

Rogers Park Community Council Minutes

7 PM Monday, December 9, 2013

Rogers Park Elementary School Library

Board Members Attending:

Janet Bidwell, President
Iris Matthews, Vice President
Jim Wright, Secretary
Cheryl Forrest, Treasurer
Bob Churchill, FCC representative

I. Welcome.

Janet Bidwell called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m., asking members to please sign in so that the existence of a quorum could be established.

II. Assembly Reports.

Assembly member Elvi Gray-Jackson spoke first, and addressed the following topics.

Title 11 – Taxicab Ordinance. There are several changes to this section of the Code to address taxi availability for the disabled, bar closing hours, and other issues. The ordinance was approved at the December 3rd meeting with 17 amendments. The final document with amendments can be found on line at www.muni.org.

The ongoing Tennis Court Issue. Two proposals were on the floor. One was to accept \$4 million and set it aside for planning, design, and site selection for a tennis court/multi-purpose facility. The second proposal was to approve \$7.5 million for a facility. Both proposals failed, and the Mayor laid a new proposal on the table at the end of the meeting to appropriate \$7.2 million for the facility and \$3.3 million for improvements to the Sullivan Arena. Public Hearing will be held at the December 17th Assembly meeting.

At its November 19th meeting the Assembly approved budgets for 2014 (General Government Operating and Capital and Utilities Operating and Capital). The General Government Operating budget was approved in the amount of \$467,824,755 before approved Assembly amendments which follow:

Federation of Community Councils	\$ 5,000
Anchorage Service Patrol Vans	515,000
Assembly Outside Counsel for Veto	30,000
Anchorage and Chugiak Senior Centers	53,240
Reduce Cost to ASD for SRO by 50%	1,500,000

Increase grant to Northeast and Mt. View Recreation Centers	40,000
Library funding for materials and band width	260,000
Code Enforcement Office in Community Planning – (Title 10)	101,248
Increase staff in Municipal Clerk’s Office for backup Agenda Support and Business Licenses	111,143
TOTAL	\$ 2,615,631

The Fees and Fines increase Ordinance passed. Approved increases include:

- Department of Health and Human Services – Noise Permit Increases;
- Community Development – On-site Water and Wastewater Fees, and Rights-of Way and Land Use/Planning Fees;
- Fire – Ambulance Fees;
- Public Transportation – Adult, Youth, Senior, and Medicare Single Trips, Day and monthly passes, and AnchorRides increase. Free Wednesdays for seniors will remain intact.

The next Assembly Meeting is December 17th.

Pete Mjos asked whether municipal funding was up to the tax cap? Elvi explained that it is about \$3 million below the tax cap.

Helen Nienhueser asked why there is low funding for schools? Assembly member Dick Traini explained that the Assembly is precluded from giving more than is allocated by the State. He said this is probably due to equalizing throughout Alaska, as between urban and rural districts.

Assembly member Dick Traini addressed the group as follows.

The taxi ordinance passed with 17 amendments, as Elvi had explained, which included protections for the handicapped.

Assembly member Chris Birch wasn’t to change the Municipality of Anchorage election from April to November. The Ethics Board has stated this proposal is unethical, as it would extend the term of Mr. Birch, and is therefore self-serving. Dick and Elvi will move to put the issue to the voters to decide, rather than the Assembly.

The tennis courts issue continues. Assembly member Amy Demboski had proposed a \$4.2 million bond to be matched by State money, to study what is the best thing to do with regard to tennis courts. That didn’t pass.

As for the towing ordinance, discussed in past meetings, the Assembly is still working on it.

Marilyn Pillifant expressed dismay that \$10 million was proposed for tennis courts while schools are in disrepair and other recreational facilities like ice rinks and ski trails are underfunded. She also noted that RCCP mediation, while said to only exist now in two elementary schools, in fact continues in more schools due to teachers' volunteer efforts, without funding. She felt that the schools should get more financial support.

Dick Traini responded that the Assembly can't re-allocate funds; the State Legislature can. Senator Berta Gardner noted that there are a number of groups within the Legislature who oppose increased public school funding for a variety of reasons.

Peter Mjos inquired about SAP, the Municipality finance software, asking if the electronic records are still dysfunctional, even after going 3 times over the budget for it? Elvi noted that it started out at \$9 million and is now over \$27 million of expense. We (undefined, but presumably Elvi and some other Assembly members) wanted \$127 thousand for an independent study. That didn't pass. Unfortunately, this Administration won't discuss problems, which is very bad. Elvi and Dick noted that the Administration tends to be secretive and evasive, requiring a great deal of care when crafting questions.

III. Legislative Reports.

Representative Andy Josephson spoke first, summarizing events he has attended in the last thirty days. He noted that he had focused on resources issues with Representative Harriet Drummond and Senator Berta Gardner. This included a visit to the Point Thompson fields, where 10,000 barrels of production is hoped for – the minimum required pursuant to their lease. They also met with Mr. Thiesen of Northern Dynasty regarding the proposed Pebble Mine.

The legislative team has also been dialoguing with local public schools, including nearby neighborhood schools Rogers Park, Lake Otis, and Tudor Elementary. He noted concern regarding the transient student population, estimated at 25-33%.

Revenue projections he described as dire. SB 21, the reduction in oil tax rates, is especially problematic. When pending it was hoped that this would result in no more than a \$400 million reduction in revenues. Later it appeared that it would result in a \$1 billion reduction in the state treasury. It now appears that \$2.2 billion is the more accurate figure.

Bob Churchill asked whether the dire projections of less oil pumped are coming from the oil industry; whether the industry agrees with these forecasts? Rep. Josephson said that Kuparuk and Prudhoe are running dry, and that these projections are not based on new fields.

Rep. Josephson said he was preparing to return to Juneau. He expects to be more aggressive and more persistent this session. He will propose bills that favor public workers; a resolution regarding national surveillance activities; and address voting and suffrage issues. He is against “tinkering” with Title 14 voting rights.

Peter Mjos asked whether there is any hope to override the \$20 million appropriation for a northern access road into the UMed District? Rep. Josephson said that he favored a legislative override of the Governor’s refusal to extend Medicaid. As for the northern access issue, the expense estimate is now up to \$42 million, per DOWL Engineering, which sum has not yet been appropriated. Senator Gardner and Rep. Josephson concurred that those who favor the project hope to start it, then increased funding will have to be appropriated to finish the job.

Bob Williams asked when will KABATA (Knik Arm Bridge & Toll Authority) die? In the legislature Mia Costello sought to strip it of authority and shift responsibility to AHFC, the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation. This passed in the House but has not yet passed the Senate. Dick Traini noted that KABATA’s ongoing purchases of property (business and residential) takes land off of the Municipal property tax rolls, thereby decreasing Municipal funds.

Helen Nienhueser addressed ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) model legislation, noting that one of its goals is to take charter schools away from local control to the state level. Has this been attempted in Alaska yet?

Peter Mjos inquired about a pending resolution by Alaska to denounce Citizens United, the United States Supreme Court decision that deemed corporations citizens with First Amendment free speech rights, and which further deemed free speech to mean no limitations on political contributions by corporations. Such a resolution was passed by this and other community councils. A resolution by our legislature would serve to promote a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United. Senator Gardner said it probably wouldn’t pass here, as some powerful forces favor the effects of the Citizens United decision.

Representative Harriet Drummond spoke next. She noted that the Mayor had pared down capitol requests for the Municipality. This included money for the Port project, and \$10 million for Loussac Library. Elvi noted that the Mayor previously proposed \$8 million, while the Assembly proposed \$12.5 million, so the Mayor then came up to \$10 million. Rep. Drummond continued to address projects in which funding requests were reduced, including the Spenard Road renovation, the Dempsey Anderson and Ben Boekke ice rinks, \$500,000 for the Sitka Street to Bannister trail connection work, and a new Transit Facility. Concurring with Rep. Josephson, she said money is narrowing.

Senator Berta Gardner spoke to the issue of disaggregating scores at Rogers Park Elementary School, data that this community council seeks. She said that Superintendent Ed Graff is unresponsive, and that Tam Agosti-Gisler, the current President of the Anchorage School Board, tends to agree with him. They say that they do not collect data

that way, and do not want to incur the cost of disaggregating the data in the manner sought. Therefore, Berta feels that the request for such information is at a dead end.

Turning to Alaska's narrowing economic straits, and noting that declining oil revenues mean reduced government funding, she said that she believes the State's savings will be raided over time, and that the permanent fund will be raided over time, and that the need for taxation will increase accordingly.

Regarding the issue of northern access to the UMed District, it was noted that Chancellor Case at the University of Alaska seeks to develop university land with an access road. But it is Berta's perception is that the contemplated roadway is not about university needs, but about moving cars across town. For its part, Alaska Pacific University just wanted a second route through campus, or dual access, which would seem to be served by the projected extension forming a loop from University Lake near the dog park.

On education, Senator Donleavy is expected to move for vouchers this session. She doesn't think he has enough support.

Oil and gas continues to be the big issue economically. On January 7 there will be a constituent meeting at which Larry Persilly, expert on Alaska oil and gas issues, and Federal Coordinator for Alaska Natural Gas Transportation Projects, will speak and address questions. This is a great opportunity to become better informed.

Helen Nienhueser expressed agreement with Berta that the contemplated northern access route is simply to move cars across town, but noting that DOWL said that was not the motive for the project. Berta said that the Environmental Impact Statement "no action" option was arguably not given adequate consideration.

Bob Churchill asked for Berta's thoughts about the recent criticism of policing and justice in Bush native communities. Does this raise the possibility that the Venetie decision will be overruled, resurrecting Indian Country in Alaska?

Peter Mjos noted that Anchorage air freight traffic has been dropping for about 12 years now, yet some are pressing for a new runway. Why?

IV. October and November Minutes Approved.

At this juncture President Janet Bidwell asked for all present to take a few minutes to review the October 2013 Minutes. Elvi Gray-Jackson moved to approve them. Bob Churchill seconded the motion. The question was put to a vote: 14 yea, 0 nay, 2 abstentions recorded.

Turning to the November 2013 Minutes, Dave Evans moved to approve. Cheryl Forrest seconded. There were 14 yeas, 0 nays, and five abstentions recorded.

V. Presentations.

A. The Northern Access (to UMed) Issue. Janet Bidwell attended of the Institute of Traffic Engineers (ITE) luncheon last week to learn more about the status of the Northern Access project. The presentation was on the Northern Access Project and was made by Steward Osgood, President of DOWL. The orange route is apparently preferred. The projected cost is now said to be \$42 million. \$14 million is required to buy the right of way from UAA. When asked whether some of the money might be dedicated to trail improvements and the like so as to mitigate some adverse impacts of the road, it was explained that this is the projection after DOWL was instructed to strip away wants and proceed only with needs. It will reportedly necessitate excavating an estimated 20 feet of organic material (peat) to get to a solid foundation. Janet asked about the impact to Bragaw Street if the road goes thru. Reportedly, the answer was there would be minimal impact to Bragaw Street.

Helen Nienhueser questioned whether this involves disturbance of wetlands. Dave Evans noted that in October it was said that the required wetlands designations are almost done, so this should be public information now. Jim Wright recalled that long ago the project representatives said that their wetlands designations are not the same as the Municipality of Anchorage's wetlands designations. It was said that the municipality based its designations long ago on flyovers, but "boots on the ground" suggest that more ground is developable. It was then said that the Corps of Engineers would ultimately have to decide.

Dave Evans said that no Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required because no federal funding is involved. Helen Nienhueser disagreed, saying that an EIS is required because wetlands are federally protected.

Peter Mjos expressed opposition to any resolution regarding funding "wants" (as for trail improvements) at this juncture, as our position has consistently been against the road, and such a resolution would tend to dilute that position. Janet Bidwell noted that RPCC has already passed three resolutions against the Northern Access roadway.

Ann Lober commented that in times of hard cuts in funding, it is ironic that big dollars are going to projects that folks don't want.

B. Neighborhood Watch. Janet Bidwell addressed this topic, noting that there are many reports of crime even as there are fewer attendees in the police academy, and fewer police resources available due to spending cuts. In these circumstances, the question arises whether there is a greater need for a Neighborhood Watch program in the community council neighborhoods. Berta Gardner asked whether there is still a requirement of being at home at certain times? Janet responded that she is not aware that such is still a requirement.

Bob Churchill suggested that in an upcoming meeting we have a guest speaker qualified to inform us about the Neighborhood Watch program.

Janet Bidwell noted that we need to report crime or suspected criminal activity to the police in order to get funding or resources in our neighborhoods. The cell phone with a camera is a great tool. If there's a car that doesn't seem to belong, take a picture with the license plate in it.

VI. Remaining Business and Discussions.

Treasurer's Report: Cheryl Forrest reports that we still have a little over \$231 in the RPCC account. Janet Bidwell proposed that we use some funds to get signs to indicate when and where there's a Rogers Park Community Council meeting. Bob Churchill suggested Janet look into the expense. Berta Gardner indicated that she has approval for a one time mailer with community council information to go out to supervoters. She expects it to go out in January. Janet indicated that she would prefer it went out to everyone, not just supervoters.

Bob Churchill moved to approve up to \$75 for community council signage. This was put to a vote, with 17 yeas, 0 nays, and 1 abstention.

FCC Report: Bob Churchill reported that the November FCC meeting was cancelled. He described the recent budget crisis, in which the FCC was 2 months late submitting its budget to the Municipality. Accordingly, the Municipality was not in dialogue with the FCC as required. The FCC has now submitted its budget.

There are now new model bylaws for the community councils, posted on the FCC website. Thanks to Darrell Hess for reviewing all community council bylaws to help develop this model.

Turning to his work on the Equal Rights Commission, Bob explained that the Commission is now working with the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce to make the city friendly to minorities moving to Anchorage.

Turning next to his work on the Commission on Public Testimony, formed in response to the divisive issue over an attempt to significantly limit public testimony before the Assembly, Bob explained that it has prepared its recommendations with the goal of expanding public testimony, and noted that some components may be codified.

Elvi noted that the Assembly approved a \$5,000 increase to the FCC annual budget. The Assembly has a Rules Committee now, and it is expected that the Assembly will put testimony rules into the Municipal Code. Dick Traini concurred.

Annual Elections in April. Janet Bidwell asked the members to consider volunteering as Nominating Chair for the April election of officers and board members. She hopes to have candidates lined up by February for RPCC members to vote on.

Northern Lights Sound Barrier. Rep. Josephson inquired about support for the final phase of the Northern Lights Sound Barrier, noting that the projected cost is \$1.2 million.

The Effort To Obtain Disaggregated Data About Rogers Park Elementary School Student Performance. Peter Mjos asked about the status of this effort, and noted that Marilyn Pillifant and Karen Ruud volunteered to serve on this committee and would like to be informed of developments. Jim Wright apologized for the oversight. The work thus far consisted of preparation of a Freedom of Information Act request, which had not been sent out due to a misunderstanding about whether the board first wished to approve it before sending. It is expected that the request will go out soon, after which we will simply await a proper response.

The meeting was then adjourned at 8:45 p.m.