

CB Bettisworth was interviewed on March 7, 2023 by Rachel Cohen and Karen Brewster at the offices of Bettisworth North Architects on Front Street in Fairbanks, Alaska. In this interview, CB talks about serving on the State of Alaska's Capital Site Selection Committee (CSSC) in the 1970s, including how he got involved, the process the committee went through to select sites, the criteria they used, how the project was funded, his assessment of the final selection of the Willow site, his views on the capital move, the successes and challenges of serving on this committee, and the long-term legacy of the capital move idea. CB also talks about his later work on the FRANK Initiative (Frustrated Responsible Alaskans Needing Knowledge), which was a citizen's initiative designed to provide Alaskans the chance to vote on the capital move based on how much it would cost and establishment of a bond to pay for it. He discusses how he got involved with the FRANK Initiative and its purpose, other people involved, the passage of the initiative and cancellation of the capital move, and the successes, challenges, and legacy of this citizen effort.

Interview Summary:

In 1974, when Jay Hammond was governor, there was a citizens' initiative passed to move the state capital out of Juneau. A committee was formed to find the best location for this move, what all was needed to make it happen, and how much it would cost. The Capital Site Selection Committee (CSSC) was formed based on having representation from all of the state's judicial districts. CB was working as a planner in Ketchikan, but originally was from Fairbanks (grew up in Fairbanks with long family connections to various other parts of Alaska from both parents) and knew folks who were talking about this CSSC and pushing him to get involved based upon his knowledge and experience as a planner and architect. In particular, Bill Cortis who was from Southeast and a friend got him involved.

CSSC had to look at state lands to find possible sites for a new capital. To do this, they established certain criteria to weed out locations that would fit or not fit the criteria. Criteria included: had to be state land; encompass 100 square miles so big enough for what really could be considered a new city; be more than 30 miles from large populations centers of Anchorage and Fairbanks; so many miles away from the Canada boundary line of demarcation; accessible or easily be able to have a road, railroad, and airport built to facilitate access; had to be a site where buildings and infrastructure could be built, ie. not swampy wetlands. And cost of creating this city on the new site was a factor in their final decision as well.

Initially, had a list of twelve possible sites and then were able to narrow it to three sites by applying the criteria they had established. Final three sites were: Yenlo near Skwenta, Willow in Matsu, and Larsen Lake near Healy. Willow was the committee final choice as meeting all of the needs and being the most cost effective place for constructing roads to get to the site, infrastructure at the site, and for logistics of transporting construction supplies to the site in the first place.

CB had been opposed to Willow site because he didn't feel it met all of their criteria; preferred Larsen Lake. But he was outnumbered on the committee and they selected Willow. He believes a factor in selection of Willow was pressure from Anchorage realtors who had gone out to the area and bought up property as speculative real estate investments once they heard the site was being

considered. Bob Atwood (publisher of Anchorage Daily News) pushed for this. They wanted to make money from this capital move and if it didn't go to Willow they were going to lose out after having sunk money into a losing proposition. (This is why the capital move concept keeps coming up because those real estate investors still want to make money off their property.)

Other members of the CSSC included: Arliss Sturgelewski, Willie Hensley, Louise Kellogg (from MatSu and a strong advocate for the move and for Willow site), Guy Martin (Commissioner of Alaska Department of Natural Resources - DNR), CB Bettisworth, Earl Cook, Katie Hurley, guy from Anchorage representing union whose name CB couldn't remember. They hired an Executive Director (CB couldn't remember name) and had staff help from DNR. Hired a consulting firm to help with collecting all the information they needed to review and with the process. This was CCHOK who brought staff to Alaska. Headed by Ed Crittenden who had been an architect that CB knew and considered a mentor. CSSC was funded by state funds through the legislature which paid for consultants, reports, meetings, committee members travel and per diem.

Even though CB was on the CSSC, he was against the whole idea of the capital move in the first place. It was not just about building a new capital building, but it was going to cost millions because it meant building a whole new city with roads, airports, office buildings, housing, recreational facilities, schools, telecommunications, utilities and creating a local government and other city powers and functions. Estimate was something around \$9 billion to build new capital.

The CSSC ended in 1976 after finishing the site selection. Then the Capital Site Planning Commission was established to move things into the next phase of actually planning and costing out what would need to happen to make the Willow site inhabitable and useable. CB was not selected to serve on this committee.

CB was contacted by Mary Nordale of Fairbanks who had been contacted by Felix Toner who felt that there needed to be statewide opposition drummed up against the capital move. Obviously, Juneau was opposed to the move as it would take away all state jobs in the city and destroy their economy. But it was felt that they needed to garner statewide opposition to be really effective. There was more anti-move support in Fairbanks than in southcentral so started grassroots efforts in Fairbanks. This led to creation of the FRANK group (Frustrated Responsible Alaskans Needing Knowledge) to develop a citizen initiative to allow Alaskans to vote for or against the capital move. Calling their group FRANK was a nice reference to the fact that the guy who put in the original capital move initiative in the early 1970s was named Frank Harris who owned a dry-cleaning business in Anchorage. CB soon became chairman of the FRANK group. He learned a lot about doing press releases and public speaking.

FRANK group hired consultant Walt DeVries who was an experienced pollster and politico to help guide them how best to lay out the argument to Alaskans to improve their chances of getting the move rejected, and how to word the initiative. DeVries did an initial poll to determine what the public sensitivities were related to the capital move. It turned out to be cost. So the FRANK initiative was written to focus on the cost of the move. They wrote it so if voters approved the move, they were approving the cost by approving a bond for a certain millions of dollars. At that time, the cost estimate was around \$9 billion. It was about people's right to know (cost) and their

right to vote (on the spending of the money). Polling numbers indicated 65% against move and 45% for it.

FRANK Initiative passed in 1978 by numbers similar to what had been polled previously. In 1982, there was another vote of yes/no to move capital or not. And later another FRANK Initiative to cover other things.

CB did think about whether there were other ways to move some of the functions of the state capital without moving everything to Willow and constructing a whole new city. He believes some of this has happened with some state office headquarters now being in Anchorage, like DNR which makes sense since they do so much business with oil industry which is based in Anchorage.

FRANK had supporters in other places, like John Kelsey in Valdez who said that “Anchorage is all about greed” and he was fighting that. He served as group’s treasurer for a while.

The capital move effort did have an impact on Alaska. The fact that all of that state money that it would’ve cost for the move project wasn’t spent that way left it to be spent on other things in the state. Think how broke the state would be now if those billions of dollars had been put into building new capital city at Willow. We wouldn’t be able to support a facility like that now. If we’d spent money on capital move, there would’ve been no money for the PFD.

Reason the capital move keeps being discussed and coming up as an issue is because of greed. Those investors in Anchorage and folks in Matsu would make out well financially.

The politics at the time in Alaska played a part as well. Rural and Fairbanks formed a coalition in state legislature and gave them power. They did not want to add concentration of power in Anchorage and Matsu by putting capital near there. Now, southcentral dominates politics of the state but didn’t so much in the 1970s. Certainly would’ve gained dominance earlier if had capital moved.

In site selection decision, part of it was calculating costs of everything that would be involved, including, building highway, airport, railroad, capital building itself, government office buildings, housing, schools, hospital, recreation facilities, telecommunications and utility infrastructure, internal roads, logistics of getting building materials and supplies to remote site.

Some folks thought it was just about building a single capital building and if you did that then you could sell the surrounding state lands and make money while someone else besides the state developed all the other buildings, roads, and infrastructure. “Build it and they will come.”

Capital Site Planning Commission did sketch plans of the sites for planning.

Benefits to CB of being on the CSSC: met a lot of people from all over the state and developed long-lasting friendships; was satisfying as a planner early in his career to be involved in such a big project and learned a lot and had contact with people that proved useful later in developing his career and own architectural business; learned about human behavior, building relationships,

and how to work through, in and around state politics. This project led to future success of his own business. Happy to have served on CSSC. Born in 1943, so around 33 years old when on CSSC so was young and learned a lot.

Challenges for CB of being on the CSSC: a lot of travel and being gone from his planning job in Ketchikan (flying on milk run from Ketchikan to Anchorage for meetings every other week took a long time before was able to let him fly through Seattle which was took less time).

Felt that committee members worked well together, even though they didn't always agree. Louise Kellogg was a strong woman and outspoken advocate in support of Willow site and capital move since represented the Matsu, but worked ok together.

Successes and challenges of FRANK: good group of people to work with: Mary Nordale, Karen Bushy. Put in a lot of work on writing of initiative before submitted to Division of Election to reduce chance of it being rejected. Got more signatures than needed. Did a press event to gain attention by delivering a van load of boxes with signed petitions. The petition signature campaign was based in Fairbanks. Most proud of involvement with FRANK was that it set a framework for how to evaluate this idea of the capital move. Provided way for public to evaluate it on a purely financial decision.

CSSC did hold public hearing when discussing options and making final choice of site.

Experience on CSSC, led to CB being appointed by Governor Hammond to the local boundary commission. Big decision of this commission was adjusting boundary between North Slope Borough and Northwest Arctic Borough so that Red Dog Mine was in the Northwest Arctic Borough and the revenue from the mine would help people in the NANA region rather than ASRC.