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From: Frances Ulmer [<mailto:affau@uaa.alaska.edu>]
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To: Brown, Joan A (GOV)
Subject: FW: editorial - Hooray!

UAA sports

University comes back with a better sports arena plan

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A year ago, when Gov. Sarah Palin vetoed \$1 million to plan a huge sports arena at UAA, we supported her decision. With state revenues uncertain, and UAA getting so little funding in that year's capital budget, a sports arena seemed like a questionable priority.

UAA went back to the drawing board. Over the past several months, it has surveyed the public, talked to students about their needs, visited nearby community councils to hear their concerns, and refined its proposal.

The result is a more responsible plan. UAA's new arena would be smaller but better suited to its most urgent needs, and located in a more suitable spot.

To which we can only say, hooray.

The Legislature put \$15 million in this year's capital budget to design the building and prepare the site. The total cost is estimated at \$80 million.

UAA has made an excellent case that it needs more sports facilities. The time is right, since the state has a multi-billion dollar surplus. We urge Gov. Palin to get the project started.

The existing Wells Fargo Sports Complex was built some 30 years ago. With a seating capacity of 1,200, it holds fewer spectators than either the East or West high school gyms. Its locker rooms are so inadequate that tall basketball players can't stand up straight in them. There is a tiny weight room and hardly any office space for sports staff or physical education faculty.

While UAA has just the one basketball court, UA-Fairbanks has five,

notes

UAA athletic director Steve Cobb. If the new sports arena were built, "We'd jump all the way up to average," he jokes.

There are now 11 intercollegiate athletic teams at UAA using the Wells Fargo Complex. Students also take physical education classes there and swim or lift weights for fun and personal health.

If the new arena is built, the Wells Fargo complex would again be the primary recreational facility for the 15,000 students, says chancellor Fran Ulmer.

The new building would house all competitive sports but hockey. The university hopes to work a deal later with the city for a joint facility for hockey, perhaps off campus.

The campus sports arena could seat a 3,500 crowd for basketball, volleyball and other university and community events.

Compare that with the 2007 proposal for a complex, with one gym that would have room for 7,500 spectators, and another gym that would hold 3,500 to 5,000. The cost of that behemoth? Who knows?

The university switched locations from the original plan. Instead of building near East High, on a boggy site south of Northern Lights Boulevard, the new site is between Providence Hospital and UAA's student housing.

The wetlands at the Northern Lights Boulevard location would be expensive to build on, as well as being home to popular trails. That site was not popular with the nearby community.

"We're very happy they're going to scale back and build in a different location," said Susan Klein, chair of the University Area Community Council.

A lot of people use the trails off Northern Lights, she said.

UAA has done its homework. A thriving university needs a satisfactory sports facility, and this project deserves state support.

BOTTOM LINE: Steel isn't getting any cheaper. Let the Seawolves prepare for construction of their new arena.