

**Eklutna Valley Community Council**  
**January 29, 2020**  
**Meeting minutes**

The meeting was chaired by council president Margan Grover and began at 6:37 p.m. The council met at the Eklutna Ranger Station. Twenty council members were present: Skip and Tena Cheely, Margan Grover, Buff and Deb Rix, Randy Bangerter, Tom Bohn, Steve Remme, Bob Reagan, Glen and Mary Keller, Lisa and Rick Sinnott, DeAnne and Michael Sabol, Bob and Cindy McElroy, Dakota Keller, Jacob Tramp, and Jim Riley.

The meeting agenda was approved unanimously with no changes.

The minutes of the October 15 meeting were not available at this meeting (oops), and were not approved at this time. Bob Reagan reported no council funds had been spent since the last meeting; therefore, the council still has \$466.64.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

**Historic minute.** Rick shared some information from the archives of the Anchorage Times relating to Eklutna's role in the founding of Anchorage. In 1915 or 1916 when a committee was looking for a location along the shores of upper Cook Inlet to build a construction camp and port for the Alaska Railroad, Eklutna was at the top of their list. Eklutna almost became Anchorage. Eklutna Valley would have become a much different place to live if the muddy tide flats at the mouth of Ship Creek hadn't looked so promising.

Rick has also found early references to the establishment and activities of the Eklutna Valley Community Council. Eklutna Valley began to organize as a community council in 1977 and was officially recognized by the Anchorage Assembly in 1978. Only 11 families lived in the valley at the time. Tena and Skip Cheely and Jim Riley were members in the early days. The council used to meet at the Cheely's house, but had at least one meeting at the Jack White real estate office in Eagle River (related to getting electricity brought up the valley) and several meetings at the Eagle River library. Our council participated in the first road cleanup in 1978. Tena said they have a photo of the humongous pile of trash they collected.

One of the council's earliest agenda items expressed our community's concerns with Native land claims in the valley. Tena said many of the homesteaders didn't get title to their land until the 1980s. This became a great cause for concern when Eklutna, Inc., the largest landowner in the valley, opposed the creation of the Eklutna Valley Community Council. Eklutna, Inc.'s, argument was that not many families lived in Eklutna Valley and that their corporation had control over most of the private land in the valley, beginning in the 1970s, as a result of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. We've gotten along much better since then.

**Local crime report.** Margan mentioned the incident where the Cousen's gate was substantially damaged by an unknown person or persons in a truck. The RV that had been parked at the bottom of Eklutna Lake Road for weeks has been towed. Someone mentioned the abandoned camper top on the power line right-of-way just west of Cheely's parking lot. Rick reported that incident to the APD. There was some discussion of salvaging it. Otherwise, The Bob's (McElroy and Reagan) will devise a way to remove it during spring road cleanup.

**Chugiak-Eagle River Advisory Board report.** Bob Reagan told us there was no new activity. He was surprised that the road issue (to be discussed under new business) hadn't already been discussed by the advisory board.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**EagExit.** Margan reported that our community council had received a certified letter from EagExit on January 21. Their letter demanded that we publicly rescind parts or all of the resolution (2019-02) that was passed at our October 15 meeting and "correct the public record." Margan called Mark Butler with the Federation of Community Councils and Darrell Hess, the municipal ombudsman, to discuss the letter and our options. Both agreed that we had followed established, legal protocols and that there was no reason to submit to EagExit's request.

Council officers met on January 25 to discuss EagExit's demands and our response. We decided to draft a response to EagExit's major points and forward it with EagExit's letter to all community council members. In our response, we stated that we saw no good reason to accede to EagExit's demand to publicly rescind our resolution.

Margan had invited EagExit to make a presentation at our January meeting. After asking for an opportunity to talk to us in October, and several months of exchanging emails and phone calls regarding our invitation, EagExit board members decided not to attend our meeting two days before we met. They gave no reason.

A spirited discussion ensued. Mary Keller asked Rick to explain why he decided to introduce the resolution at our October 15 meeting. He said he'd read articles about EagExit in the Anchorage Daily News last year and thought that much of their information seemed sketchy and inaccurate. He and several other members had read all the information provided on EagExit's website (eaglexit.com), which included a "resolution" and a "white paper." Both seemed to assume that the majority of the residents from JBER to Eklutna were in favor of detaching from the municipality and that EagExit represented them. Rick said a resolution was supposed to be an expression of the will of the members of an assembly. EagExit's "resolution" appeared to be an expression of a self-appointed board of directors that officially represented no one but themselves.

Rick brought a draft resolution to the October meeting, resolving that EVCC would disassociate ourselves from the EagExit movement unless an independent analysis finds that detaching from the municipality would reduce property taxes in Eklutna Valley without a) necessitating the adoption of sales or other new local taxes in Chugiak and Eagle River or b) foregoing necessary and beneficial government and educational services. The resolution passed with near-unanimous approval (one vote opposed).

Jim Riley and Dakota Keller told the council that they had recently discussed our resolution with EagExit board members. They were told that the economic study EagExit has commissioned will be completed in mid-February and that EagExit would make the study's findings available to the public. Margan said EagExit had told her they would send our council a copy.

Upon being asked what we should do if one of the officers was contacted by the media or other community councils, we decided that we would respond by sending them a copy of EagExit's letter. We would not voluntarily share our written opinion of their letter because that was intended to be for council discussion only.

No motion was made in favor of or opposed to the officers' recommendation to not submit to EagleExit's demands. However, after over 20 minutes of discussion, a motion was made and seconded to lay the issue on the table. The intent was to wait until the economic study was released, at which time our conversation would be better informed. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion. The issue was not taken from the table during the remainder of the meeting.

**Birchwood Community Council's request for support asking the Assembly to reconsider a road-related ordinance.** Birchwood Community Council recently passed a resolution asking the Assembly to reconsider A0 2019-136, an ordinance passed last November that established a new category of roads to be constructed based solely on areawide elections. Birchwood CC believed that the ordinance had been passed without adequate public process, including contacting all affected community councils and road service areas.

Bob Reagan reported on a conversation he had with Debbie Ossiander, Birchwood CC's chair, regarding this issue. Before the new ordinance, local road service areas could be created, altered, or abolished only with the approval of a majority of those voting on the question within the area affected. Not only did the Assembly fail to notify the public, they failed to put the new ordinance to a vote in each road service area.

Rick had listened to a 40-minute debate on the issue recorded during an Assembly work session on January 24 and added some background information. The new category is "life/safety access roads." These roads have been a hot issue on the Hillside, where small road service areas have not been able to cooperate on which roads are a priority for accessing or evacuating areas threatened by wildfires or other disasters. Thus, the municipality decided to exercise its power to prioritize and bond life/safety access roads areawide, in the same sense that the municipality has combined many local police service areas into an areawide power. According to muni planners, the two parts of the municipality where life/safety access roads are most needed are Hillside and Chugiak-Eagle River.

The municipality believes that it is not overstepping the authority of local road service areas to prioritize their local road needs (and tax mill rates) by exercising its areawide authority for life/safety access roads. The muni claims that because life/safety access roads will be decided by a citywide vote and paid for by a citywide bond that, in effect, the rest of the city will subsidize these roads on the Hillside and Chugiak-Eagle River. According to city planners, we would pay less for a life/safety access road built and maintained in Chugiak-Eagle River because the rest of the city would help pay back the bond.

The idea is not without merit. However, the process was flawed, and life/safety access roads are not defined in the municipal charter. Any road might be considered a "life/safety access road." In Birchwood Community Council's opinion, the Assembly needs to define the new road category and fully vet the idea of areawide control and bonding with community councils and other road-related entities. There is a need to act quickly on this issue because the Assembly wants to include an areawide vote on this issue during the April election and ballots need to be printed before that.

Bob Reagan (with a little help from Rick) drafted a resolution to support the concerns raised by Birchwood CC. Jim moved to approve our Resolution 2020-01. Tena seconded. The draft resolution was read aloud. No amendments were proposed and the motion to adopt the resolution was approved unanimously.

**Update on restoration of Eklutna River.** Rick reminded members he was on the Anchorage Watershed and Natural Resource Advisory Commission. Last October the advisory commission passed a resolution (WNRC Case No. 2019-03), asking the Assembly to “recognize and support re-establishing adequate in-stream flows and fish passage to restore Eklutna River to a healthy system that supports wild salmon populations.” The resolution asked that Municipal Light and Power, Chugach Electric, and Matanuska Electric Association make a definitive commitment to restoring water flow in the river and work collaboratively with the Native Village of Eklutna, Eklutna, Inc., and state and federal resource agencies to “implement an experimental program of flushing flows from the lake into the Eklutna River to better facilitate studies and mitigation planning and to allow for recovery of salmon habitat.” Finally, the resolution asked that all parties recognize and protect the use of Eklutna Lake in perpetuity as a source of the municipal water supply. The full resolution is on the advisory commission’s website (<https://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/SiteAssets/Pages/WNRCReso-MinutesArchive/WNRC%20Reso%202019-03%20Eklutna%20River%20Restoration.pdf>).

Our community council passed a resolution in 2016 in favor of restoring Eklutna River. EVCC Resolution 2016-01 asked the mayor, Municipal Light and Power, Chugach Electric Association, and Matanuska Electric Association to release enough water into Eklutna River to restore and sustain a viable population of salmon. The deadline for the power producers is fast approaching and it is disconcerting that four years have gone by since our resolution and there appears to have been little progress in planning and no funding provided for the necessary studies.

The “flushing flows” mentioned in the advisory commission’s resolution refer to an experimental procedure in which a relatively large volume of water is released from the dam for a short period and tracked downstream to better understand how much water will be needed to create suitable salmon habitat and other goals of the river’s restoration. The riverbed and riparian areas have changed considerably in the 90 years since the original dams were built. Assessing the impacts of flushing flows is one of the biggest unanswered questions needed to develop a restoration plan for the river.

**Additional issues raised during the meeting.** Skip raised an issue with trail signs. He asked Ranger Keith to erect a sign for the Mt. POW/MIA trail, between Mile 4 and 5 on the Eklutna Lake Road, because the trail is hard to find (there is no parking within about half a mile on either side). The ranger told him he couldn’t sign that trail because it is an unofficial trail. Someone suggested asking Kirk Alkire, the person who named Gold Star Peak, helped establish the veteran’s memorial there, and leads most of the visitors up and down the trail to erect a sign. Council members seemed to favor the idea of a sign and several volunteered to pursue the issue. Tom Bohn said he would ask Steve Cleary, executive director of Alaska Trails, a nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance on trails.

Dakota told us he had talked to McKenna, the contractors who plow and sand Eklutna Lake Road between the frontage road and the Ernie Turner Center located at about Mile 2. He said if our community council asks the municipality the contractors could plow and sand the remainder of Eklutna Lake Road as well. Skip made a motion that Margan should write the letter. Rick seconded with the provision that we wouldn’t have to pay extra for it. Skip accepted the friendly amendment. The motion was unanimously approved. Margan said she would coordinate with Dakota to get names and addresses.

The meeting adjourned at about 8:07 p.m.