

Rogers Park Community Council Meeting Minutes

Meeting: Monday, 24 Sept 2020, 7:00pm – 9:22pm

Zoom meeting was called to order by Janet Bidwell, President at 7:00pm.

Steve Lindbeck, Secretary, confirmed by zoom attendance count, 18 RPCC members were in attendance.

Linda Chase moved, Ric Wilson seconded approval of the minutes from 9 March 2020; asking for and hearing no objections, President Janet Bidwell announced the minutes approved

Ric Wilson, Treasurer, reported a balance of \$763

Anchorage Police Department Community Update

Police Chief Dustin Doll provided a community update to the group. His update included:

- Acknowledgement that George Floyd in Minneapolis is an important event for police across the country and here in Anchorage, raising the urgency of ensuring that our police have a robust and engaging on-going conversation with the communities they serve
- Affirmation that as part of the Anchorage Police Department (APD)'s initiatives to be open, transparent and engaged in a dialogue with the community they serve, will publish their policies and procedures on-line and submit changes therein to an advisory board
- A description of his APD team effort to build up the department's capacity, review and redeploy resources to where they are most effective, and work closely with partnerships across the community to improve their service across the community
- Descriptions of the reduction in dispatch times, currently around 11 seconds, striving for the benchmark of 10 seconds
- Descriptions of the reduction in backlogs
- A review of the reduction in crime statistics over the past four years

Deputy Chief McCoy and APD Deputy Chief Kerle were in attendance. Deputy Chief McCoy added that the department had a busy year preparing for and serving the community during the COVID-19 pandemic while simultaneously engaging in important public discussions around their service to their community.

RPCC members raised questions about service in our local neighborhood, including whether the RPCC might get a report from the team assigned to their area.

Police Chief Doll indicated he would support a follow-up report to RPCC from the team assigned to the area and was striving toward public transparency of call volume data that would enable neighborhoods to see their local statistics.

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson thanked Police Chief Doll for acknowledging the importance of George Floyd in their on-going public discussions about how to improve their service to our community.

Committee Reports

The slate of candidates for new officers of the RPCC for 2020/2021 was presented by Pete Mjos, chair of the nominating committee.

Janet Bidwell, President, put the slate before the RPCC and asked whether there were any others who wished to run. No other nominees were received.

Steve Lindbeck, outgoing Secretary, counted and Mark Foster, incoming Secretary, independently confirmed a count of 22 members in attendance.

Janet Bidwell asked for a vote on the slate of candidates presented. The slate of candidates received 22 affirmative votes and zero votes opposed.

In the Crime and Safety Committee report, Linda Chase, chair of the Committee, expressed her appreciation for the work of Police Chief Doll and his team. Linda also highlighted a concern with the frequent encampment and trash she observed at the corner of New Seward and Northern Lights. Assemblyperson Meg Zaletel posted a link to a website where residents could request trash abatement and offered, based on her proximity to the corner, that she and her neighbors did not observe overnight camping at the location.

In the Garden and Beautification report, Zack Zaletel, appointed chair, reported on the neighborhood clean-up work on Saturday, September 12th from 9am to 1pm. Several RPCC members expressed their appreciation for the team-work and for Zack's outstanding effort in the clean-up. Zack indicated he would be assessing interest in another neighborhood clean-up to be held on September 26th.

In the Midtown Congestion Relief (MCR) committee report, Renee Whitesell from Dowl Engineers, reported that RPCC members were in attendance at the September 5th kick-off meeting of a newly reconstituted State/Local transportation advisory committee and looked forward to their ongoing collaborative work with Anchorage Community Councils.

There was nothing new to report from the ADU Committee.

Representative Reports

Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson (Senate District I) highlighted:

- She expected a special session would be needed to ratify COVID-19 federal relief funding appropriations that had previously been implemented by the Governor under a Legislative Budget & Audit Committee review process
- The efforts by her and others to strongly encourage the Governor to make the \$290 million small business relief fund, first round of applications were received in May, for businesses who had previously received support from federal COVID support programs, e.g., payroll protection plan (PPP), which lead to the Governor revising the program in August
- Federal unemployment benefits (\$300/week payments) were retroactive to July 25th
- Five public COVID testing sites were currently slate to stay open through the end of October
- Additional information is available via Elvi's Updates: <http://conta.cc/3bQc15x>

Representative Andy Josephson (House District 17) highlighted

- His meetings with University of Alaska stakeholders to develop initiatives to restore funding above the levels described in the Compact [made in a previous Legislative Session between the Governor and the Board of Regents] to avoid large cuts in the University
- His observation that legal concerns remained about the nature and extent of the Governor’s authority to continue to administer COVID-19 relief funds without express appropriation authority from the Legislature
- His participation as a member of the Legislative Budget & Audit Committee which has elevated his concerns about the separation of power between the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches.

Representative Harriet Drummond (House District 18) highlighted

- Public testimony she had received as Co-Chair of the House Education Committee concerning the herculean efforts that were being made by teachers and school staff to support our students this fall as they returned to school in on-line, hybrid and in person instructional settings.
- The challenges placed on teachers to individually follow-up with students who did not attend virtual classes, “it is the first time that we have assigned teachers truant officer duties on top of their on-going work”
- The challenges that were growing around teacher retention due to salary/benefits and working conditions
- The challenges of providing broadband access to students in many rural communities where broadband service was limited; in some cases local schools had extended wi-fi hot spots to their community using school bandwidth
- Significant concerns with the current enrollment projections which are running on the order of 10% below last year which could result in a daunting budget shortfall in the current school year
- Concerns with the underinvestment in public education

Assembly Member Meg Zaletel highlighted

- CARES ACT relief funding allocations and descriptions available at:
 - <https://assembly-cares-act-muniorg.hub.arcgis.com/>
- The Property Department at the Municipality of Anchorage was in their due diligence and negotiation phase in the acquisition of the Golden Lion Hotel to be used to provide drug/alcohol treatment services as well as other properties for public services in support of the homeless
- The budget development session for next fiscal year were about to commence
- Police Use of Force Resolution was introduced and tabled while alternative public disclosure and review approaches to ensure policy use of force policies and practices are reviewed to ensure they are transparent and subject to public review and input.
- The “Anchored Home Plan” will be before the Assembly at its second meeting in September
- On October 16th the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration will expire

Assembly Chair Felix Rivera highlighted

- The Assembly will resume Assembly meetings with in-person attendance and participation, subject to masking, 50% capacity and physical distancing among participants, which effectively limits attendance at any one time to roughly 60 public members

- The Assembly recently passed a ban on conversion therapy for minors, while it made adjustments in the proposal that was adopted designed to protect parental rights and freedom of religion
- AO2020-79: An Ordinance creating an Office of Equity & Justice, creating the position of a Chief Equity Officer, reorganizing and focusing the Municipality in an effort to promote equity and justice for all
- AO2020-84: An Ordinance to Provide Protection For Hotel Workers' Employment By Amending Anchorage Municipal Code With A New Chapter Requiring Large Hotel Employers To Offer Rehire To Employees Laid Off In Relation To The Covid-19 Pandemic, And To Retain Eligible Workers For A Period Of Time After A Change In Ownership Or Control, And Thereafter Consider Offering Them Continued Employment.

School Board Member Margo Bellamy highlighted

- School Board meetings will resume its meetings open to in-person attendance and participation, subject to masking, capacity limitations and physical distancing expectations on September 22nd
- Superintendent Bishop is expected to make an announcement this week regarding how schools will be conducted during the second quarter (mid-October).
- The School Board Governance committee is reviewing its policies regarding disparities and barriers to success to ensure it is enabling all of its students to achieve success in life.
- Enrollment is trending down – roughly 10% decline from the prior year – with an associated revenue shortfall of \$28 million. It was not clear how much federal, state or local relief might be forthcoming to offset the declines.
- In a response to a question from an RPCC member, Margo Bellamy provided a link in the chat box to school district policies regarding teacher leave associated with COVID and was going to follow up with additional detail in response to a follow-up question about whether teacher requests for extended COVID leave would require a supportive note from a physician

New Business

Action Item brought forward to Pete Mjos: A Resolution In Support of Traffic Calming Measures on East 24th

Linda Chase moved and Marilyn Pillifant seconded a motion in support of the resolution. Discussion followed. Steve Lewis reported on his direct experience at his curb and in his front yard of vehicles which had exceeded safe speeds for road conditions and skidded into his curb and yard. There were comments emphasizing the number of children who live on the street.

Linda Chase called the question and Steve Lindbeck called for a vote via chat box.

There were 15 votes in favor, two abstentions – Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson and Assembly Member Meg Zaletel, and zero votes in opposition.

Discussion Item brought forward by Linda Chase: the Municipality of Anchorage proposed acquisition of the Golden Lion Hotel property for the purpose of providing drug and alcohol treatment services.

Helen Nienhueser supported the need for a treatment center as something the community needed.

Peter Mjos expressed concern that the recent newspaper editorial suggesting that the Salvation Army Clitheroe Center might be a viable alternative was a distraction as it was far out of reach of associated support services.

Linda Chase asked “what is the most appropriate place for a treatment center?” She felt the administrative process that led to the identification of the Golden Lion Hotel site was rushed and she remained skeptical that the Golden Lion Hotel was the most appropriate place in the community for a treatment center.

Michael Savitt raised a number of concerns with the proposed acquisition and use of the Golden Lion Hotel as a treatment center, including:

- The Municipal process was flawed and didn’t provide adequate notice nor opportunity to be heard in person
- The Mayor and Assembly received several hours of testimony over the course of five nights that ran strongly against (on the order of 4 to 1) the proposed use of the Golden Lion Hotel for a treatment center that would likely include homeless clients
- The Mayor and Assembly treated the neighbors who testified against the proposal with “contempt and disdain” and the Mayor was “AWOL”
- The Mayor and Assembly have not adequately addressed whether the proposed funding of the acquisition will meet the issues raised by the Office of Inspector General from the Treasury
- The Mayor and Assembly have not adequately addressed the likely reduction in adjacent property values, ranging from 8% for an alcohol treatment center to 17 to 18% for a treatment center that attempts to treat opioid addictions
- The Mayor and Assembly have not adequately addressed the need to rezone the property to allow it to be used for the treatment of persons with mental health issues
- The Municipality should expect a lawsuit against the proposed property acquisition based on constitutional issues raised by the process
- If we are genuinely concerned with helping them, we should do substantive due diligence and engage all stakeholders instead of the current process that sought “no input from anyone” before making it public, it looks like a quick fix, not a thoughtful process
- I have reviewed several proposals to address these issues, but “I don’t favor any of them”

Sara Dykstra offered that she lived in the neighborhood near the Golden Lion Hotel, has children and supports the proposed acquisition and use of the Golden Lion Hotel as a treatment facility.

Assembly Member Meg Zaletel, reiterated that administration’s Property Department was in the process of conducting due diligence on the Golden Lion Hotel property and negotiating terms and conditions for the acquisition for the purpose of developing it into a treatment center.

Assembly Chair Felix Rivera responded to the concerns by offering that the Assembly listened to five nights of testimony, added conditions to the administration’s proposal to mitigate some of the concerns raised by neighbors and expects the Administration to conduct and report on further due diligence about the suitability of the site and the terms and conditions of its acquisition. He expects the

Administration and Assembly will seek neighborhood input on the Request For Proposals from vendors who will be asked to propose a treatment services contract on the site.

Helen Nienhueser expressed an interest in learning more about the administration's response to the questions and concerns raised in this meeting.

Ric Wilson engaged Michael Savitt in a colloquy about whether his concerns were solely about what he saw as a rushed and flawed process, the suitability of the location or some combination of the two. Michael Savitt reiterated that he had substantive concerns about both the process and the location.

Steve Lindbeck observed that we were approaching 9:30pm and that he expected these issues would likely be back before the Assembly and RPCC in future meetings.

Linda Chase moved, Marilyn Pillifant seconded a motion to adjourn. Without objection Steve Lindbeck adjourned the meeting at 9:22pm.