



October 2, 2015

City of Wasilla Planning Office
290 East Herring Avenue
Wasilla, AK 99654-7091

Attn: Tina Crawford
City Planner

**Subject: Use Permit Application
Land Use Application**

Dear Ms. Crawford:

After almost a year of renewed discussions with your team, the Planning Commissioners and the Wasilla community, Matanuska Electric Association, Inc. is pleased to submit a Land Use Application and Use Permit Application for the proposed Lazelle Substation to Herring Substation 115 kV Electric Transmission Line Project portion that lies within the City of Wasilla. We appreciate your consideration of this project which will serve Wasilla's growing electrical needs and decrease the vulnerability of critical loads serving homes and businesses within the city limits and beyond.

In addition to the applications you will find:

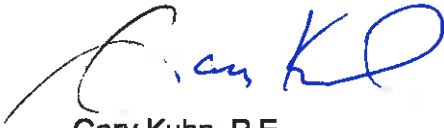
- A check in the amount of \$150.00 for the application fees,
- A corridor plan,
- A synopsis of the proposed project details,
- A separate letter formally requesting a waiver of the site plan requirement,
- A copy of a letter and synopsis for the "Neighborhood" Meeting,
- A copy of a letter and synopsis for the Open House and Public Hearing testimony with accompanying maps of the 20 highest ranked routing alternatives,
- Letter sized copies of the pertinent exhibits from the "Neighborhood" Meeting, Open House and Public Hearing, and
- A Draft Decisional Document with the process and results of the public participation process undertaken to date. This document is currently undergoing a public comment period until November 9th at which time it will be finalized once relevant public comment is incorporated.

During the work sessions with the Planning Commission, the commissioners expressed a desire to see more than one proposed alignment. In an effort to identify the best possible option for the City, MEA has provided one preferred alignment and a few additional alternatives for consideration.

Please place this application on the agenda for the November 10, 2015 meeting of the Planning Commission. Due the quantity and variety of material for the Planning Commission to consider, MEA respectfully requests the Planning Commission grant extra time for the applicant presentation at the beginning of the hearing from five minutes to twenty minutes.

If there are any questions or additional information is required, please direct your enquiries to either our consultant, Dan Beardsley at Dryden & Larue, Inc., phone 907-646-5139, or to Julie Estey, Director of Public Relations at Matanuska Electric Association, Inc., phone 907-761-9215.

Thank you for your consideration,
Matanuska Electric Association



Gary Kuhn, P.E.
Director of Engineering
Matanuska Electric Association, Inc.
(907) 761-9281

Enclosures:

Use Permit Application
Land Use Application
Check
Corridor Plan
Waiver Letter
Zoning Map with Transmission Line Segments
Preliminary Design Details
Letter and Synopsis of Neighborhood Meeting
Letter and Synopsis of Open House and Public Hearing testimony
Draft Decisional Document (awaiting the results of final public comment by November 9th)

October 2, 2015



CITY OF WASILLA PLANNING OFFICE
290 E. HERNING AVE.
WASILLA, AK 99654-7091
PHONE: (907) 373-9020
FAX: (907) 373-9021

Date: October 2, 2015
TID # _____
Case No. A 15 - 109

**LAND USE PERMIT
APPLICATION**

<p>Type of application (check all that apply)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Single Family Dwelling (SFD) <input type="checkbox"/> Garage/Shed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Addition to SFD <input type="checkbox"/> Accessory Use</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Commercial under 10,000 sq. ft. <input type="checkbox"/> Transmission Line</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <u>Transmission Line</u></p> <p>Project Name and Description</p> <p><u>±1,917,500</u> <u>±1,917,500</u> <u>Lazelle Substation to Herning Substation</u> <u>See Transmittal Letter & Attachments</u> <u>See transmittal letter & attachments.</u> <u>Site plan waiver requested.</u> <u>Site plan waiver requested.</u></p> <p>Subdivision Name:</p> <p><u>N/A</u> <u>N/A</u></p> <p>Street Address of project:</p> <p><u>N/A</u> <u>N/A</u></p> <p>Zoning Designation: <u>C, I, and RR</u></p>	<p>Property Owner:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Applicant Name:</p> <p><u>Matanuska Electric Association</u> <u>Matanuska Electric Association</u></p> <p>Mailing Address:</p> <p><u>P.O. Box 2929</u> <u>P.O. Box 2929</u> <u>Palmer, AK 99645</u> <u>Palmer, AK 99645</u></p> <p>Phone: <u>907-761-9215</u> <u>907-761-9215</u></p> <p>Fax #:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Email:</p> <p><u>publiccomments@mea.coop</u> <u>publiccomments@mea.coop</u></p>
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The following items must be shown on the Site Plan:

- All provisions of WMC 16.08.015 Site plan - As-built survey.

Applicant Certification:

I certify that the information contained in this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge, and that I understand that any false statements made by me on this application, may be subject to revocation or denial of the Land Use Permit. I further certify that I am the property owner or that I have been designated by the property owner to act on their behalf. I understand that the City of Wasilla will not be held liable for any improvements made to this property if an appeal is filed or if other types of permits for this property are required by another agency. I further understand that no activity may be made to this property until a Land Use Permit is valid.

Signature of Applicant: _____

Date: 10-2-15

* All activity regulated or permitted under this title must comply with applicable borough, state & federal laws & regulations. (WMC 16.04.030)

LAND USE PERMIT APPLICATION NARRATIVE

Overview of MEA Route Selection Process applicable to all comments:

In an effort to serve significant load growth in the City of Wasilla and surrounding area and ensure basic reliability standards are met to decrease vulnerability of critical load centers in the City's core commercial and residential area, MEA is seeking a permit to construct a 115kV Transmission Line from Lazelle Substation to Herning Substation. Since the Wasilla Planning Commission voted in 2013 not to allow MEA to construct along our preferred route of the Parks Highway, MEA re-engaged the community to seek a permit-able route that met the electricity needs of the community while ensuring the most public good for the least private injury. It was important to MEA to address feedback from the previous application and ensure key stakeholders felt our process was transparent and provided a meaningful opportunity for the community and other stakeholders to review and contribute to the discussion of multiple options.

MEA engaged the community to analyze four potential corridors: Theater, Gully, Fairview and Southern. Those four corridors consisted of 440 potential routes to determine potential impacts to individual property owners, existing public infrastructure and potential public improvements. From responses received in an extensive public participation process involving local government entities, community leaders, stakeholders, property owners and the general public, MEA identified the criteria for analyzing the impacts to properties crossed by the routing alternatives based on stakeholder priorities.

Criteria:

- Construction cost
- View shed impact

- Major impacts including reduction of lot size and future development impact
- Number of parcels requiring easements
- Environmental impacts
- Number of parcels passed
- Right of way costs
- Maintenance and operational issues
- Proximity to the proposed transmission centerline are the criteria derived from the public comment.

The criteria established by the public comment process were initially applied to the 440 alternative routes within the four corridors to provide an objective score for each route based on stakeholder-driven values. Results of that initial analysis resulted in selection of 20 ‘finalist’ routes along two corridors, the Theater and Gully corridors. It is important to note that when MEA removed cost from the analysis, and used only the stakeholder criteria to examine the routes, the rankings remained very similar, confirming the validity of the top 20 finalist routes.

A second level, more detailed analysis of the top 20 proposed routes once again examined every property crossed by the proposed routes to determine the impacts. Where possible, modifications to those routes were incorporated to further reduce or minimize the potential impacts of a particular alternative. In addition, the impact analysis was expanded to include the nearby properties not actually crossed by the transmission line.

From the top 20 routes, the five highest ranked potential routes along with two hybrid or modified routes were considered for a final review. Maps of these routes are attached. From those seven potential routes, MEA selected a modified route as its preferred alternative, T-24 Modified. At the Planning

Commission's request, two alternative alignments have been identified, T-17 and a modified Gully Route, to allow for additional public input on the routing options. A more in-depth discussion of the routes and their impacts can be found in the Draft Decisional Document included with this application.

This application is for the approval of a double circuit overhead transmission line route within the boundaries of the City of Wasilla. Once a route is approved MEA will enter into design of the route. Negotiations with affected property owners may result in minor revisions to the alignment for individual properties, but the final route will be substantially in compliance with the routing approved by the City of Wasilla Planning Commission. Due to the complexity of the project, the long lead time required for design, right-of-way acquisition and procurement of long lead-time items, MEA is requesting permit approval for a 2 year construction window instead of the standard 1 year permit.

1. Neighbors. Explain how due deference has been given to the neighborhood plan; or comments and recommendations from a neighborhood with an approved neighborhood plan.

As stated in the overview, MEA conducted an extensive public participation process that identified the criteria the participants considered important for selecting the potential route.

Those criteria are:

- Cost
- View shed impact
- Major impacts including reduction of lot size and future development impact
- Number of parcels requiring easements

- Environmental impacts
- Number of parcels passed
- Right of way costs
- Maintenance and operational issues.

None of the areas crossed by the proposed transmission alignments are within a specific neighborhood plan, therefore the Comprehensive Plan Land Use categories and the zoning types within those categories were considered. Zoning for the properties crossed along the preferred alignment for the 115 kV Transmission lines are: commercial (C), rural residential (RR), single family residential (R1) and industrial (I). As can be seen on the attached zoning map, the majority of the properties crossed by the proposed transmission lines are rural residential.

Aside from the noticed meetings, MEA accepted feedback via phone and email and took time to meet with specific neighborhood groups and individuals to walk their properties and neighborhoods and discuss potential impacts and route options first hand.

General residential land use has a wide range of housing types and densities, schools, daycare facilities, necessary public utilities and facilities. It allows for large-lot, semi-rural neighborhoods and multifamily housing. There are small scale commercial buildings such as convenience stores and small restaurants. The designation of how many housing units may be allowed on a lot is indicated by the zoning districts. In this case, the proposed transmission line crosses several properties in the RR zoning district and one in the R1 zoning district. The vast majority of the homes within the RR zoning districts are located in the “Gully Area”, in the vicinity of Glennwood Avenue, Bayview Drive, Valley Side Circle, Cotton Drive and Old Matanuska Road. Because of the smaller lot sizes and limited routing options available, MEA held a separate “neighborhood” meeting for the gully area property owners.

Invitations were sent to 232 property owners in this area with 32 attendees at the meeting. A synopsis of the results of that meeting are attached. The one R1 property actually crossed by the proposed transmission line is located just west of the Wal-Mart property. Unfortunately, it was not possible to identify a route without impacts to adjacent residential properties. The public participation process results were tabulated and analyzed by applying the publicly identified criteria in increasingly more critical evaluations, MEA chose an alignment that crosses a limited number of residentially improved properties and meets the objective to identify the route with the greatest public good and the least private injury.

Commercial property is described as a variety of office and retail uses. The design of commercial property is meant to minimize setbacks and traffic for adjoining neighborhoods. There are two larger commercially zoned areas crossed by the proposed transmission line routing, properties adjacent to the Palmer Wasilla Highway Extension and the commercial development west of Seward Meridian Parkway. A smaller commercially zoned area between the Alaska Railroad and Old Matanuska Road would be affected by the T-17 alternative route. The same criteria were analyzed (as listed on page 3) with respect to these commercial properties.

Only one industrial zoned property, the City of Wasilla Wastewater Treatment Plant, is crossed by the proposed transmission line. MEA met with the City of Wasilla mayor, deputy mayor, public works director and planner regarding possible alignments across the property. The criteria applied to this property was the same as considered for the other two zoning classifications of property.

2. Plans. Is the proposal substantially consistent with the 1996 City Comprehensive Plan and other adopted city plans?

Reliably, predictably priced power is a platform for economic development and community vitality. According to the 2011 Comprehensive plan, there are six key elements that are critical to the City's future growth and quality of life. Those elements are Transportation, Land Use, Downtown, Community Assets, Economic Vitality, and Intergovernmental Coordination. Except for the Transportation Element, MEA's proposed transmission line and public process to identify the route applies to at least one goal in the other five elements.

Land Use Element. Goal 2: "Encourage development opportunities that support the City's role as a regional commercial center." Reliable and affordable power is one of the key components for economic development. Wasilla has recently experience rapid commercial growth that significantly increased the demand and consumption of electricity. MEA's upgrade to the system will improve capacity of the system and add redundancy to reduce the current vulnerability of critical load centers essential to the community. By reducing the potential for transmission outages, MEA will provide reliable power to meet current and future demand within the City of Wasilla.

Downtown Element. Goal 1: "Promote and encourage development and redevelopment with the Downtown area." Again, reliable and affordable power, especially to commercial consumers that on average use eight times the power of residential users, is necessary to promote the commercial growth in order to increase the vitality of the Downtown area. Potential businesses increasingly demand infrastructure capable of supporting their business and reducing risk. Much of the power supply to the community of Wasilla is currently vulnerable.

Community Assets Element. Goal 1: “Provide essential services and facilities necessary to encourage new commercial, industrial and manufacturing development.” Along with roads, water, sewer, and gas, electricity is an essential service necessary for expansion of the commercial, industrial and manufacturing sector in Wasilla. Inadequate supply or unreliable power availability are strong deterrents to economic development. New box store commercial, industrial and manufacturing enterprises evaluate power supply, cost and reliability as part of their due diligence analysis for locating new sites.

Economic Vitality Element. Goal 1: “Continue to promote and enhance the City’s future as the region’s major center for commerce, services, visitor hospitality, culture and arts, transportation and industry.” Goal 2: “Diversify the economic base and attract new employment generators.” MEA’s improved electric system comports with both of these goals by providing power, a necessary service, essential to economic growth and development.

Intergovernmental Coordination Element. Goal 2: “Continue to promote the awareness and involvement of the residents in the planning processes for the City.” Through its public participation process, MEA has encouraged local involvement in the corridor and route selection process. The neighborhood meeting for City of Wasilla residents, the public open house, and the public hearing, as well as the notices and mailouts have engaged the public in the selection process. Affected individuals have been provided notice that this selection process includes approval of the overhead transmission line routing within the City of Wasilla, which will occur only after the public has had an additional opportunity to provide their input into the process.

The City of Wasilla’s mission statement is as follows:

“It is the mission of the City of Wasilla to provide optimum service levels to the public as cost effectively as possible to ensure a stable and thriving economy, promote a healthy community, provide a safe environment and a quality lifestyle and promote maximum citizen participation in government.”

MEA originally attempted to provide the most cost effective route with the least impact to residential neighborhoods by utilizing highway corridors with adjacent commercial uses along the Parks Highway and Palmer Wasilla Highway Extension. The City of Wasilla Planning Commission found this did not meet viewshed and quality of life goals of the City of Wasilla Comprehensive Plan. The corridor was approved for the construction of an underground transmission line along that corridor. The City permit condition for undergrounding along that alignment was not financially or operationally viable for MEA and its ratepayers.

MEA has subsequently entered into an extensive routing analysis to identify an acceptable overhead alignment. During this effort, viewshed and impacts to adjacent land uses played a substantial role in the analysis and selection of the possible alternatives. Construction of the transmission line cannot avoid impacts to adjacent properties, but efforts to minimize the impacts can be made. To the extent the transmission line is located within residential neighborhoods, it does not promote the quality of life for those impacted by the transmission line alignment; however, MEA has made every effort to minimize or eliminate impacts to the residential neighborhoods. MEA has reduced the impacts by selecting routes that affect the least number of residential properties and by making design modifications to reduce viewshed impacts to adjacent property owners. This proposed routing does eliminate the City of Wasilla’s previous concerns about a decrease in visual attractiveness of the community along the main route through Wasilla, issues

with removal of landscaping from commercial properties, and potential limitations on commercial development.

As mentioned under the Intergovernmental Coordination Element, MEA sought to maximize citizen participation and used the information provided by the public to guide its analysis of the various alternatives. The preferred alternative, submitted by MEA, is the best effort to identify a cost effective route that has the least impact to the adjacent property owners and the Wasilla Community.

- 3. Special Uses: If your proposed use is a Heliport, Resource Extraction in the RR or C district, Adult Business, Correctional Facility, or Planned Unit Development, please refer to Section 16.16.060 of the Code and address the additional standards listed. N/A**

N/A – Permit is for a utility facility.

- 4. Reviewing Parties. Various state and local government agencies will receive copies of your application for review and comment. Copies of their comments will be sent to you. Be ready to address their comments and recommendations.**

A transmission line requires administrative approval under City code 16.20.20 within commercial and rural residential zoning districts. MEA has complied with the Matanuska Susitna Borough (MSB) Code Chapter 17.05: Essential Utilities. Permits will be required from the Alaska Railroad Corporation and the Alaska Department of Transportation. MEA has met with both those agencies and obtained their preliminary comments. Both agencies will provide formal comments once MEA provides a route design. Unless access roads in wetlands are required, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska

Division, has indicated construction of the transmission line structures and ice roads, in the same manner as was done across the Palmer Hayflats, will not require a Corps of Engineers wetlands permit. That response will be verified once a final alignment is approved. MEA will continue to analyze comments and concerns that are raised by local agencies and members of the public as a part of its final decisional document approval process.

5. Neighborhoods. Due deference has been given to the comments and recommendations of reviewing parties.

In meeting the public participation requirements of Matanuska-Susitna Borough Code Section 17.05, and as a result of workshop recommendations from the City of Wasilla Planning Commission, MEA embarked on a substantial public participation process that included interviewing key community representatives, various stakeholders, state and local governmental agencies, community councils, property owners and members of the public. Through those meetings, MEA has documented the comments received and used those comments to establish the criteria and weighting used to evaluate the many routes considered. The comments, letters, notices and informational mailouts to property owners and participants at the meetings are documented in MEA's Draft Decisional Document, which is made a part of this application. The Decisional Document provides a written analysis of the process used to identify and evaluate the proposed corridors and routes to select a final preferred route and two possible alternatives.

6. Fire Safety and Emergency Access. Describe how you have provided for adequate access for emergency and police vehicles. The proposal may not pose a fire danger as determined by the State Fire Marshal or the MSB Wasilla-Lakes Fire Chief.

N/A – Transmission line will not affect fire safety and emergency access.

- 7. Traffic. The proposed use shall not overload the street system with traffic or result in unsafe streets or dangers to pedestrians.**

N/A – Transmission line will not impact traffic.

- 8. Dimensional standards. Describe how the dimensional requirements [setbacks, density & height] of section 16.24.010 have been met.**

N/A– Transmission line will not impact development dimensional requirement standards.

- 9. Parking. Describe how your use meets the minimum parking, loading areas, lighting and snow storage requirements of 16.24.040. Parking must be adequate, safe and properly designed.**

N/A – Transmission line does not require parking.

- 10. Utilities. How do you propose to supply water, sewer, electricity, on-site water or sewer systems and other utilities to the site?**

N/A – Transmission line is an essential utility that will improve MEA’s ability to serve power to City of Wasilla businesses and residents.

- 11. Frontage. What is the primary road access to the property? Non-residential large developments must be located with frontage on street(s) classified as an interstate, arterial, or as a major collector.**

Proposed access to the transmission line will be via the Fairview Loop, Seward Meridian Parkway, Old Matanuska Road, Jude Street, Cotton Drive, South Chilligan Drive, Bayview Circle, Althea Street, East Boitz Circle and the Palmer Wasilla Highway Extension.

- 12. Peak use. Describe the type of traffic your proposed use will generate. The proposed use may not create a significantly different peak use characteristic than that of surrounding uses or other uses allowed in the district. The proposed use may not overload the street system with traffic or result in unsafe streets or dangers to pedestrians.**

Construction equipment and vehicles supporting that effort will occur the length of the project during construction. Traffic control plans will be in effect where the construction is occurring within the public road rights of way. Once constructed, traffic impact generated by the line location will be minimal, confined to routine maintenance and emergency repair which should have minimal impact on the traffic in the area.

- 13. Off-site Impacts. Explain how you meet the standard that the proposed use may not significantly impact surrounding properties with excessive noise, fumes or odors, glare, smoke, light, vibration, dust, litter, or electronic interference.**

N/A – Transmission line will not produce any of the listed impacts.

- 14. Landscaping. Describe, or show on site plan, how your proposed use complies with the City of Wasilla Landscaping standards.**

MEA will construct and maintain the project in compliance with WMC 16.33.030 F and 16.33.030 I.

15. Pedestrian Circulation. Walkways, sidewalk and bike paths may be required.

N/A– Transmission line will not impact any of the listed items.

16. Water, Sewage and Drainage Systems.

N/A – Transmission will not require or generate water, sewage or alter the terrain to affect drainage. Except for the Old Matanuska Road crossing of Cottonwood Creek, which was rejected in the previous application, any other crossing of Cottonwood Creek will require clearing within the flood plain adjacent to the creek. The Cottonwood Creek floodplain is approximately 180 feet wide at the proposed crossing. With typical 600 foot spans, the structures will be located to avoid placement in the wetlands or the flood plain. A portion of the area needed for the proposed right of way is already clear of trees due to the existing distribution line crossing the creek. A waiver for clearing will be required for clearing at the proposed crossing. Once a route is approved, the approved crossing location will be designed and surveyed with danger trees identified. An application for a clearing waiver will be submitted once the design of the crossing is final.

17. Historic resources. Is your property a historic building or historic site? The proposed use may not adversely impact any historic resource prior to the assessment of that resource by the city. N/A

N/A – No historical uses will be impacted by the project.

18. Appearance. Is your proposed use similar in appearance to other uses in the general area? The proposed use may be required to blend in with the general neighborhood appearance and architecture.

Generally a transmission line is more compatible with commercial development along a major transportation corridor; however, the lack of an acceptable transportation corridor within City of Wasilla boundaries mandated an alignment predominantly within rural residential areas. Impacts to viewshed, proximity to improvements and limitations on property use are very significant concerns for residential property. MEA examined viewshed impacts to panoramic views from properties crossed by the transmission line and those nearby, as well as loss of visual screening buffers located between properties and along existing rights of way for every property on each alignment considered. MEA also evaluated the impact of proximity to the transmission line, improvements affected, and loss of usable property area to the easement for every property. Every route was first examined to identify those routes with the least overall impacts to the properties crossed by the transmission line. Only the 20 routes with the lowest impact to the properties crossed were selected for further consideration. Of the final 20 possible transmission line routes, additional modifications were made to minimize the routing impacts to both the properties crossed by the route and to those nearby properties not actually crossed by the line.

Once the five routes with the least impact were identified, along with two modified routes, a modified route with a revised design was ultimately selected to limit the impacts as much as reasonably possible. The preferred alignment was modified to lower the tower height by 20 to 25 feet in areas with panoramic views by eliminating the three phase distribution underbuild component of the transmission circuit in certain areas of the alignment. The alignment selected uses large undeveloped properties to the maximum extent

possible and places the profile of the transmission line against the backdrop of the easterly bluff of the gully so that the tops of towers are not visible above the horizon for residents along the westerly bluff of the gully. Visibility of the transmission line from the easterly side of the bluff will be minimized to the extent practicable.

19. The applicant may be required to dedicate land for drainage, utilities, access, open space, parks or playgrounds if the city finds such area necessary for public use or safety.

N/A

20. Open Space and Facilities.

The preferred alignment and the alternative alignments all cross the City of Wasilla Wastewater Treatment Plant. MEA and the City Public Works Director will coordinate the design of the final alignment to assure the structure locations will not interfere with the existing settlement ponds or the proposed expansion of the wastewater treatment facilities. Preliminary indications of MEA's design parameters will be able to address concerns the City may have.

21. Winter hassles. The proposed use shall not significantly increase the impact on the surrounding area from glaciation or drifting snow. N/A

N/A – The transmission line will not affect snow management.