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## Gun club buys shooting range

By Hal Spence | *Peninsula Clarion*

A local gun club that has operated a public shooting range near Beaver Loop Road in Kenai for decades will soon own the 186-acre site.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly approved a measure Tuesday authorizing the borough to sell the acreage to the Snowshoe Gun Club for \$70,000.

That is \$56,000 less than fair market value, but the public benefit of a gun range, deed restrictions, and consideration for lease payments already made reduced the price to \$70,000.

The gun club is a 501c(7) non-profit corporation that has operated a public shooting range on the property since 1971. Through 1984, it subleased the land through the city of Kenai, and from 1985 through 2005 directly from the borough. It has operated the range under a borough land-use permit since 2006 and paid a total of \$24,600 in lease payments.

Attorney Phil Nash, a club member for more than 25 years, said it was "an exciting day" for the club, and noted that the club has over 500 members. Under special arrangements, Snowshoe Gun Club provides nine different local law enforcement agencies with opportunities for daytime and nighttime weapons practice, including city police and Alaska State Troopers.

"The law enforcement community is very important to the borough and also very important to Snowshoe Gun Club," Nash said.

Stephen Stringham, of Soldotna, testified that he believed the training available through the shooting range was "absolutely essential."

Bobby Cox, of Kenai, said with the purchase, it would open door to possible grants that could allow the club to build a permanent structure on the land for training purposes and club meetings. Under the lease, nothing could be built there that could not be dragged off, he said.

Larry Lewis, with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Soldotna, is a firearms trainer. He said he has trained such people as oilfield workers to protect themselves from wildlife while in remote locations. He has also trained borough assessors, he said. He noted the lack of training facilities on the Kenai Peninsula.

"About the only other option here locally is a privately owned parcel off Swanson River Road," he said. "That's subject to change at any time."

The only other options involve driving to Cooper Landing or south to Anchor Point, he said.

He passed on a message from the Kenai Police Department supporting passage of the ordinance and allowing the purchase to proceed.

The assembly voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the sale. Assemblymen Paul Fischer, of Kasilof, is in California for medical treatment. He and Bill Smith, of Homer, had excused absences.