

Rogers Park Community Council Meeting Minutes
Meeting Held December 13, 2010 in the Rogers Park Elementary Library
Minutes Prepared by Beate Zinck, Secretary

Community Council Officers in Attendance:

Jim Wright, Past President, Presiding
Bob Churchill, Vice President
Cheryl Forrest, Treasurer
Beate Zinck, Secretary

Handouts available included: Meeting Agenda; November 2010 Meeting Minutes Draft submitted for approval; Draft of a proposed letter of concern to the municipality regarding police service provided by the municipality.

I. Welcome

The meeting began at 7:05 pm with a thank you to all in attendance for braving the cold temperatures; it was noted that the group did not have a quorum.

II. Approval of November 2010 Meeting Minutes

Since the group did not have a quorum present, approval did not take place; however, a couple of spelling corrections were proposed and will be made prior to the January 2011 meeting.

III. Assembly Reports

Elvi Gray-Jackson spoke first, mentioning that the last of three Public Hearings on the 2011 General Government Budget was held November 23rd, 2010. She indicated that she took good notes and that a total of 155 people testified; according to her notes 22% (34 individuals) of those that testified were in favor of the Mayor's proposed budget; over 100 emails were also received with favorable responses holding a similar percentage.

Ms. Gray-Jackson went on to say that the 2011 budget was approved by the Assembly. Items reinstated included \$20,000 for Covenant House; \$20,000 for Project Access; \$40,868 for Boys and Girls Clubs; \$240,000 for Anchor Rides; \$247,000 to reinstate early morning and late night Transit Service; \$85,050 for East Anchorage Plan; nine positions and Truck 11 in Eagle River; nine positions and Engine 10 on the Hillside; an additional \$52,500 for community grants for arts that gives a sum total of \$137,500; and \$50,000 added back to the Federation of Community Councils for a total of \$80,000.

She added that the 2011 Capital Budget Items for Rogers Park Community Council will also be included in the MOA's legislative program request to the State legislators:

Northern Lights Boulevard Sound Barrier Fence Phase II – Seward Highway to Lake Otis Parkway -- \$1 million.

Rogers Park Elementary Overpass on Northern Lights Boulevard – Safety Upgrades Study

9th Avenue Reconstruction Phase II – Cordova Street to LaTouche Street

Also noted, Assembly Member Birch introduced an ordinance to ask the people of Anchorage if they want a sales tax. The ordinance also addresses the question of changing the required 60% voter approval to 50 plus 1. Public hearing was opened and continued to a future meeting so that the ordinance can be heard at the next Budget and Finance Committee meeting.

We learned from Ms. Gray-Jackson that Assembly Member Birch introduced an ordinance to include language in the Charter that states “the base amount for calculating the next year’s tax increase limit is the amount of taxes collected in the current year”. Per Ms. Gray-Jackson, this is and has been the intent and practice dating back to 1982 when the tax cap was established. There is a Public Hearing scheduled for January 11th.

We were updated on Mr. Traini’s New Year’s Eve fireworks ordinance – it passed with a two-year sunset clause. Fireworks will be legal in Anchorage on New Year’s Eve from 9:30pm until 1:00am.

We learned that Rogers Park teacher Dave Huycke and his 6th grade class spoke before the Assembly a few meetings ago regarding the issues related to homeless inebriates; the students designed a bus sign that encourages citizens to donate to charity rather than giving directly to panhandlers. Assembly Member Harriet Drummond will help the students finalize their design; the Firefighters and Police Unions have donated \$2,500 toward the cost of placing the signs on city buses.

And finally, Ms. Gray-Jackson met with the General Manager and other staff at Home Depot on Tudor Road; they are looking for ideas on how to give back to our local community. Currently they are helping out with the graffiti issues with donations of supplies and staff time. If anyone has any other ideas on how Home Depot could help out within Anchorage please share your thoughts.

The next Assembly meeting will be held December 14th – the agenda is short, mostly consent items.

A question was raised concerning the current alcohol tax in Anchorage – Assembly Member Traini indicated that the state established the rate.

Mr. Traini furthered that he is seeking an opinion from legal regarding a local excise tax; the current tax does not cover the expenses relative to alcohol-related issues in the municipality. Mr. Traini encourages those individuals interested to take a ride with our community public officers to witness what he has observed – most calls are alcohol related.

Mr. Traini addressed the tobacco tax – the tax passed; the anticipated revenue is how the budget balanced.

Assembly Members Gray-Jackson, Flynn, and Drummond voted no on the tobacco tax; Ms. Gray-Jackson asked for the opportunity to explain her vote. She believes the need for the tobacco tax is “manufactured”; the city employed a tax cap in 1982 and currently the city taxes below the ‘cap’. From her point of view, the discussion is whether to collect to the cap or almost the cap versus decreasing services versus balancing the budget on the back of a small segment of our population, ie., tobacco users and/or alcohol users.

Mr. Traini continued his remarks with a discussion on a safety zone ordinance he is working on, the purpose of which will be to require individuals to refrain from standing within 500 feet of stop lights unless they are waiting for the cross light to turn; he has requested feedback from the Legal Department and the ACLU.

Comments and questions came from several members in attendance following Assembly Member Traini's remarks:

Mr. Ted Ryberg asked about various user groups costing the city more than what is taken in – Mr. Traini reiterated his earlier comment about riding with the police once per month and noting that most calls were alcohol-related; Mr. Bob Churchill asked about the Samson-Diamond Library Branch closure and queried, barring cost, why close it? Elvi Gray-Jackson responded that the Mayor admitted that the owner of the Mall wanted a two year commitment for full service versus an express library for two years free rent; Ann Lorber spoke her concerns, saying that it was a big mistake to close the branch – inconvenient for South Side residents, the UAA library has become more difficult for people to use, and she feels that a city this size is underserved as it is for citizens to access computers, do research, etc. Pete Mjos echoed Ms. Lorber's remarks and suggested that it was difficult to locate materials at the Consortium Library. Bob Williams added that in fairness, it should be considered that the Mayor probably got advice from Friends of the Library and others regarding the issue and he stated that the Samson Branch had experienced declining numbers for years. He also stated that when dollars are short, funds should be directed to the main branch so that areas like the Alaska Collection, which has seen a cut in hours, can remain more accessible to more patrons.

Assembly Member Dick Traini restated that the 2011 Budget was a tough budget to work on, there were compromises; Anchor Rides was his number one priority because the folks served by Anchor Rides have few to no other options for transportation.

Arndt von Hippel stated his feelings regarding a need for audits on three big projects (H2H, Bridge, City Dock) that he has previously stated opposition to – he believes there is a 'lot of spare change' that could be available but for spending on these projects.

(At Jim Wright's request, the meeting continued off Agenda order) Pete Mjos asked questions regarding the Mayors Task Force on Obesity – where are things at? He asked for clarification from the Assembly members present; what is being done? What steps are being taken to implement the goals of the Task Force? Council area member Dave Morgan identified himself as the out-going HHS Commission Services Chair, and stated that for those interested, at the next HHS meeting (January 12, Health Department, 4th floor conference room from 4:30pm to 7:30pm) there will be a presentation of a report that summarizes the activities of the various departments involved and what they have been working on; the state director of the Obesity Program will be in attendance. Dr. Mjos asked Mr. Morgan if he would be willing to share what action has taken place regarding this concern at our next community council meeting; Mr. Morgan agreed.

At 7:50pm it was noted that we still had no quorum.

IV. Legislative Reports

Representative Les Gara was not feeling well; his staffers are ill with the flu -- no report.

Representative Berta Gardner reminded us that, although the Legislature is not in session, many legislators are involved in a number of activities. She gave us a ‘window’ into the life of a state legislator: she sits on the State Legislative Ethics Committee and last week she was in DC for a meeting, discussing the impact of the Citizens United case; Representative Gardner had a lobbyist argue with her that the case had no real impact – she suggested asking Joe Miller his thoughts on the matter. She participated in an ethics meeting today relating to a house member; tomorrow she will be headed to a Chugach Legislative Reception. This week she has/will participate in three community council meetings, a Caucus meeting and a Rules meeting.

At a library visit she learned that 60% of community members have a library card and that the library receives 74% more visits than the Sullivan Arena. Sixty per cent of job seekers through the Department of Labor make their initial contacts via library computers – resumes and applications are all on-line. Requests include more public meeting rooms and ‘teen room’ centers based on a Seattle model.

Pete Mjos asked about redistricting plans.

Alaska is one of six states monitored by the Feds – we have to get approval so that indigenous populations have adequate representation. Rural areas likely to lose out, ie., Woodie Salmon covers 54 villages. Efforts have been made, according to Rep. Gardner, to take meetings around the state to increase access.

From Senator Davis’s office, Mr. Tom Obermeyer stated that Senator Davis is working on 17 bills, primarily health care and education bills, including some hot button issues such as Denali Kid Care; she will continue to work on major issues until the Christmas holiday. Senator Davis is Chair of the Senate Health and Medicaid Task Force, a task force for cost containment essentially.

Senator Ellis’s office was represented by Zack Mannix. Senator Ellis is the Rules Committee Chair; as such he controls activity on the Senate floor including things like seating arrangements.

V. Federation of Community Councils Report: FCC Representative Bob Churchill

The last FCC meeting held was on November 17th.

The focus of the meeting was the proposal to eliminate funding for the FCC administrative structure which is the “umbrella” organizational structure to support and coordinate the efforts of the individual community councils within the municipality. This is funded by a grant and administered by a group of volunteers elected as officers from the FCC delegates. It was the general consensus of the group that if the FCC structure was to go away, it would in all likelihood significantly reduce the effectiveness of the Community Council system as a whole.

The treasurer’s report indicated that the project to review administrative costs and effectiveness was ongoing by the finance committee. The committee was proposing to change the systems for printing and copying currently used as there are most cost effective options available. A proposal to change the equipment was presented and passed by the group. This should result in a net savings to the FCC costs next year.

A review of the mailing lists for the individual councils was discussed and the efforts to reduce the amount of hard copy mailings were highlighted. This has been a major cost item for the FCC over the past years. It was noted that councils have been systematically reducing the number of hard copy

mailings which results in significant savings. RPCC was down to 6 on the list for hard copy mailings which was excellent.

Arndt von Hippel again raised his concerns about municipality fiscal responsibility; Bob Churchill called a point of order and suggests we move on.

VI. Presentations and Discussions

Agenda Item VII.A. Bob Churchill offers his draft letter to Mayor Sullivan regarding the depletion of police services to those present; with no quorum present to vote, he asked that individuals review the letter and email revision suggestions to him so that he can prepare an updated letter for presentation at the January 2011 meeting.

Elvi-Gray Jackson added that \$300,000 acquired from drug busts is being directed to a police academy in September 2011; a 'COPS' grant was received from the federal government for 10 police officers for three years.

Agenda Item VII.B. Jim Wright apologized to those present for speaking on our behalf; he was asked to sign a letter prepared by the Federation of Community Councils that stated opposition to proposed cuts in the 2011 city budget to the FCC budget. Due to timing concerns he signed the letter with the caveat that his signature was subject to a vote on a resolution in support of his signature by the RPCC membership; due to the lack of a quorum present, action could not be taken. He asked if members present would like to discuss the matter further or leave it to the next meeting. It was noted that the issue is now moot, as FCC funding was reinstated and approved.

Jim Wright offered to open the floor to member input regarding the other budget cuts, to police, fire, libraries and schools, for example. Pete Mjos offered that we have talked enough for the night. Elvi Gray-Jackson asks the RPCC organization to stay on top of budget issues for the 2012 budget, sharing our concerns via letters, Assembly testimony, etc. She further suggests that we target our September 2011 meeting to prioritize our budget needs.

In closing, a discussion ensued about the need to bring closure to a several months-long discussion regarding concerns raised over fiscal responsibility and accountability for project costs in which the municipality is involved (Kabata, H2H, and the dock expansion). It was the opinion of the organization Vice-President that this issue had been discussed at length, that various actions had been taken to address the concerns, and that the membership had expressed a desire to move on. Following the Vice President's departure, Jim Wright noted that the issue had been considered over many months time, it had been put to a vote and failed. There had been ample opportunity to garner further support for a revised proposal, but that member interest in the proponent's position was not apparent. It was further expressed that the RPCC saw no need for additional action unless new issues were presented, noting that the issue could be further pursued before the Assembly or otherwise.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:30 p.m.