

RUSSIAN JACK COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6:30 PM, Wednesday, December 13, 2023

At Zion Lutheran Church – 2100 Boniface Parkway

Present: Ed Leach, Lori Pickett, Kathleen Plunkett, Bill Wielechowski, George Martinez, Forrest Wolfe (Rep Wright), Stanley Wright, Dan & Sherry Wright

Present via ZOOM: Kendra Kloster, Ted Eischeid, Mercedes Colbert, Katy Giorgio, Arielle Wiggin, Zak Hartman, Staffer to Rep Gray Deirdre, Dora Wilson

Meeting was called to order at 6:34 pm by Kendra, then the meeting was run by Lori.

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

2. Legislative report (3 minutes each)

Sen. Bill Wielechowski – (Seat K) 1st draft of Governor's budget expected out tomorrow. Budget was based on \$73/barrel oil prices, which is about where we are today. Senate & House Leadership meeting focused on energy and transmission authority on the railbelt. Electrical grids in the Lower 48 are redundant, so there is backup. We only have one electric grid with an average 88 days a year that it is down. Purchasing energy when you are uncertain if it will be available is a difficult sell. We have 8 years to comply with federal requirements for funding. Bill took a trip to North Dakota to learn about their work on carbons. Public Employee pensions remains a hiring issue.

Sen. Forrest Dunbar – (Seat J) - A written monthly report provided at the meeting. Forrest is introducing legislation regarding PTSD treatments, utilizing psychedelic medicines. Task Force will set up the regulatory framework.

Comment from Ted E. regarding social security penalties because of working for the MatSu Borough – knows there have been past legislative efforts to get rid of the windfall tax. Impacts those that might work for State of Alaska. Hoping to see a defined benefit package passed. There is a peace of mind that comes with knowing we can provide something for our families after we pass.

Lori asked about marijuana medicinal uses at the federal level. Forrest said they are at Stage 3 trials. Depression and addiction are often associated with trauma. Ed asked if there is any benefit to the state to having illegal drugs at all. There are probably 60 years of evidence that the war on drugs isn't working. Portugal has decriminalized drugs and moved toward treatments, not sure the US citizens are ready for that.

Lori asked if there is any effort to help Medicaid reimbursement efforts. There is a bill addressing Medicaid reimbursement.

Rep. Genevieve Mina – Seat 19 – (Katy Giorgio gave the report). Preparing for legislative session. Increasing eligibility for food stamps is one of the main bills they are looking at.

Rep. Stanley Wright – Seat 22 (Forrest Wolfe) – Meeting for constituents this Saturday from 10 – 12 at Starbucks off DeBarr/Muldoon. Records anticipated as coming off CourtView for 8500 individuals with prior marijuana convictions.

Rep. Andrew Gray - Seat 20 - (Dierdre gave the report) East High pool is still not open because there are no lifeguards available. They have scholarships available for anyone interested in that job. She spoke about recent guests with Rep Gray's podcast. Innovative Readiness training with the Coast Guard provides help in local issues – requires an application. No constituent meeting this month – will be one in January.

3. Assembly report (3 minutes each)

Christopher Constant Seat 1B – no report

Daniel Volland Seat 1L – no report

Karen Bronga Seat 5H (Genevieve Kikukawa) –spoke in conjunction with George's report.

George Martinez Seat 5I – MOA budget veto override prioritized workforce placement and retention. Focus on housing for the homeless is moving forward. Using transitional shelter into housing. Public safety recognition – mobile intervention deal with trauma and mental breakdown and mobile crisis team that AFD responds where there is not a threatening situation. Looking at billing Medicaid for those types of interventions. Anchorage Goes campaign (for public restrooms bonds), and park funding (Russian Jack and Nunaka Valley).

Ted E – question regarding the number of miles of state vs. city maintained roads in Anchorage – from that analysis it appears about even. There are some unfilled plow positions on both state and city levels. Something needs to be done to expand the maintenance division to previous levels of plowing. Any creative ideas? Karen is co-sponsoring a mission critical pay for winter street maintenance, offering bonuses in an attempt to fix the wage gap. Dispatchers and mechanics are also part of the picture. These need to be proposed in order to be addressed. MOA lost drivers to the state last year because of wages.

Kendra thanks for looking at Nunaka Park that needs some TLC. It would be a great place for a dinosaur park.

Ed spoke about nuclear training – perhaps a summer training program for a one-year minimum contract so that when snow removal season is happening, they will be ready. BridgeBuilders has outreach to high school and perhaps recruitment could come from this.

Sherry Wright said that snow plowing is happening, but they are not clearing the entire road or the turn lanes. Studies were done to determine how many lanes are needed to accommodate Anchorage traffic before building the roads. Anchorage has more traffic and having lanes unplowed creates dangerous driving, contributing to accidents, lack of emergency vehicles getting people to hospitals, creating school closures, which then impacts people's livelihoods because of the need to stay home with children. We have never seen so many school closures. So many parents would get their children to school if buses are not able. Roads were built to accommodate the amount of traffic we have and they are just not being maintained adequately.

Ted spoke about the MatSu Borough that has a number of part time positions, that can bolster full time work. Ted is interested in that job. Let's keep working on it.

4. School board report (3 minutes each) Dora Wilson spoke that the Board moved forward with several bond proposals for April ballot. Graduation rates were discussed, learning that it is showing 81% for 4 years, but 86% for five years. FY 2025 budget presentations are showing a 98 million dollar deficit. Great work is being done with Anchorage Academics. Kendra asked, What has changed around the school closure decisions? It is in part safety for the children, whether or not busses can safely navigate neighborhood roads. There has been more "distance learning days". Kendra wondered what the parameters are because it is very different than when she grew up here. It's very frustrating for parents. Dora will check to see if there are any details she can provide regarding the parameters. ASD Community Survey re: Budget is <https://www.asdk12.org/fy25survey>

Ted E asked how important is the Governor's veto override? What is going to happen if we don't raise the BSA? The school can't continue increasing class sizes, reducing classes. Costs of transportation has gone up. Legislators at RJCC meeting are truly fighting for education and are appreciated. There are five days after they convene to override the veto. The Senate and the House have to agree to a Joint Session to avoid taking action, but is hopeful that they will take that action. School board and Assembly (MOA) both asked for a raise in the BSA. Senate also asked on a permanent basis to increase the BSA, which is in the House currently. A bill to re-write the BSA formula is in the works, but don't let that cause a neglect to taking action now. The BSA is not keeping up with inflation.

Ed said 55 years ago residential roads were not plowed, but the schools were not closed. Children who could not make it had an excused absence. You can get around. Parents can get around if they are willing. They don't need to close all the schools just because some are not accessible. Buffalo, NY is comparable to Anchorage, AK and have a 24 hour turnaround.

Kathleen - BSA has needed to be fixed for 10 – 20 years. It's not just Anchorage, it's also Fairbanks. Cost of living is only one part of the formula.

Kendra suggested doing a resolution regarding snow plowing and the BSA to be read at the Assembly meeting January 9th. Lori is available January 9th to read the document, if needed. Ted supports also. Kendra will draft. Executive board will review.

5. FCC report – Kathleen Plunkett – Contract with FCC and MOA was signed. FCC Manager position is still open. The officers are working on the position description. No December meeting, so Happy Holidays!

6. Williwaw Traffic Calming Project – Zak Hartman, MOA Traffic Calming/Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator spoke about Russian Jack grant specific for neighborhood roads. Based on feedback this past Spring, San Roberto Avenue, San Antonio Street, and San Ernesto Avenue had a problem with people speeding 12 – 13 mph over the speed limit. A network of speed humps are the proposed solution with a few mini traffic circles at Hoyt and on E 8th Avenue. They have intersection neck downs on San Roberto & Pine and San Ernesto & San Antonio St. Keeps people from parking right next to a STOP sign. Ted asked about how the bike lanes are

incorporated into this narrowing. It doesn't happen where there are dedicated bike lanes, but the goal is to slow down traffic, so bikers are safer. They will need to be a certain distance from driveways (St Anthony's church parking was mentioned). NYC has one policemen for every 200 residents. Anchorage has one policemen for every 800 residents. Enforcement is an issue.

7. Elections for RJCC Officers – Motion to retain current officers was made by Sherry Wright. 2nd by Dan Wright. No objections. Officers were elected as follows: Kendra Kloster, President; Lori Pickett, Vice President; Sherry Wright, Secretary; Ed Leach, Treasurer; Kathleen Plunkett, Trustee and FCC Representative.

8. Neighborhood/Community Announcements - We miss our Mountain View Library updates. Digital Equity Plan from Federal Government (pass through State of Alaska Commerce & Economic Development) with good funding coming in for infrastructure, literacy, helping people get online. Chugach Park Access is still in the works. Basher Road moved away from Campbell Creek – expansion of parking on MOA lands. May be a separate bond on the ballot. Canyon Road is another area. Keep an eye for a bond on the ballot.

Next meeting is scheduled for January 10th at 6:30 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:18 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:
Sherry Wright, Secretary