

Eklutna Valley Community Council
October 15, 2019
Meeting minutes

The meeting was chaired by council president Margan Grover and began at 6:36 p.m. The council met at the Eklutna Ranger Station. Nineteen council members were present: Margan Grover, Dan Thompson, Debbie and Steve Thon, Buff and Deb Rix, Randy Bangerter, Tom Bohn, Erlinda Downing, Steve and Cheryl Remme, Keith and Vicki Darby, Bob Reagan, Glen and Mary Keller, Lisa and Rick Sinnott, and Kevin Menkens.

The meeting agenda and minutes of the October 18 meeting were approved unanimously with no changes. Bob Reagan reported no council funds had been spent since the last meeting; therefore, the council still has \$466.64.

OLD BUSINESS

Secure trash zone resolution. At our last meeting we discussed the new municipal ordinance regarding trash storage and handling. One of its provisions was that the Assembly intended to designate areas where wildlife frequently get into garbage as “secure trash regulation zones.” Rick introduced a draft resolution asking the Assembly to designate Eklutna Valley as a “secure trash regulation zone.” The primary difference between these areas and the rest of the municipality is that anyone using a commercial solid waste service will be required to obtain a bear-resistant container.

Rick read the proposed resolution and elaborated on the various reasons why our community council should ask to be so designated. A motion was made and seconded to adopt the resolution as written. After a little more discussion, during which no amendments were proposed, the question was called. The motion carried 15-1. Resolution 2019-01 is attached.

Historic minute. Rick shared some information garnered from the archives of the Anchorage Daily Times on the first long-distance sled dog race from Anchorage. Many decades before the Iditarod race, in January 1916, four mushers raced from Anchorage to Eklutna and back. All finished the race. The winner took 7 hours and 52 minutes. The air temperature was so low – about 10 below zero with a strong wind blowing – that there was a genuine concern that someone would freeze to death. So there were no more long distance races until the 1930s.

Local crime report. No recent activity was reported; however, several observations of unfamiliar parked vehicles were shared.

Chugiak-Eagle River Advisory Board report. Bob told us there was no new activity.

NEW BUSINESS

DOTPF has decided to leave the lights on. Last week the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities announced it was going to turn off the streetlights between interchanges on the Glenn Highway from Anchorage to Palmer daily between 1 a.m. and 4 a.m. as a cost-cutting measure. After complaints from Mat-Su residents and a call from one of our legislators, DOTPF announced that the lights would remain on.

Native Village of Eklutna casino. Eklutna Village has sued the federal government for permission to build and operate a casino. This issue has been in the news sporadically for over

20 years. Mayor Berkowitz and Congressman Don Young are in favor of the idea. This would be a class II casino, which allows gambling with pull tabs and bingo on “one-armed bandits,” but not card games and roulette. The site of the casino, if approved, would be on Birchwood Spur Road, near the Birchwood airstrip. Our community council would not be affected, however, things may change and we’ll try to keep up.

EaglExit. Rick asked if anyone else had concerns about the group calling itself EaglExit and their plan to detach Assembly District 2 (Eagle River, Chugiak, JBER, and Eklutna) from the rest of the municipality. He read excerpts from the Anchorage Daily News and EaglExit’s website (eagleexit.com) where they had written a “resolution” which appeared to claim that Eklutna was on board with the idea.

Some of the grievances and solutions expressed by EaglExit at recent presentation and on their website are false and misleading. For instance, Rick did not believe that Assembly District 2 (in general) or Eklutna Valley (in particular) have been “shortchanged in city services, educational outcomes and political representation” as EaglExit’s website claims. Rick provided information on the relative tax burdens of Alaska towns and cities, all of which pay more than Anchorage residents when sales and other taxes are factored in. Within the municipality, Chugiak, Eagle River and Eklutna property owners are subject to lower mill rates than residents in the Anchorage Bowl and most of the Hillside.

As for political representation, Assembly District 2 includes about 16% of the muni’s population, but we are represented by 2 of 11 Assembly members (18%). With regard to educational services, Assembly District 2 has 25% of the high schools (38% if you count Bartlett), 20% of the middle schools, and 19% of the elementary schools. Although Anchorage school district board members are elected citywide, at least one member currently lives in Eagle River (14%). We pay a higher mill rate for parks and recreation than others in the municipality because Assembly District 2 has voted in favor of the bonds.

An attempt to detach from the municipality in 1974-75 was deemed unconstitutional by the Alaska Supreme Court. During another attempt, in the mid-2000s, an independent analysis concluded that the proposed borough “could not provide its citizens with the same level of services that the current municipality provided in 2006 without an increase in property taxes or some other form of revenue,” and that the new borough would be unable to maintain the current level of educational services even with tax increases. Finally, Rick argued that Eklutna Valley has the same right to self-determination as Chugiak and Eagle River; therefore, he believed that we should resolve not to detach from the municipality unless the separation would a) reduce property taxes without necessitating the adoption of sales or other taxes in Chugiak and Eagle River or b) forgo necessary and beneficial government and educational services.

In effect, the rest of Anchorage is subsidizing Eagle River, Chugiak and Eklutna. We should be careful what we ask for because other Anchorage voters might be more than willing to cut us loose.

Rick had prepared a draft resolution including these and other items. After he read the resolution, a motion was made by Steve Remme and seconded by Bob Reagan to adopt all but the second “resolved.” More discussion ensued and several amendments were proposed. Margan moved and Lisa Sinnott seconded an amendment to delete from the last “whereas” the clause “nor do we agree with its arguments.” The amendment passed 15-1. Bob Reagan moved and Buff Rix seconded an amendment to revise the title of the resolution from “A resolution declaring our independence from the proposal by EaglExit...” to “A resolution

disassociating Eklutna Valley Community Council from the proposal by EaglExit..." The amendment passed unanimously. Deb Rix moved and Bob Reagan seconded an amendment to change the fourteenth "whereas" from "WHEREAS, small communities are not necessarily more tax-efficient..." to "WHEREAS, we have no reason to believe that smaller communities are more tax-efficient..." The amendment passed unanimously. Steve Remme moved and Tom Bohn seconded an amendment to delete from the first "whereas" a parenthetical description of EaglExit: "(in deference to Brexit, Great Britain's bid to separate from the European Union)". The amendment passed 15-1. No more amendments were offered. In the final vote for the resolution, with the addition of all four amendments, the resolution passed 15-1. Resolution 2019-02 is attached.

The meeting adjourned at about 8:07 p.m.