritage Park

by Geoff Kennedy  
for the Tundra Times

The Alaska Native Heritage Park won approval from the Anchorage Assembly the second time around last week.

The assembly June 5 had turned down the proposal, but had voted to reconsider.

The assembly voted 6-3 Tuesday to lease 59 acres in East Anchorage to Alaska Native Heritage Park Inc. for the tourist facility.

The developer wants to build replicas of Indian, Eskimo and Aleut villages as they were before contact with Russians. The plans include an amphitheater, outdoor performance areas, a display hall, retail shops and a restaurant joined by trails.

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The Native heritage park would be part of Far North Bicentennial Park, a 4,200-acre area in what used to be called the Campbell Tract off Campbell Airstrip Road.

Planners estimate the park would draw up to 250,000 visitors a year from May to September.

The 30-year lease would require the corporation to start building within two years, unless it requested an extension.

Alaska Heritage Park, Inc. would pay \$1 a year for the first five years. After that, the corporation would pay 3 percent of the admission revenues and 2 percent of the gross retail receipts each year.

The corporation would have to show it has enough money to pay for each phase of the project before it begins that phase.

Assembly member Jim Barnett switched votes from June 5. In the intervening two weeks, he devised three amendments to protect the municipality from any financial losses as a result of the deal.

One would require Alaska Native Heritage Inc. to prove it has enough money to operate for at least five years.

A second would require the developer to provide an "acceptable abandonment guarantee" in case Heritage defaulted on its lease and abandoned the property.

And a third would require a review of the lease terms every three years to adjust municipal fees to the fair market value of the property.

The president of the corporation, Lydia Hays, responded to the amendments with restraint.

"You have to be cautious until you see the terms of the lease. The specifics are not there yet," she said.

The amendments address concerns both to the city and to the corporation, Hays said.

"We don't want to fail any more than the city would want us to fail," she said.

The heritage park project has been subjected to an "extraordinary review and extraordinary requirements,"

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—Lydia Hays

Hays said. Usually policy-making groups agree on general principles but leave the negotiation of details to administrators, she said.

Critics pointed out the amendments lacked specifics, but Barnett said the details would be worked out before the municipality signed any lease.

Assembly member Craig Campbell also voted for the park. He had been absent for the June 5 vote.

Two members who voted against the park June 5 were absent for Tuesday's vote.

That vote triggered a petition drive by Friends of Campbell Tract who are seeking 5,600 signatures to require the matter be decided by voters in the October local election.

Some Anchorage residents who live near the park are concerned about the effects on their neighborhood. Others oppose the park because they want the area to remain undeveloped for cross-country skiers, dog-mushers and hikers. And some support a Native cultural center, but not in a city park.

But a buffer of 17 acres separates the park from heavily traveled Tudor Road, Hays said. Planners as far back as 1974 intended the area for moderate development, she said.

In addition, racism and misunderstanding about Native

cultures helps fuel the opposition to a Native cultural center in a city park, she added.

Some Anchorage residents seem unable to recognize that Alaska

Natives are human beings with feelings, she said.

"The idea of a statewide cultural center bridges those gaps and brings us closer together," she said.