



# CITY OF BETHEL

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## Alaska Rural Justice and Law Enforcement Commission Public Testimony Submitted April 6, 2005 Bethel, Alaska

**Need:** New Public Safety Building in Bethel, Alaska to serve the Bethel Community of 6,000 and any of the 26,000 residents of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Region who visit Bethel or relocate to Bethel.

**Statement by:** Wayne Ogle, Public Works Director, City of Bethel

**Problem:** The Bethel Police Department occupies a very old building. It is becoming increasingly more expensive to maintain. Pouring money into old building is not cost effective. The plumbing is in poor condition and in constant need of maintenance. The sewage backs up several times a year and renders the central part of the building unusable. The building has a long history of extensive problems. This summer, the Public Works Department plans to paint the outside of the building, which I believe amounts to a giant *cover-up* of the real problem, the poor condition of the building.

The Bethel Police Department building is in such bad shape that minimal security standards for a law enforcement building of this type serving a community our size is not possible.

Another problem with the poor condition of the police department building is what it represents to the community and visitors. Adjacent to City Hall, the police station represents the single most important *face* of our city. It is supposed to be a symbol of authority, but its substandard, shabby appearance gives law enforcement in Bethel a bad reputation, a reputation that there is little, if any serious law enforcement in town. The appearance of the building plays a major role in our ability to recruit and retain qualified officers, dispatchers, and administrative staff. The building is an important work condition that impacts employee morale. I believe the old adage, "If you live in a nice environment, you'll do a better job."

**Recommendation:** I strongly recommend that a new public safety building be constructed in Bethel – immediately! A new building that houses the Bethel Police Department, Alaska State Troopers and other law enforcement agencies would take advantage of economies of scale and make it more cost effective for each agency to operate. A new building will enhance the ability of the Bethel Police Department and the Alaska State Trooper to recruit and retain law enforcement officers and dispatchers. A new building will enhance the Bethel Police Department's public image.

A new Public Safety Building that housed the police department would have modern utilities, up-to-date heating system, and weather resistant envelope. The cost to maintain a new building would likely be much less than the cost to maintain our current building.

Wayne Ogle, Public Works Director, City of Bethel

*"Deep Sea and Transportation Center of the Kuskokwim"*