

Eklutna Valley Community Council
October 27, 2011
Meeting minutes

The meeting was presided over by council president Steve Remme and began at 6:38 p.m. The council met at the Remme's house. Fourteen council members attended: Steve and Cheryl Remme, Tena and Heather Cheely, James Riley, Dan Thompson, Randy Bangerter, Buff Rix, Bob Reagan, Debbie and Steve Thon, Mary Keller, and Lisa and Rick Sinnott. Paula Caywood, representing Wallace Brothers Mountain Subdivision, also attended.

The minutes of the October 27, 2010, were approved with no changes. Cheryl reported \$466.64 in the council's piggy bank.

Wallace Brothers Mountain Subdivision. Owners of the property, about half of a section at the top of Skyline Drive in Eagle River, have agreed to try to sell the land to the municipality so that it can be developed as an access point to Chugach State Park. They are asking \$6.45 million, which they believe is fair market value based on nearby Eklutna Inc. property traded to the municipality last year. If the deal does not materialize, the owners are likely to start selling parcels for homes.

Sen. Fred Dyson has agreed to submit a Capital Improvement Project request for most of the purchase amount. The funding would come from existing oil and gas revenues and not increase our taxes. Paula said other Eagle River/Chugiak senators, representatives, and assembly members have voiced support. This area is already in high demand by hikers, berrypickers, and sightseers, but parking is extremely limited and existing public property along the road is too steep to be developed into a larger parking area.

In negotiations with the municipality, the Parks and Recreation department has told the owners that it doesn't have money in its budget for managing and maintaining the area; however, if it received the CIP funds, it would purchase the land and allow it to be managed by Chugach State Park. Chugach State Park has not agreed to do so yet. Rick Sinnott, who's a member of the Chugach State Park advisory committee, said they have discussed acquisition of the property and have seen it ranked highly compared to other potential new park trailheads. There is no place in Eagle River and Chugiak with similar access to alpine parkland, so there is a good possibility that a trailhead developed on the property would rival Glen Alps in popularity. Chugach State Park managers are reluctant, if not unwilling, to ask for a CIP to acquire more land within the park; however, they might be willing to manage the property for the obvious benefits.

Paula distributed a draft copy of a letter from the Chugiak Community Council that seemed to favor the idea, as long as the municipality and Chugach State Park worked out any kinks before hand and engaged the public in further debate on the issue. She also had a draft resolution from the Eagle River Community Council supporting the CIP contingent on a memorandum of understanding between the municipality and Chugach State Park. After some discussion, it was decided that either resolution would have the same result, given that the communities and potential user groups would have ample opportunity to weigh in on the CIP during the upcoming legislative session.

A motion was made and seconded for our community council to support the concept and to send the municipality a resolution similar to that approved by the Eagle River Community Council. The motion passed with 12 yeas and 2 nays.

[Update: The municipality has asked for \$6 million to purchase the Wallace property in the FY 2012 list of desired capital projects.]

Title 21 update. Debbie gave a brief update on the progress of the proposed Title 21 land use changes. The Chugiak/Eagle River portion is separate from the Anchorage Bowl regulations. The draft plan will go to the Planning Commission on December 12, to Planning and Zoning in January, and to the Assembly in February. The Chugiak/Eagle River portion of Title 21 is available at <http://www.aswcd.org/consortium.html>. Some concern was raised in previous meetings about new animal care provisions. Debbie said the state is writing animal care regulations, available at <http://www.dec.alaska.gov/eh/vet/AnimalCareWorkshop.html?mid=50>.

Chugach State Park Access Plan. The park is revising its access plan. The period for public comments recently ended. This has been a long process, and the community council submitted comments on the plan over a year ago. One of the big concerns raised at our October 2010 was in response to several references to taxes. At this point, our understanding is that, because this is a state park, municipal property taxes will not be used (or increased) to pay for Chugach State Park amenities and management.

The planning staff will address all written comments in detail, and council members will be told when the responses are available online. One difficulty with the planning process is that the state is developing separate plans for access, trails, and general park management concepts. Presumably, these will be combined into a final draft and the public will get at least one more opportunity to review it.

Grading the Eklutna Lake Trail. The Eklutna Lake Trail is increasingly eroded on hills and potholed on flat sections. Skip Cheely graded the trail the last time it was done. He recently asked Ranger Keith Wilson if the park would allow him to grade the trail to the end of the lake. Skip would donate his time and attempt to find a corporate sponsor to pay for the grader rental and gas. Tena said Skip was told that the park superintendant, Tom Harrison, was thinking about the offer. Rick volunteered to talk to Tom Harrison about it and vouch for Skip's expertise.

New business. Mary Keller asked if the community council wanted to write to someone requesting that the Thunderbird off-ramp be rerouted slightly. She contended and others agreed it was dangerous coming off the Glenn Highway at highway speeds and going slightly downhill, then slowing down soon enough to make the right-hand turn onto the Old Glenn Highway. Several members pointed out that the off-ramp used to bend more gradually into the Old Glenn, but was changed presumably because vehicles were driving too fast when they came to the Thunderbird Heights access road. Mary and anyone else with concerns was encouraged to contact the Alaska Department of Public Transportation or one of our local legislators. Steve Thon suggested we might want to invite someone from DOT to our next meeting to discuss the issue.

Rick and Lisa have volunteered to plant wild flowers in the two small flower beds next to the Eklutna Lake park entrance station. In the past few years the flower beds have been overrun by invasive species like white sweetclover. This creates a poor impression when visitors enter the park, if they know anything about invasive species. The community council was invited to help next spring. The park might allow us to put a small sign in the flower bed claiming credit for the community council.

An election was held for new officers. Rick Sinnott was selected as president, Debbie Thon was re-elected vice president, and Lisa Sinnott as secretary/treasurer. Steve Thon was re-elected as sergeant at arms.

The meeting was adjourned about 8:00 p.m.