

Eklutna Valley Community Council
February 8, 2023
Meeting minutes

The meeting was chaired by council president Rick Sinnott and began at 6:38 p.m. The council met at the Chugach State Park ranger station. Seventeen council members were present: Dan Thompson, Margan Grover, Bob Reagan, Randy and Charity Bangerter, Bob and Cindy McElroy, Russ Carpenter, Teal Heller, Buff and Deb Rix, Lisa and Rick Sinnott, Gwyn Wiedmer, Tom Bohn, Derek Lampert, and Linda Hilton. Ranger Levi Schmidt and Dave Briseno, the park's winter caretaker, and David Nyman, a Girdwood resident, also attended part of the meeting.

The meeting agenda was approved unanimously with two additions. Gwyn asked for a minute to get feedback on the buildings they hope to build on their 30-acre lot. Rick added a brief discussion of the community council boundary. The minutes of the October 4, 2022, regular meeting and the October 28 through November 9, 2022, special meeting (by email) were approved unanimously with no changes.

Dan Thompson reported that the council still has \$578.38 in its account.

OLD BUSINESS

Local crime report. No suspicious activity was reported other than the abandoned car that had been sitting at the top of the long hill for two weeks. Derek confirmed that the APD had flagged the vehicle but it might be a while before it could be towed.

Wildfire planning and mapping. In the past several months Margan has attended about seven of these meetings and Rick two. The last meeting was about two weeks ago. Jen Schmidt, the UAA researcher, is finalizing a report on wildfire safety and evacuation plans for the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) and when it is completed Rick will email a copy to Eklutna Valley residents.

At the last wildfire safety meeting a person representing the Anchorage Office of Emergency Management suggested that a siren might be a good idea for warning Eklutna Valley that an evacuation has been ordered, particularly park visitors who have no cell phone connection. She seemed to imply that her office would soon have funding available for such a thing. After weighing pros and cons, everyone at the community council meeting thought that a cell phone tower would be much more valuable than a siren. It would also be more useful for other emergencies and first responders in the park and on Eklutna Lake Road. Rick will ask that the wildfire report include a recommendation for a cell phone tower for Eklutna Valley and will contact the emergency management office to investigate funding opportunities for the tower.

NEW BUSINESS

Community council boundary. Every 10 years the municipality is required to contact community councils and determine if any boundary changes are needed. The muni recently contacted Rick, who told them we were happy with our present boundary. All members present agreed.

Heritage Land Bank and CY Investment's joint venture in Girdwood. The Heritage Land Bank (HLB) is the MOA's real estate arm that disposes of public land. After the HLB issued a

request for proposals (RFP) for a public land disposal in Girdwood, the HLB formed a joint venture with CY Investments (owned by Connie Yoshimura) to develop a subdivision to be called Holtan Hills. Girdwood residents largely oppose the final development agreement, not because they oppose development (they want more housing), but because there were no provisions for affordable housing for workers. The development would likely result in 100 or more new high-end houses and condos that, given the experience of Girdwood residents, would mostly be used as second homes and short-term rentals. This would exacerbate the housing problem in Girdwood, not help solve it. After over a year of trying to communicate with HLB and CY Investments, with almost no success, the Girdwood Board of Supervisors (their community council) voted on a resolution asking the Assembly to postpone or reject the agreement. The Assembly decided, on a 7-5 vote the night before our community council meeting to “indefinitely postpone” further consideration.

Rick had provided several documents about this issue for members to read prior to this meeting. They included Girdwood’s resolution and a letter of objection, an article written by the Anchorage Daily News about a year ago that described the issue and included a map, and an opinion piece written by Connie Yoshimura about the issue. He also forwarded a letter written by David Nyman, a Girdwood resident, and a draft resolution from our community council in support of Girdwood.

David Nyman joined the meeting via FaceTime. He described how the issue had evolved over the last couple of years and how Girdwood’s needs were not being addressed. The discussion emphasized the concern expressed by David and Rick that the development agreement is flawed in many respects. It appears to favor CY Investments financially by transferring many costs and risks of development to the MOA. Rick pointed out that our community council could suffer the same fate as Girdwood if a developer worked out a deal with the MOA to favor a variance, conditional use permit or zoning change that was not supported by local residents. That was one of the main reasons why our community council decided to support Girdwood.

After questions and discussion, Rick passed around the draft resolution. He read each “whereas” and the “resolved” section and made revisions based on recommendations and consent votes by the members. At the end the entire resolution was considered in its entirety and approved by a unanimous vote.

Funding request for repairing the Eklutna Lakeside Trail. Tom Bohn had learned of a funding request from Alaska Trails, asking the Alaska Legislature for \$234,000 to repair, and reroute in some places, the Eklutna Lakeside Trail. Tom drafted a letter of support from our community council that members discussed, and Rick was directed to send the letter to Alaska Trails by a unanimous consent vote.

Wiedmer’s building plans. Gwyn passed out a map of their property with outlines of proposed buildings. The planning department has been questioning them because one of the buildings initially described as a garage will be a little bigger than their house. The Wiedmers have argued that the large building will be a multipurpose storage structure that will include, among other things, their salvaged wood supply as it is sawn into dimensional lumber for their own use. The planning department has offered to call Rick, as a representative of the community, to ask what neighbors think about the building. Having heard no objections from the members present, Rick will inform the muni that our community has no problem with the structure.

The meeting adjourned at about 8:40 p.m.