

Federal Bldg. Accepted-

Controversy Erupts Over Location

Plans for the proposed new \$21 million federal building were becalmed in a sea of discussion as a large crowd turned out for an all-day hearing in city council chambers Friday.

Presiding over a six-member panel were Sens. Mike Gravel and Ted Stevens. Panel members and the senators heard testimonies from 18 people, including Fairbanks Mayor Harold Gillam, City Manager Wallis Droz and representatives from the East Side Neighborhood Association.

That a new federal building, perhaps a complex housing government offices at all levels, is needed appeared to be the one idea that nearly everyone accepted. Controversy arose over the location.

The 9.2 acre site east of Noble Street came under heavy attack from nearly everyone there, particularly the East Side organization. The main objection was that putting the complex there would mean razing 52 homes and uprooting more than 200 people. Only

(Continued on page 6)

Federal Building . . .

(Continued from page 1)

the Chamber of Commerce and borough officials favored the location.

Alternate sites were suggested in the Weeks Field area near Airport Way and in the vacant lot south of J. C. Penney's.

George Easley, representing the governor's office, testified first. Noting that architects have been retained, he said they were prepared to go ahead and could probably put out plans in June.

"It would certainly provide advantages for citizens attempting to do business with the government if all business were centrally located," he said.

Borough Chairman John Carlson favored the central spot.

"In Fairbanks, federal offices are scattered over a wide area. A new building would improve efficiency and create jobs and new business opportunities. Other business would be attracted," he said.

"I see nothing but good coming from this building and would encourage it. Basically, there is a feeling that it should be in the core area," he added.

Mayor Gillam, while favoring construction of the building, objected to "displacing people who have made their homes there (on the East Side)." He also proposed the Weeks Field area, as it is near major traffic arteries and close to the complex consisting of the present state building, MUS, and the police and fire stations.

Gillam, along with several others, felt that a central location would do more harm than good. Ice fog and traffic congestion were two reasons given against such a spot and he said, "It'll be over my dead body that this plan will go through."

C. W. Baer, Chamber of Commerce representative, endorsed the new building, saying that a new and better court system was greatly needed. The Native Land Claims act will require expanded agency room in Fairbanks, he stated. Also, the town is growing and office space is on the short side.

Mrs. Alice Wilson, chairman of the East Side association, protested being taken into urban renewal without knowing what was happening.

"The people have a constitutional right to privacy. The government has the constitutional responsibility to inform," she said, quoting from Sen. Gravel's book, *Citizen Power*.

Other East Side citizens spoke on the already-bad pollution problem, the possibility of relocating the main post office and quality of life here in Fairbanks as opposed to that in the lower 48.

Celia Hunter, co-owner and operator of Camp Denali, said this proposal is like the Army in Vietnam saying "We had to destroy the town to save it."

Speaking for Howard Rock, editor of the *Tundra Times*, was Frank Murphy. He said that Rock was in total support of the project because of what it represents in terms of employment and because it would help the Natives. He continued that Rock hoped money could be allocated for an Alaskan Native motif to express individuality. And he concluded by saying that if Fairbanks did not want

the building, it could always be relocated in Point Hope.

After several more witnesses had testified, Sen. Gravel brought the hearing to a close.

"We're not going to do something that would violate the interests of a large number of people," he said.

He added, "What mechanisms will be used, I'm not sure, but they will be public mechanisms, I can assure you."

He concluded by suggesting that city and borough officials send him suggestions for the building's location. A study would then be made to arrive at a final decision.