

RUSSIAN JACK COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6:30 PM, Wednesday, September 14, 2022

At Zion Lutheran Church – 2100 Boniface Parkway

Present: Ed Leach, Helena “Tiger” Gish, Kathleen Plunkett, Bob & Kathi Jo Skaats, Andrew Gray, Dan & Sherry Wright

Present via ZOOM: Lori Pickett, Keelin Baughman, Lindsey Hajduk, Ted Eischeid

Meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm by Vice President Lori Pickett.

1. Welcome and Land Acknowledgement We are meeting on Dena’ina Land – grateful for their care and sharing the land with us.

2. Anchorage Police/Fire Station Report – no report

3. Legislative report (3 minutes each)

Sen. Elvi Gray-Jackson (Keith Baugess) – no report

Sen. Bill Wielechowski - AK currently has the worst transparency government web site, and SB 25, the Open Checkbook bill, put into law governmental transparency, allowing anyone to find out where the money is being spent. Another bill passed dealing with how political parties are recognized. Formally based on percentage of signators – new bill sets the number at 5000 registered voters. Libertarian will be the only recognized addition at this time. Inflation reduction act – federal government can start negotiating Medicare drug prices. Many have requested this and it is hoped it will create a significant reduction for senior drug costs. Homeowner that wants to improve E-rating can get a good rebate. Oil revenues looking promising. Centennial park monitoring of the homeless is ongoing.

Suggestion to purchase Northway Mall and build a homeless shelter. Pete Petersen reported that it had been looked at by 3 different groups and they all found it would be too expensive to renovate. Lindsey provided a link to the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness for more information: <https://aceh.org/taskforce/> .

Capital project update - 1.67 million which includes: Community patrols; community garden in RJCC area; pedestrian safety near schools and NECC area; monitoring Centennial park.

Sen. Tom Begich (Mercedes Colbert provided the report) – Office open through January 16. Education community email sent out re: regulations to implement early education. More info on that can be found at <https://education.alaska.gov/akreads>. Elections.alaska.gov – find your polling place, change registration, order mail-in ballot and more.

Rep. Geran Tarr – Mountain View may be adjusting their meeting schedule. Geran began with a discussion about speed humps in the neighborhoods. There are removable speed humps, gradual speed humps. Newest speed humps are even more graduated, but also has 2 cutouts that accommodate emergency vehicle and bikers. Huge controversy over this, but lots of support.

Bob Skaats asked about Davis Street – last 25 years have been trying to get speed bumps or stop signs on Caribou to slow down racers.

School policy legislation related to dress, hair and regalia passed. Bridge naming signed and done. Bi-partisan food farm caucus formed and some issues discussed at AK State Fair. 95% of Alaska food is imported. Forgivable food program – people that are growing are selling everything they are growing. Governor’s Council of Human & Sex Trafficking – was part of her work. There are a lot of systems that are failing our youth. There are many ways we can both save money and have better outcomes. Doctors are doing brain research around poverty – early investment in child development pays dividends. Restorative Justice summit this fall. Lisa Rush is new intern.

Rep. Ivy Spohnholz – Maya Narang is her new legislative aid and can be reached at maya.narang@akleg.gov or 907-269-0123. Telehealth bill signed into law this summer that allows flexibility, eliminates red tape and makes it easier for those who need to see a specialist outside. Requires equal pay for equal care, prescriptions allowed. Access increase of 800% in rural areas as they didn’t have to travel and deal with lack of broadband. Advanced practice for dental hygienist serving underserved populations bill passed into law. Spoke a bit about governor bill vetos. Legislative Budget & Audit – state single audit necessary to receive federal funds. Increase in number of audit findings, with bulk of the findings a result of staff turnover and lack of filling positions. Qualified audit – disagreement of facts reported from FY18. Issue is primarily into which fund the money should be credited.

Rep. Andy Josephson (Tristan Walsh) – no report

4. Assembly report (3 minutes each)

Pete Petersen – ARPA funding passed – purchase of hotels to house homeless this winter is the intended expense for that. Not putting Assembly clerk on the ballot next April – something going on all over the country. Clerk is also in charge of elections.

Tiger wondered if any of the native corporations are interested in pitching in to help with the Anchorage homeless population issues? They are involved working with many of the entities that work on the homeless issue. Navigation Center passed recently. Golden Lion was supposed to become a rehabilitation center. These are two ongoing hot potato items.

Forrest Dunbar – Affordable housing, childcare, economic development, are ARPA priorities. There is a childcare crisis in Anchorage (not enough affordable childcare). Anchorage has a budget surplus that came from rental car taxes this summer. Appropriation to spend surplus on fuel costs overruns, repairs to Sullivan Arena. A possible expansion to property tax exemption giving MOA the ability to raise the exemption. Percentage of 20% cap was created by Assembly. Percentage is going up to 40%. In 2022 the mill rate fell, but evaluations went up – driven by the assessor’s office. This issue will be on the ballot. Confirmed Park & Office of Management & Budget directors.

Thanks from Lori to the Assembly for the AK Literacy Project funding.

With the redistricting, there are now several elected officials that are not attending RJCC meetings and a discussion for them to be invited/asked to attend. Forrest agreed to reach out to the other Assembly members who represent RJCC neighborhood.

5. School board report (3 minutes each) – Kelly Lessens -ASD is required to present a balanced budget. More information can be found at <https://www.asdk12.org/FY24>. Inflationary costs and reduced attendance has left with a 68 million deficit/gap. Currently they are using federal relief dollars to fill that gap. Cuts that will help efficiencies will be in the future. They are looking for public feedback. Encourage us to vote for public officials that support public education. Ad hoc wellness committee – working on improving structures in schools for healthier students. An item of discussion for an upcoming School board meeting is release of moveable buildings that could be used for alleviating some of the homelessness in Anchorage. Curriculum is in a 5-6 year cycle then up for review. Update on the bussing issue – options have changed, depending on where students are located. Schedule changes every three weeks. 50+ drivers – new bus driver incentives. Happy to report that many are stepping up because of their desire to serve the community. Partnership with JBER airmen that have stepped up to drive busses. Hope to be fully staffed with bus drivers by the end of October. Looking closer at why this is happening so they don't have a shortage again. Shortages are with contracted as well as ASD bus drivers. Lori mentioned hiring barriers for new arrivals included requiring a GED. Federal Government raised requirement for CDL's.

6. FCC report – Kathleen Plunkett can talk to Daniel George about changing CC meeting dates in an effort to accommodate Legislative and Assembly members attendance. No meeting yet as they also take off July and August, so no report – meeting next week.

7. Report from JBER Public Affairs – no report

8. Capital Projects update for RJCC area – Was discussed during Sen Bill Wielechowski report.

9. Neighborhood/Community Announcements - Keelin Baughman – Mt View Library events – September 17th, Saturday 2 pm there will be a poetry workshop with Toya Brown and 49 Writers; September 21st 5:30 pm Anchor Gardens is hosting a class on prepping gardens for winter, as well as harvesting anything left in the Mountain View Teaching Garden. Story time continues at 6 pm on Tuesday.

Lindsey – Bragaw Street garden food forest already harvested. Happy to participate in the funding secured by Legislators for RJCC area garden. Lori Pickett invited everyone to the Welcoming Anchorage event Thursday from 4-7 at Grow North Farms. She also reported that there are record numbers of people from Afghanistan and Ukraine arriving to Anchorage. Ted Eischeid running for office. Andrew Gray running for House District 20. Website andrewgrayak.com

Next meeting is scheduled for October 12 at 6:30 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 7:58 pm

Minutes respectfully submitted by:
Sherry Wright, Secretary