

Rogers Park Community Council Minutes

7 PM Monday, February 10, 2014

Rogers Park Elementary School Library

Board Members Attending:

Janet Bidwell, President (present at outset only)¹

Iris Matthews, Vice President

Jim Wright, Secretary

Cheryl Forrest, Treasurer

Bob Churchill, FCC representative

I. Welcome.

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. Members were asked to sign in so that the existence of a quorum could be established. It was announced that there will be no March meeting due to spring vacation at the school, so that the next meeting will be in April. April is the designated month for the annual election of community council officers. Volunteers for a Nominating Committee and Chair are still being sought, and the Minutes for the January 2014 meeting will be addressed at the next meeting, in April.

II. Assembly Reports.

Assembly member Elvi Gray-Jackson addressed the following topics.

- At the January 14th meeting, the Assembly approved the Title 28, Elections Code rewrite after several amendments based on input from the public. A copy can be found on line at www.muni.org.
- On Tuesday, January 28th the Assembly approved, with a vote of six to five, holding the referendum on AO 37 with the State election in November 2014. The ordinance also states that if an agreement on running the election can't be reached with the State and the Municipal Clerk by July 7th, the election will be held at the regular election on April 7, 2015. A copy of the ordinance can be found on line at www.muni.org.
- Assembly members Gray-Jackson, Traini, and Steele introduced an ordinance to require a vote of the people in order to change the election date. The Public hearing was held on January 14th and the ordinance was postponed indefinitely due to clear lack of support.

¹ Ms. Bidwell had to leave the meeting due to a child's illness. Ms. Matthews presided after the introduction.

- Mr. Traini, Mr. Steele, and Chair Hall introduced an ordinance that would require two-thirds majority vote to change the date of regular municipal elections. The Public Hearing was opened at the January 28th meeting and continued to the March 25th meeting.
- Mr. Birch, Mr. Starr, and Ms. Demboski introduced an ordinance to move the April election to November, effective in 2017. The Public hearing will be held at the February 25th meeting.
- 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 that was introduced at the January 14th meeting and the public hearing was opened at the January 28th meeting and continued to the meeting of February 11th. There is a substitute version that was reviewed by Rules Committee and the Task Force on Thursday, February 6th. The public hearing will be continued at the February 11th meeting.
- Mr. Traini, Gray-Jackson, and Honeman introduced an ordinance *to prohibit acceptance of lobbyist fundraising when the lobbyists are registered for municipal work and the candidates are Municipal elected officials or employees.* The ordinance will be heard by the Ethics and Elections Committee prior to the Public Hearing.
- Ms. Demboski introduced an ordinance *to allow for disclosure and appropriate adjustment of travel reimbursement for municipal employees and elected officials engaging in candidate fundraising while on paid travel status for the Municipality.* The ordinance will be heard by the Ethics and Elections Committee prior to the Public Hearing.
- Several bond proposition ordinances were approved at the January 28th Assembly meeting.
 - Public Safety Facilities and Police Service Area Capital Improvements - \$650,000
 - Anchorage Fire Service Area Capital Improvements - \$1,950,000
 - Park and Trail Improvements - \$2,550,000
 - Areawide Facility Improvements - \$5,550,000
 - Safety and Public Transportation - \$1,793,000
 - Roads, Storm Drainage, and Related Capital Improvements - \$20,200,000

The next Assembly meeting is February 11th.

Bob Churchill asked, regarding the vote on AO 37 (the labor ordinance), what the cost of a special election would be? Assembly members Elvi and Dick (Traini) estimated that expense as \$345,000 to \$470,000.

Elvi and Dick noted that they had proposed a resolution to increase the base student allocation for our public schools. This is a matter for the state legislature, so the resolution is an effort to persuade the legislature.

Bob Churchill expressed thanks to Elvi and Dick for coordinating efforts with the Citizens' Task Force on Public Hearings. Bob and Arliss Sturgulewski were members of that Task Force. Arliss inquired whether there is resistance to implementing the recommendations, to which Elvi responded that none is apparent, but that some members are sometimes hard to read. Dick noted that if there are problems implementing them, they will renew the issue with the new Assembly after the upcoming elections in April.

Assembly member Dick Traini further supplemented Elvi's information, as follows.

- Changes in the community council system have been enacted. For example, voting members can now be as young as 16 years of age, and there can be no requirement to pay dues as a condition to vote. Training for officers and board members will be provided, as well.

Arliss Sturgulewski thanked Dick and Elvi for coming to the community council meetings and working so hard in our members' best interests.

III. Legislative Reports.

There were no legislative reports, as the legislative session is beginning and our legislators are either in transit or already in Juneau.

IV. Presentations.

A. Pedestrian Overpass Design. Brooke Blessing of MOA, Project Management and Engineering addressed the topic of pedestrian overpasses: 1) across Northern Lights Blvd. to Rogers Park Elementary School; and 2) across Lake Otis Blvd. to Lake Otis Elementary School. There is presently a \$100,000 fund for the design only of new or improved overpasses at these two locations. It was a high priority of the community council in past CIP surveys. There will be an open house to provide input on February 24, from 6:30-8 p.m. at the Rogers Park Elementary School Library.

Peter Mjos asked whether the overpasses will be reconfigured for ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance? Brooke indicated that this was a goal, but not the only goal, of the redesign. She referenced the overpass on the east end of the intersection of Tudor and Elmore Road, as an example of what might be feasible to replace the steps currently used in favor of a ramp. She noted that the ADA requires a grade of 5% or less, which may or may not be do-able. The hope is that ramps can be built that are usable for a bike, even if the grade is a bit more than 5%. She believes that is the case at Tudor and Elmore.

Peter Mjos also asked who is responsible to maintain access, as by snow clearing and the like? Brooke explained that the Alaska Department of Transportation (DOT) is responsible, although the Municipality typically maintains subject to DOT concurrence.

Arliss Sturgulewski asked for clarification as to the funding, and Elvi Gray-Jackson recalled that the MOA funding request to the state was \$150,000 for each overpass. Elvi said she'd research that and get back to the group.

Iris Matthews noted that she used the Northern Lights overpass every day, as she has a child in school. She observed garbage and various things left behind at or around the overpass.

One member noted that the steps on the Lake Otis overpass use grates, which fill with snow and ice, resulting in a dangerous condition.

Brooke invited all members to call or e-mail her with suggestions or thoughts. Her contact information is tel: 343-8387; email: BlessingBR@ci.anchorage.ak.us.

Past legislator Arliss Sturgulewski noted that one eye should be cocked to the timetable, as we'd need to hurry to get a request to fund reconstruction this year. Brooke responded that it is already too late this year.

B. The Knik Arm Crossing. Shannon McCarthy of KABATA provided a project update. The projected bridge is 1.74 miles long with 18 miles of road built out to/from it. It will take an estimated 4.5 million cubic yards of gravel. It is expected to be, among other things, a military deployment route.

The project alignment runs from the Point McKenzie Road, which is now paved running to the port on that side, to a route through Government Hill on the Anchorage side.

Why now? Shannon referenced the 2009 Anchorage Individual Land Assessment by AEDC and MOA, and the 2012 Housing Market Analysis done by MOA, which together indicate that Anchorage is out of individual land and out of room for residential growth.

Peter Mjos disagreed with that assessment of residential housing, noting that there was sparse densification thus far – i.e., relatively little growth into modes of clustered housing. Shannon responded that people want single family homes rather than condominiums and the like, so that many are commuting into Anchorage from the Mat-Su Valley.

Dave Morgan noted that the mayor of Wasilla says there is 8-9% growth for permitting of single family homes there. He asked what is the figure here? Shannon responded that she did not know that figure, but most Alaskans want land around their own house.

Jim Wright asked for copies of the two reports referenced by the presenter. He noted that he looks forward to her addressing the cost of the bridge and whether it pencils in, as he has repeatedly heard that it does not.

Shannon said that two benefits of the bridge would be: 1) to serve people who are seeking single family homes in the Mat-Su Borough; and 2) freight haulers could bypass downtown when traveling south/north. There was no discussion of whether and to what extent freight haulers are already able to bypass downtown.

Peter Mjos asked whether any studies were done of what infrastructure would be needed on each side of the projected bridge.

Shannon summarized the history of the project, covering a few hurdles. The perceived threat to beluga whales was researched, and it was found that Cook Inlet beluga whales are not in jeopardy from the projected bridge construction. Permit applications is another step required, as is right of way (ROW) acquisitions. Wetlands review is now in progress before the Corps of Engineers. The DEC reviewed the plans, for impact on water quality, in 2012. Working through these steps, KABATA contemplates a 2-lane bridge with a 4-lane foundation allowing for growth. It will take four years to construct at an estimated cost of \$750,000. The money is expected to come, as follows: \$300 million in federal funds, with the remainder (~2/3) financed, in the form of a \$276 million federal loan and \$262 million in bonds. Thus, roughly \$538 million plus interest would have to be repaid. There was no discussion of whether and to what extent that debt could be repaid from projected tolls.

Peter Mjos noted that this project started with the representation that it would be privately funded, but now it is definitely funded by taxpayer dollars. Shannon responded that the state pays for all of its roads. The State still hopes for public-private partnerships, but not on this project.

The next steps are to verify socio-economic data and traffic and revenue forecasts, await passage of legislation allowing the project to proceed to completion, and then move forward with permits and ROW acquisition.

Iris Matthews asked why there is a need for socio-economic data at this late stage? Shannon responded that it is to verify that the bridge can support itself.

Peter Mjos asked why KABATA is proceeding with land acquisition in the face of community council opposition? Dave Morgan responded that this was not condemnation of land, but simple negotiation to purchase land consensually. Shannon agreed, adding that this mode is smoother, involving less expense and delay.

C. Alley Pickup Update. Iris Matthews spoke to this issue. Progress working with the MOA Solid Waste Service (SWS) disposal folks was good, identifying concerns and coordinating with SWS). Other effected community councils also seem pleased. Arliss Sturgulewski thanked those contributing to this effort for their good work.

D. Rogers Park Elementary School Update. At issue is the performance of Rogers Park School when students in the largely separate highly gifted program are

disaggregated from other students at Rogers Park Elementary. Roger Elconin addressed this ongoing concern. Disaggregated data was made available for 2011 by Carol Comeau, the outgoing ASD superintendent. He noted that the highly gifted students, those falling within the 99+ percentile of performance on certain tests, are treated as “special ed” based on the argument that they are disabled if left in a regular classroom. He said that now the highly gifted students comprise ~50% of the school. In the circumstances, he said, it is misleading to the public to put the performance data of these two groups into a single figure, and to make decisions based on such aggregated data.

Mr. Elconin represented that the school principal did not want him to talk to teachers about the issue, but he spoke with Andy Holeman, president of the teachers’ union about it. The number of those tested for the highly gifted standard increased from 55 to 170+ in one year. He wanted to know why. That question was never answered.

Roger recapped the 2010-11 data, displaying enlarged format charts indicating 1) test results; 2) the growing highly gifted population and demographic; and 3) the 2012-13 Terra Nova reporting indicating national rank. The aggregated data from the latter chart shows 73-77% proficiency in key areas. However, he said, the Rogers Park students falling outside of the highly gifted program are in fact among the poorest performers in the Anchorage School District.

Ann Lorber asked whether he had considered the impact of school zone boundaries changing over time? Roger responded that they had not changed much.

Roger emphasized that when he asked questions, he was “unfriended” quickly. There is no meaningful dialogue. He reached out to the PTA but found there was poor parent involvement there. He said the State had adopted the Family Engagement Action Plan, which contains policies at odds with what he is seeing, but he was told by the school administration that it has not been implemented here.

Kate MacClellan is a mother of young children in the Rogers Park school zone, and new to the neighborhood. She stated that she is very concerned about what she is hearing.

Bob Churchill asked Mr. Elconin to articulate what he wants to see happen, and how he believes the community council can help?

Dave Morgan noted that the legislature is seeing declining performance and increasing costs, so the issue is how to change these trends. Bob Churchill responded that Mr. Elconin’s issue is not about money; it is about disclosure.

Peter Mjos noted that there is growing expense to educate, that poverty is a big factor, and the issue of school funding is much more complex than simply cutting funding.

Ann Lorber said she understands Mr. Elconin’s frustration. We need information, but the school district is working with a system of performance numbers. If another school is designated as failing, then the students can switch to here (Rogers Park); and if Rogers

Park is deemed failing, then students can switch to elsewhere. The system itself seems problematic.

Iris Matthews noted that other schools also use the “school within a school” approach, so the issue is larger than Rogers Park Elementary School.

Bob Churchill, with Jim Wright, noted that our Freedom of Information Act request for the sought-after data was denied, based on the argument that the ASD is not required to create data not kept in the ordinary course of its business. While we may feel that position lacks credibility or is otherwise unreasonable, that is where things stand. The Committee (Bob Churchill, Jim Wright, Karen Ruud, Marilyn Pillifant, and Kate MacClellan) are willing to explore other avenues to assist, but we seek an action plan proposal.

V. Treasurer’s Report: Cheryl Forrest noted that we have ~\$231, subject to a bill outstanding that will reduce that figure. Iris Matthews indicated that the board will bring a request for contributions at the next meeting (April).

VI. Federation of Community Councils (FCC) Report: Our delegate to the FCC Bob Churchill summarized some of the Assembly’s changes to the community council system. He said that some boundaries may change regarding some community councils, but that would not occur here. Community council officer training will be offered on Saturday March 1st, and limited to about 60 participants. Bob has looked over the new model bylaws, comparing our existing bylaws to the model. Recommendations for changes in our Rogers Park Community Council bylaws may follow.

At the last FCC meeting Mary Jo Torgerson from Loussac Library sought support for efforts to obtain funds to fix safety issues regarding the stairs leading to the library entrance.

VII. Other Business.

Peter Mjos asked to address the ongoing controversy over the UMed Northern Access projected road issue. He noted that Senator Berta Gardner submitted a bill to rescind the \$20 million appropriation so far made on the project, and that Rep. Harriet Drummond and Rep. Andy Josephson had submitted a bill or bills to simply halt the project. We as a community council passed a resolution calling for an independent study with a complete cost analysis. The UAA Board of Regents is considering the current proposals. There is a UMed Open House on February 18 at East High School in the Commons. We will be told the final decisions then.

There was a meeting Friday and a petition being formulated, emphasizing that the costs of this project are unknown: social costs, impact on wetlands, and other aspects. Peter Mjos, Bob Churchill, and Janet Bidwell are all involved. Peter invited members to keep their eye out for this petition once it is ready for circulation. It will foreseeably call on the legislature to withhold action on the UMed North Access road project pending completion of the proposed studies.

Peter Mjos volunteered to chair the Nominating Committee, and interested persons were invited to contact him.

The meeting was then adjourned.