

Rogers Park Community Council Minutes

7 PM Monday, January 13, 2014

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 7:02 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 addressed the following topics.

The Tennis Court Issue. Two proposals were on the floor – one to accept \$4M and set it aside for planning, design, and site selection for a tennis court/multi-purpose facility. Second proposal was to approve \$7.5M for facility. Both proposals failed and the Mayor laid a new proposal on the table at the end of the meeting to appropriate \$7.2M for the facility and \$3.3M for improvements to the Sullivan Arena. At the December 17th meeting, a compromise was approved – The Tennis Facility received \$4.4M, Sullivan Arena \$3.8M, the Ben Boecke \$1.1M, and the Dempsey Anderson \$520K. This appropriation is in addition to the \$26M already approved for these facilities and other Project 80's facilities. It does not include the Library. We wanted money for the Loussac Library, but it didn't happen.

The Proposed Change in Schedule For Municipal Elections. Mr. Birch intended to bring forward an ordinance to move the April election to November. The Ethics Board reviewed the ordinance and opined that it would be a conflict of interest to all Assembly Members to even vote on such an ordinance based on extension of the current term length and potential receipt of \$20,000 in additional compensation for each. At the December 17th meeting, Mr. Birch introduced an ordinance that moves the election date to November and includes an attempt to avoid the opinion of the Ethics Board. Currently, the effective date of the ordinance has been left blank. The ordinance was reviewed by the Assembly Elections and Ethics Committee attended by the Ethics Board who continue to have concerns. The public hearing will be held at our next meeting, on January 14th.

Assembly members Gray-Jackson, Traini, and Steele introduced an ordinance to require a vote of the people in order to change the election date. Public hearing will be scheduled for January 14th.

The Proposed ASD School Bond. At the December 17th Assembly meeting, the ASD School Bond proposal passed unanimously.

The Public Testimony Limitation Issue. The Rules Committee met and determined which recommendations from the Citizens' Task Force on Public Hearings could be codified and which would be implemented through policy. The Assembly's attorney has drafted a Code change which will be introduced at the January 14th meeting and public hearing will be held at the January 28th meeting after the Rules Committee meets with the Task Force to review the proposed ordinance changes. A copy of the ordinance can be found online at www.muni.org.

The Legislative Program was amended and approved at the December 17th meeting. You can find it online at www.muni.org.

RPCC member Jim Richardson asked what can be accomplished with \$4.4 million for tennis courts? Elvi said that the first step in a proper process would be to review site selection options. Assembly member Dick Traini noted that the controversial original attempt included no site review – its proponents tried to stack it atop the Dempsey-Anderson site to avoid that step.

Assembly member Dick Traini addressed the group as follows.

The Proposed Change in Schedule For Municipal Elections. Mr. Birch is trying to circumvent ethics board requirements. Mr. Traini has tried to delay the Birch proposal, and on a related note is seeking to stop elected officials from using municipality lobbyists to get funds for their campaigns.

Curbing Spice & Synthetic Drugs. An attempt is underway to curb the practice of selling spice and the like in stores. Assembly member and former police officer Paul Honeman has confirmed via informal investigation that these products are still available commercially. The Assembly hearing tomorrow will address this issue and the issue of community councils.

Community Council Changes. A number of changes to the community councils are under consideration. One is the requirement that dues may not be required as a condition to vote. Another is the reduction of age to be a voting member. Further, training for officers and board members will be provided for if the changes are adopted.

Fire Stations. The administration wants to move Fire Station 3 away from Airport Heights. Mr. Traini will inquire how this might impact the Rogers Park Community Council area.

Public Transit. Mr. Traini explained that there the administration is also considering a midtown public transit station. Helen Nienhueser, Senator Berta Gardner and Ann Lober all weighed in, with Helen questioning the wisdom of the move, Berta responding that it makes some sense in light of public needs, and Ann offering her impression that it seems like someone might have a

financial interest in the proposed location. Dave Morgan noted that economic factors suggest that there are savings associated with the move, as it would afford an efficient shuttle to the health clinic and facilities.

III. Legislative Reports.

Senator Berta Gardner applauded the proposed training for community council officers. She reported that the constituent meeting with Larry Persilly went well as it was very informative. The Anchorage Caucus open forum also went well. The next one is on February 21 with four focus areas. She will be in Juneau for the legislative session until March, at which time she will have a constituent meeting, most likely at Stellar School.

Berta noted that she is on the Senate Education Committee, addressing the Common Core State Standards for public school curriculum. Seven states initiated this program and 45 have now adopted them. (Only Alaska, Nebraska, Minnesota, Texas and Virginia have not yet adopted them. See www.corestandards.org.) While Alaska has not formally adopted the common core standards, Alaska's standards are very similar. There is noted hostility in some circles to adopting uniform standards. And, while Alaska has not adopted the common core standards, the Anchorage School District did so in 2012, reports ASD Board President Tam Agosti-Gisler. To get out of No Child Left Behind, adoption of the common core standards has the effect of facilitating the process of showing that the state standards are as rigorous, or more rigorous, than the federal standards.

Helen Nienhueser asked whether the common core standards speak to the issue of evolution? Berta responded that it is neutral in that regard. She noted that some say the common core standards fall short for STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) careers at competitive universities.

Berta said the big issue at the upcoming session will be oil and gas, and that she is intrigued by the Governor's proposals.

She is focused on education funding. She, Rep. Harriet Drummond and Rep. Andy Josephson visited virtually all schools in our districts recently. The status quo of flat funding year after year, without increases keyed to inflation, means decreased funding of schools.

Berta would like to see spice outlawed at the state level. The problem so far has been how to define it, and the legislature is working on that.

Janet Bidwell suggested that students utilize an Alaska State funded online homework help site: tutor.com.

Bob Churchill commented that Larry Persilly's presentation was great; his handouts are available in paper or thumb drive, and he's willing to make himself available to community councils on request. Berta agreed that Larry is an especially good communicator to lay persons unversed in the technical aspects of oil and gas.

Jim Richardson wanted him to get into the economics of Cook Inlet gas. He noted that pricing in that quarter is dysfunctional, and that Alaska is understaffed. While Alberta, Canada has hundreds of experts on staff for its oil and gas development, Alaska's Cook Inlet has a nine-person staff of questionable expertise. Berta responded that the local market is too small to absorb Cook Inlet gas – we need to market via exports if we are to enjoy the benefits of volume production. Mr. Richardson said that exports will render all of the gas gone in ten years – the amount of production over time needs to be addressed, and planned, but it is not being addressed.

Representative Andy Josephson was already gone to Juneau.

Representative Harriet Drummond was also absent, and presumed to also be gone to Juneau.

IV. School Board Report: Tam Agosti-Gisler, President ASD Board.

Tam Agosti-Gisler, President of the Anchorage School Board, spoke to the members about revenue sources and the status of the education funding for Anchorage public schools. The Anchorage School Board cannot tax. It must rely on the state base student allocation, of BSA. There has been no increase in four years. While funding remains flat, the cost of goods and services needed for the schools has gone up. In the past ASD got separate money for maintenance and safety, which helped some, but it was one-time money. What is needed is an increase in the BSA.

Capital Projects funding also helps, but ASD can only devote such funds to their granted purpose (e.g., upgrading computers or fixing a roof). We can't spend it on other things that are needed.

The Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) contributes, but the State has capped how much the MOA can contribute. When MOA contributes, it reduces what the State contributes. The MOA previously paid some discrete expenses, but that practice has been discontinued. For example, MOA provided police at the schools, to prevent crime, delinquency, and truancy; but the MOA has now shifted that expense from the municipality to the ASD.

The ASD is facing budget cuts. The district cut \$18M last year, deleting largely administrative and support functions. Overall 214 positions were cut. We used \$7M in reserves to make up the needed difference in the \$25M shortfall.

We expect to face a \$49M shortfall next year, which we plan to absorb as follows: \$23M this year and \$26M next year, anticipating to cut ~200 positions this year and another ~200 next year. This trend is obviously grim for the future of public education here.

Ms. Agosti-Gisler addressed the Destination 2020 goals, in proficiency, attendance, graduation, efficiency, and safety. These goals are frustrated to the extent that education is underfunded. ASD works with the Council of Great City Schools, comparing notes with like-sized districts and comparable diversity makeup. Health care is perhaps the biggest cost driver, increasing more than other expense items.

One criticism of education funding is the idea that any money that goes into the BSA will just be passed on to increased teacher salaries. Ms. Agosti-Gisler noted that only a small part of the BSA goes to increased teacher salaries.

Peter Mjos asked what attention goes into career and technology education? Tam responded “Lots.” For example, various high schools now have engineering academies, biomed academies and health academies. Peter said he understands that some students can’t attend the King Career Center due to academic requirements. Tam responded that he means curricular demands outside the career center, to get core requirements covered in order to graduate. We are trying to approve career courses to meet some of the core requirements, so as to mitigate this concern.

One member noted that there are no academies at East High School as yet.

David Morgan noted that we spend \$14K+, or ~\$16K, per year per student in Anchorage, which is about 2 times what most other states spend; salaries have remained fairly level, but benefits, primarily health care, have increased; homework is estimated to be the 4th highest per student. He asked that these Minutes include economist Mark Foster’s presentation handout entitled “Anchorage School District Cost Drivers & Solutions In the Search for High Value Benefits to Sustain A Competitive Economy”, dated October 9, 2013. That material is attached along with Tam’s handout entitled “10 important things the Anchorage School Board wants you to know about the budget.”

Mr. Morgan said that a 32% tax on health care is on the horizon unless we apply for a waiver. Tam responded that she doesn’t know yet what impact that might have; it is a concern faced by all districts and not just schools. It was noted that ASD has a very high number of students with special needs, including factors involving language, meals, and disabilities. David noted that nutrition supplies are federally funded.

V. Review & Approval of Meeting Minutes: December 9, 2013.

The December 2013 Minutes were reviewed, Bob Churchill moving to adopt them and Gayle Nienhueser seconding the motion. Dave Evans proposed that there be a minor change at page 6, 3rd paragraph down (“Dave Evans said that ...” should be “Dave Evans said he had heard that ...”). Subject to that change, the Minutes were approved with 17 yeas.

VI. Presentations, Discussion & Updates.

A. The Chester Creek Improvement Project. Maeve Nevins, ASLA Park Planner.

The Chester Creek trail began in the 1950s, when Chester Creek was identified as a greenbelt including the trail. Lands were then acquired. In the 1980s and 1990s the trail was developed into a multi-use 8 foot wide trail, with occasional shoulders, the width occasionally constricted to account for wetlands and waterways. Lighting was provided.

We are now in a two year project to improve the Chester Creek trail. We have \$250K from the State for survey and design. It will further be funded via a \$1.6M MOA bond for construction and improvements. We estimate that \$3.25M is needed to complete the whole job, about twice

what is now available. We hope for another \$1.5M to get the job done. Today we ask for your feedback regarding priorities for funding – i.e., what repairs are most needed.

We've surveyed from Westchester Lagoon to Russian Jacks Spring Park. We'd like to improve signage, install view sheds and improve trail lighting. We expect to utilize Youth Employment in Parks (YEP) rather than contractors to the extent possible.

Tree roots are hazards, with cottonwoods being particularly difficult to deal with. We can cut the trees, but the roots still thrive. There are also bulges where utilities cross under the trail – apparently the heat causes bulges. There are cracks in the pavement, potholes and sinkholes. Bridge transitions typically involve heaves (bumps) or holes (dips). We won't rip out the bridges, but we'll clean up the heaves, dips, etc. Drainage is not just a Parks & Recreation issue, so any such problems will have to be coordinated with the Department of Public Works for appropriate solutions.

We've rated trails by frequency of hazards per section. We encourage RPCC members' input, asking that you all take our survey to identify hazards and priorities. It can be done via handout or on our website, and is due January 15th. All members are invited to get on the project's e-mail contacts list.

Helen Nienhueser expressed concern that they not dump excavation materials and the like so as to block the ski trails. Marilyn Houser noted that culvert tunnels for pedestrians and bike riders need improved sight distances. Jim Richardson suggested appropriate signage regarding bears in the neighborhood of Westchester Lagoon. Dave Evans questioned the priority of spurs versus the main trail. Maeve noted that the main trail is the top priority. At this point, the group took a break to identify suggested priorities.

BREAK (10 minutes)

B. A Resolution Of The Rogers Park Community Council (RPCC) Requesting An Independent Study Of The Traffic Impact And A Financial Cost Analysis On Bragaw Street And The Bragaw And Northern Lights Intersection That Would Occur If A Northern Access Road Into The U-Med District Is Developed. Presented by Peter Mjos.

Peter Mjos presented a proposed resolution pertaining to the UMED North Access issue. He noted that we have, in the past, adopted three resolutions opposing UMed North Access. All contiguous community councils opposed it. But it is private property owned by the universities. UMed is expanding rapidly with increased medical and educational activity. The UMed study is ongoing, as is the UAA study. We don't know the main drivers for this extension. Certain intersections were identified a few years ago which had stoplight congestion at peak hours. There have been changes since then. Martin Luther King Blvd. was expected to mitigate the problem. But in the last minutes of the last legislative session, Mayor Sullivan and legislator Bill Stoltze of Eagle River cut a deal to get \$20M to fund this project over the objections of the area community councils. The route is valued as a local greenbelt and recreational area.

The Sports Complex was originally to be at the intersection of Northern Lights with the then-proposed Bragaw extension. We have University of Alaska Chancellor Fran Ulmer to thank for

the move to its present location. But the Bragaw extension is nevertheless still in the works. Its proponents refuse to consider a no-road option. The only consideration has been to mitigating the adverse impacts. The projected budget is now \$42M without funds to mitigate adverse impacts. There was a meeting held by area legislators to consider this. The project participants declined to attend.

Following this introduction, Peter read his proposed resolution, followed by questions and comments. Tom Obermeier asked where funding will come from? And who should this go to in order to influence decision-making? Pete said he is open to suggestions on the latter score. Jim Richardson said the University's needs don't support a highway through the university lands. Who is driving this? Berta Gardner responded that APU is eager because it wants development for funding purposes and is concerned about fire protection access. Janet Bidwell described it as a proposed thoroughfare not apparently designed to serve university needs at all. Berta suggested that Janet do a Compass Piece on the subject. David Morgan described it as "Manifest Destiny", saying nothing will stop it.

Jim Richardson moved to adopt the resolution. Iris Matthews seconded the motion. The handout version of the resolution varied somewhat from the resolution as presented. In these circumstances, Bob Churchill asked whether in these circumstances a vote should be deferred to the next meeting. Helen Nienhueser sought clarification and possible changes. Peter explained that a paragraph was missing from his first draft, which he had intended to include in the current draft but had overlooked. It was agreed that this paragraph should be included. He will provide the board with a corrected copy. The membership in attendance expressed a collective desire to vote now, at which point it was put to a vote, with 21 yeas, 0 nays and 0 abstentions reported.

C. Start Neighborhood Watch Groups?

John Rogers addressed the group with an announcement of crime in his neighborhood (he lives within one block of Rogers Park Elementary School). A thief struck his truck, and his neighbor's vehicle. He suggested folks be vigilant and guarded in their possessions. The members were reminded that they may wish to consider forming or joining Neighborhood Watch organizations on a "line of sight" basis or otherwise.

D. RPCC Annual Meeting Scheduled for April.

RPCC President Janet Bidwell reminded members that elections will occur at the April meeting, and that the board is seeking a Nominating Committee Chairperson for the election of officers. Election of a Nominating Committee Chair will be on the February agenda. Those interested should not plan to run for office as that would be a conflict of interest. No volunteers came forth at this time.

Between now and the April meeting a committee will be looking at the RPCC bylaws to see that they conform to Municipal Statute and the new model bylaws for community councils. Bob Churchill and Jim Wright are looking into that.

E. RPCC Signs.

The members having previously pre-approved expense of \$75 for RPCC signs, President Janet Bidwell reported that \$125 is needed for signs to advertise the time and place of community council meetings. Accordingly, we've requested funding for RPCC signage from the FCC. Janet invited any artists or designers or talented person to submit a design for the sign(s) at the February RPCC meeting.

F. School Report Card Update. Presenter Roger Elconin.

Given the lateness of the hour, the members attending, with Mr. Elconin concurring, agreed that the issue of Rogers Park Elementary School performance data and status would be deferred to a later meeting.

VII. Treasurer's Report: Cheryl Forrest reports that we have ~\$231.

VIII. FCC Report: Bob Churchill said the new FCC website will be up soon. He is working on a committee to obtain an FCC grant, like a performance grant, and a committee on community council officer training. It is expected that they'll have about 60 participants per training session to cover "community council 101" basics.

Turning to his involvement with the Committee on Public Testimony (see Elvi's report, above), one proposal is that each community council gets five minutes to present positions at Assembly meetings, with individuals getting three minutes.

Bob is also working on the FCC's Archives Committee, which is expected to produce a proposed model contract for archiving community council records at UAA, along with guidelines for organization of materials.

IX. Public Comments and Announcements: Janet Bidwell reminded members that a University District public hearing will be January 16, 2014, 5:30-7 p.m., at the Community Development Training Room on 4700 Elmore Road.

A gentleman named Travis residing on Jarvis Street introduced himself to the council. He is new to the neighborhood and noted that a neighborhood hill is icy. Peter Mjos welcomed him to the council and explained that this concern is already on our capital improvements survey so we are aware of the concern and seeking a cure.

Janet Bidwell announced that the next Rogers Park Community Council meeting will be on February 10, 2014 at 7 p.m.

The meeting was then adjourned.