

Inside Today

North Pole man reels in 18.8-pound luncker to lead Silver Salmon Derby. A6

‘Polaris Commons’ proposal for Lacey Street site calls for housing, retail

By Jack Barnwell

The City of Fairbanks received a single proposal for a request for proposals to develop the old Polaris Building site at 123 Lacey St.

The Urban Coalition, Fairbanks Neighborhood Housing Services and Bettisworth North submitted a joint proposal called the Polaris Commons. It’s a mixed retail and affordable housing project that includes two buildings in a phased development.

“Polaris Commons is founded on a simple belief: a home extends beyond the walls of an apartment,” the project’s

narrative states. “Community is shaped through everyday encounters, shared public spaces, and a strong sense of belonging. The project explores how architecture can foster these connections throughout every season.”

The first phase would involve a four-story building on the Lacey Street site, with ground floor retail and community space, and three floors of 27 mixed one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments.

The second phase would include a three-story building on the city-owned lot on Noble Street between First and

Second avenues, which currently serves as a parking lot. The ground floor would house FNHS’s office and the other two floors would be a mix of 10 one- and two-bedroom units.

The proposal includes common spaces and retail options such as a cafe, specialty retail pay and a community room. Both buildings include a public mural or artwork.

The phases are independent of the another.

According to the 57-page proposal, the Urban Coalition estimated the first-phase

POLARIS » A3



BETTISWORTH NORTH CONCEPT ART

A conceptual rendering of the proposed Polaris Commons, a joint development submitted by Urban Coalition, Fairbanks Neighborhood Housing Services and Bettisworth North for the old Polaris Building site on Lacey Street.

Moving on

Diann Darnell wraps up Senior Games leadership after 17 years

**Kris Capps**
COMMUNITY EDITOR
kcapps@newsminer.com



KRIS CAPPS

“Keep Moving” is Diann Darnall’s motto, so of course that phrase showed up on the cake celebrating her retirement from the Alaska International Seniors Games board of directors.

It’s hard to think of anyone who has more energy than Diann Darnall. She inspired all the volunteers she oversees to help organize a successful 2026 Alaska International Senior Games.

Darnall retired this month after 17 years as president of the board for the Senior Games.

Although she predicted her future will include some naps in the following days, it’s not likely she’ll slow down anytime soon. After all, her mottos is: Keep Moving!

For 17 years, she has been in charge of a volunteer organization that manages more than 100 volunteers who host 20 sports for an estimated 400 participants every year. This is the Alaska event that qualifies senior athletes to participate in the International Senior Games.

Volunteer commissioners, who spearhead each competition, honored Darnall at the wrap-up meeting at the Alaska Salmon Bake on Sunday.

A special handmade award came from Carol DeVoe’s yard. She’s a 91-year-old competitor in the senior games. The award is a slice of choke-cherry tree, polished and gleaming, with the words: “Thanks Diann Darnall — Keep Moving! 17 years of Alaska International Senior Games, 2009-2026.” Friends and supporters signed their names on the back.

Darnall happily held it overhead for everyone to see.

Fairbanks North Star Borough Mayor Grier Hopkins also presented a special

DARNELL » A5



COURTESY TAMMY TRAGIS-MCCOOK

Diann Darnall happily shows off the handmade award that honors her 17 years serving as president of Alaska International Senior Games.

UAF, military sign new research agreement

Staff report

The University of Alaska inked a new federal agreement with the U.S. military expanding its research partnership, the university announced Wednesday.

The new five-year agreement builds on UAF’s work as a recognized university-affiliated research center. The previous agreement, signed in 2018, focused on detecting nuclear blasts.

“This partnership with UAF is a natural extension of the increasing U.S. and global interest in the Arctic,” UAF interim chancellor Larry Hinzman said in a statement. “It will allow the U.S. government to leverage UAF’s unmatched Arctic research expertise to increase security, awareness and preparedness in the region.”

The UAF UARC designation was recently rebranded as the Arctic and Homeland Defense Center University Affiliated Research Center. Its mission as assisting in the oversight and guidance of the Defense Department’s research, development, testing and evaluation of technology and science to sense, locate, characterize and

DEFENSE » A5

Tok residents take stock of damage as Mukluk Fire threat continues

By Shelby Herbert
ALASKA DESK

Robert Nelson and his wife, Helena Fix-Nelson, surveyed what remained of their home in Tok on Wednesday morning. It’s where they built a life for almost 20 years, raising kids, grandkids, dogs and bees. Robert Nelson called it a “kick in the gut.”

“There’s where my bees sat, and all the clover we planted. Some of

her trees survived, some didn’t,” he said. “It was beautiful and green.”

Now their home is a heap of cinders and twisted metal. The Nelsons said they couldn’t make sense of what burned and what didn’t. The fire began just a few blocks away and tore through in a matter of hours, skipping over some cars and houses while incinerating others. The Nelson’s greenhouse survived,

healthy squash flowers blooming and tomatoes still hanging on the vine.

“Our delphiniums are still kicking,” Robert Nelson said. “Our carrots did okay. Our potatoes over there are a little crispy.”

State fire officials say a downed power line sparked the Mukluk Fire on Monday. Since then, the fire has damaged or destroyed at least 20 homes and burned about 8 square miles around

the eastern Interior Alaska community. On Wednesday afternoon, more than 150 firefighters were working the fire, which is at about 16% containment.

A wall of noxious white smoke hung over the town. On the north side of the highway, you didn’t have to go far down any of Tok’s gravel roads before you could see trees that



SHELBY HERBERT/KUAC

Robert Nelson and Helena Fix-Nelson stand the burned wreckage of their home in Tok on Wednesday.

TOK » A5

GOOD MORNING



The weather.
Morning showers, then a shower.
High today64
Low tonight48
Sunrise: 5:56 a.m.
Sunset: 9:49 p.m.
WEATHER » A3

IT’S MOVE-IN DAY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS

:

INTERIOR
Page A3

:



SOURDOUGH JACK:
“The Alaska spirit shows when communities come together in awful circumstances.”