

FCC MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

October 21, 2020

Reported by Jim Wright

FCC Manager Mark Butler:

1. FCC spending in 2020 is consistent with its 2020 budget, and FCC requested the same budget as last year to fund its 2021 operations.
2. FCC is seeking the same insurance as last year. *[Note: The FCC Manager has so far declined to provide a copy of that insurance policy or policies so that RPCC might be informed of the scope of its protection, if any.]*
3. FCC offers its paperwork assistance to community councils as they may opt to transition to in-person gatherings.
4. FCC reminds us that it has an ample supply of white cotton masks to disburse to anyone who wants them, at no cost.
5. FCC reminds us that it will provide \$75 per year for authorized uses to each community council, upon a written showing of what it is to be spent on.
6. FCC reminds us that it has four zoom accounts that can be used for community council purposes.

The Mayor's Office report was presented by Jason Brockenstedt, Chief of Staff:

1. The Mayor did not appear, as he had announced his resignation and the Acting Mayor had not yet filled his seat *[which was scheduled to occur two days later, on Oct. 23]*
2. The Acting Mayor is expected to continue the policies of Mayor Berkowitz.
3. During the covid crisis MOA funding includes:
 - a. \$5.5 million to help with rent or mortgages. Call 211 for more information.
 - b. Small business relief - there is another \$10 million grant to be disbursed.
 - c. Nonprofit assistance was available for applicants to October 30.
 - d. Grants devoted to the hospitality industry include up to: \$30K for those closed; \$15K for restaurants and breweries; \$7K for other qualifying entities, including childcare program assistance. See the Cook Inlet Lending Services website for more information.

The **APD** report included:

APD favors a proposal that they wear body cameras. There will be a December 8 public hearing about it, and a special tax levy to vote on in April 2021 to fund this and other things, bundled into a \$1.8 million package. There is an estimated tax increase of \$15 on a \$350k home if it passes.

The Assembly report was presented by Felix Rivera:

The question has arisen whether there will be a special election for a new mayor. The MOA Charter says a special election may not occur sooner than 90 days following a vacancy in that office. Historically, Mayor Begich stepped down in January, with 93 days remaining to the general election, so the Assembly chose not to do a special election, which would cost over \$300,000. Three options are in discussion: 1) a special election no sooner than January 21; 2) no special election, in which case the acting mayor would serve through June 30, to be succeeded by the new mayor chosen at the general election in April; or 3) have the new mayor chosen at the general election seated sooner than mid-summer, but that would require a change in existing law. Felix said there will be a runoff between the top two candidates if no one gets 45% or more of the vote.

The Assembly is presently working on the 2021 budget. Further information is available on the MOA website.

Current issues include the storm water utility project. A robust public process is expected. The Assembly is also looking to update the building codes, considering what version to adopt. This is a big issue for areas like the Hillside and Chugiak, as the new code may require sprinklers in residences. Also under consideration is the issue of tax breaks in transit supported corridors.

The sprinkler code requirements might apply to all newly constructed residences, adding an estimated \$15,000 to \$30,000 to the cost of new homes, for installation and maintenance. An exemption may apply to townhomes, one-family homes and duplexes. If a new building is outside of the MOA water utility, does it apply? That's a big concern. Matt Cruikshank noted that Birchwood and its environs seek an exemption, the wellwater needs being already taxed.

Felix noted citizen frustration over the public process regarding purchase of four properties under AO 2020-66. This includes the Golden Lion near RPCC. People testifying often don't understand the process, focus on blame rather than solutions, and get upset when they are cut off before they've completed comments. One improvement is installation of a large timer so persons testifying can see their time remaining. The MOA website has information about how to testify, and Mark Butler suggested that the FCC also provide guidance on the FCC website.

Julie Hasquet reported on the status of the **transition of MLP to Chugach Electric**:

The sale of MLP to Chugach Electric Cooperative was approved two years ago. The closing is to occur within two weeks *[of Oct. 21]*. On November 4 affected consumers can apply for membership in the cooperative. The old MLP area will become "Chugach North." See the Chugach Electric Cooperative website for more information. Rates will

likely go down as part of the deal, which provided that ~\$36 million will go back to consumers. The website has a portal for each member, called "My Account" and provides for autopay.

The **Anchorage School District** report was presented by Margo Bellamy of the School Board:

I [Jim Wright] pressed Felix to explain ASD priorities, noting that at the last FCC meeting in September, Mayor Berkowitz had said school re-opening would follow the covid data, although the following day the School Superintendent said ASD would follow "a more holistic approach." ASD was moving toward reopening to congregating students, so what is the Assembly's role, position and intent? Felix and Margo indicated that Margo would address this.

ASD previously delineated various risk levels based on covid positive trends in MOA, and how it would respond at each level. Since then, the Superintendent raised other factors, including: emotional health, loss or delay in foundational skills of young students, and behavioral challenges at home. The School Board voted to give Superintendent Deena Bishop discretion to decide on re-opening classrooms to congregating students. She has decided to re-open schools, starting the phase-in on November 16. She maintains that it is safe, citing as evidence the prior experience with Campfire, seven reading programs, and sports activities. It was noted that covid positive results showed up in the sports programs, but that was deemed evidence that mitigation efforts are working.

Members pointed out that covid numbers are surging dramatically and that flu season is also upon us, so that it seems unwise to re-open classrooms at this time. Margo urged concerned citizens to provide their feedback by writing and emailing the School Board, and/or taking part in the School Board's November 6 meeting.

[Note that since the October 21 FCC meeting covid numbers have continued to surge. On November 4 Assembly member Meg Zaletel hosted a zoom meeting on public health at which ASD appeared to disavow responsibility for contact tracing among students, and an MOA health expert testified that meaningful contact tracing is no longer feasible because covid numbers have passed the point where transmission sources can be identified and isolated.]

Jim Wright