

RUSSIAN JACK COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6:30 PM, Wednesday, February 14, 2024

At Zion Lutheran Church – 2100 Boniface Parkway

Present: Ed Leach, Bill Popp, Karen Bronga, Kathleen Plunkett, Dan & Sherry Wright

Present via ZOOM: Deirdre Goins (Rep Gray), Mercedes Colbert (Sen Wielechowski), Genieve Mina, Bill Wielechowski, Seth (Sen Dunbar), Katy Giorgio, Kendra Kloster, Diana – Anchorage Parks Foundation, Ted Eischeid, Forrest Dunbar, Kaleb Callahan, Brenda Campbell Johnson

Meeting was called to order at 6:33 pm by President Kendra Kloster.

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) Hopefully passing an education bill by February 27. Still disagreement on base student allocation. Defined benefit plans bill in the works that will save \$6-7 million per year. The other issue is concern of collapse of LNG energy. Hillcorp produces 90% of the gas. Cook Inlet gas is available, but producers are unwilling to drill. They are looking at incentives for producers. Alaska may benefit from Biden's LNG shutdowns.

Sen. Forrest Dunbar – (Seat J) His report is attached. Voted for education override. SB88 support has to do with employee pensions. Believes there will be LNG imports and storage regulation will be important as storage will be controlled by the producers. Lands should be returned to village corporations. AK Performance Fellowship to increase scholarships due to inflation and qualifications. Filed bill to allow childcare workers without American education.

Rep. Genevieve Mina – Seat 19 – Support veto to override, waiting on negotiations. SNAP – online application available now. HB 196 to improve SNAP program (SB 149). Snow – removal / maintenance increased contracting work and needs. There is a 24% vacancy for maintenance workers, mechanics and operators. Department of Transportation looking at incentive pays to fill some of those vacancies. HB 325 waive business license fees for first time applicants. Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) - was rejected by the feds, leaving us without \$1billion funding because there were constituents in Anchorage and Fairbanks left out of the process. DOT is working on amendments and re-applying.

Ed favors bringing back the fuel tax \$.25 per gallon that would provide funding for transportation. Ted is concerned and thanks Genevieve for bringing this to our attention.

Rep. Stanley Wright – Seat 22 (Forrest Wolfe) HB 161 Civil Legal Services allows state to fund civil legal services up to 20%. HB 158 Military Space Force bill to add them to the statute. HB 179 Employee rights regarding free speech for political or religious freedom. HB 253 Federal Refrigerants – moving through committee. HB 291 – Native Corporations reporting depending on the size of community. HB 292 AHFC authority – acquiring building 700 Bragaw that could provide housing in our area.

Karen commented on education and hopes he heard support from constituents.

Rep. Andrew Gray - Seat 20 - (Deordre Goins provided a report). Alcohol bill that would educate Alaskans on the increased cancer risk. Pod cast Town Hall March 14th will discuss mobile home tenant rights.

3. Assembly report (3 minutes each)

Christopher Constant Seat 1B – no report

Daniel Volland Seat 1L – no report

Karen Bronga Seat 5H - Stem at Wayland – small structures program. Central Lutheran is constructing 5 tiny shelters and a shower house that will be moved. They will charge rent and expectations of tenants with encouragement to move toward permanent housing. *In My Backyard* is the name of the program. Karen went over the various types of housing costs (prison, mental health facilities, etc). Alcohol tax funds should go toward prevention. Short term rentals hearing February 27. Animal control rules on e-collar (instead of leash). Right on Red is pushed to May (pedestrian safety).

Ted suggests as a runner or biker – he runs on the left side, because people turning right on red don't look right. Resolution asking State of Alaska pass a vulnerable user law (for those who have been struck by vehicles). This is something they are looking at as they have discovered it can be as little as \$100 fine if someone is killed in a crosswalk.

Kathleen – was in Houston last week and saw the homeless problem there. Crime and homeless aggressiveness were problems she encountered. Houston is not a perfect model for Anchorage. They still had plenty of problems. Anchorage is trying to work toward a static homeless population.

George Martinez Seat 5I – no report

4. School board report (3 minutes each) – Carl Jacobs reported they are working on adopting 2024/2025 budget. ASD facing \$98 million deficit. Staffing challenges leave vacancies and those funds are used to fill some of the deficit issues. Grade 4 – 12 student/teacher ratio. Administrative expense reductions. Allocation for supplies reduced. Language immersion reductions. Removal of night positions. February 20 board meeting and public is welcome. Ties between school board / PTA policy to increase parental involvement.

Kathleen – super majority took budget down to 5% and doesn't believe it is fiscally responsible. Most east side schools in high density/lower economy neighborhoods do not have PTAs. Please reach out to those schools and parents. Superintendent salary increase does not reduce administrative costs. It has not been increased for several years.

5. FCC report – Kathleen Plunkett – Treasurer resigned due to running for office. Office manager position was revised and sent out. 2024 Legislative Program presented by the Anchorage Assembly & Mayor Bronson. (available on the MOA website). Kathleen will send report to secretary to be read into the record.

6. Review RJCC letter outlining community council ideas and concerns – This letter was drafted and reviewed online. Kendra will take care of edits and email out.

7. Anchorage Parks Foundation – This year’s park bond is Prop 4 – 4.35 million. They are having an in-person meeting for people to learn more about 2 grant opportunities on February 29 from 5:30 – 7:30 at Fairview Rec Center with a free dinner. New neighborhood forest grant – work can be done on private lands with up to \$25K & 40k available. You can reach Diana at diana@anchorageparkfoundation.org or 907-249-6652.

8. Neighborhood/Community Announcements - Bill Popp addressed council. He is running for mayor and lives in RJCC area. Next public debate February 26th. Poppforanchorage.com They will have several opportunities to share their views and plans.

Ed provided a detailed alternative report DRAFT of Alternative D Roadway and Highway Improvements. He said it is the only one that doesn’t affect any residences. It includes skyway and below ground, and connects the Port of Anchorage. There are meetings next week that focus on the alternatives. *Fairness for Fairview* is trying to improve pedestrian safety and keep Fairview from being cut in half by these alternatives. Interim Solution is the one more likely and doable. There is an online open house – State DOT is looking for public comments with an April 7 deadline. Comments can be submitted: SewardGlennconnection.com

Next RJCC meeting is March 13th at 6:30 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:
Sherry Wright, Secretary