



CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL

INCORPORATED MAY 30, 2008

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NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release: 03/26/2020 3:15 p.m.

COVID-19 UPDATE: RESPONSE BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO REQUESTS FOR LOCAL AIRPORT CLOSURES

Wrangell, AK – Many Wrangell residents have asked if the City & Borough of Wrangell (CBW) can mandate closure of the airport as a way to prevent further risk of COVID-19 being introduced to the community by an incoming passenger. The CBW does not own, nor does it have the authority to close the airport terminal (owned and operated by Alaska Airlines), or the airport runway (owned and operated by the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities).

Recently, the Alaska Department of Transportation issued the attached letter explaining why the Department will not be closing any airports due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

encl. Draft Airport Closure Requests (State of Alaska)

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Contact: Wrangell Borough Clerk, 907.874.2381, clerk@wrangell.com



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Transportation and
Public Facilities

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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March 24, 2020

Dear Sir / Maam,

As rural communities seek to limit the impacts of COVID19, the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is receiving numerous requests for local airport closures. DOT&PF has confirmed with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that airport closure is not a valid option at this time for several reasons:

- Airports are public facilities that provide critical life, health, and safety access to rural communities.
- Alaska's airports have received significant federal funding to ensure they remain open and operational to all aircraft users and the public. Federal grant assurances associated with the funding prohibits airport closure without FAA approval.
- Public airports must remain open and available to all types of users (commercial, private, passenger, cargo, etc.)

Questions have arisen surrounding 17 AAC 45.700 – Airport Abandonment or Closure. This regulation is intended to address emergency operational issues (runway obstructions, unsafe surface conditions, etc) that could result in an aircraft mishap and requires FAA approval. In such cases, the FAA gives the airport sponsor (DOT&PF) the authority to immediately close the airport to prevent an operational mishap.

In response to the COVID19 situation, the FAA also issued the following:

“In general, the FAA does not permit temporary closure or restriction of federally obligated airports for nonaeronautical purposes. An airport sponsor must obtain FAA approval to allow airport closure for a non-aeronautical purpose. (Grant Assurance 19 and 49 U.S.C. § 47107(a)(8)). Grant Assurance 19 further requires that airport sponsors will not cause or permit any activity or action on the airport that would interfere with its use for airport purposes. This guidance includes all airport structures and operational areas.”

Both the Governor and DOT&PF have issued travel guidance intended to limit the spread of COVID19 while still allowing essential activities to occur. The Department will continue to monitor emerging conditions and expert guidance to ensure Alaskans are served throughout this challenge.

Sincerely,

John MacKinnon
Commissioner