

RUSSIAN JACK COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6:30 PM, Wednesday, November 18, 2020

At Zion Lutheran Church – 2100 Boniface Parkway

Present: Ed Leach, Fred McLeary, Louis Imbriani, Kathi-Jo & Bob Skaats, Danny & Sherry Wright

Present via ZOOM: Kendra Kloster, Renea Miller

Meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm by Chair Ed Leach.

1. Anchorage Police Report - no report

2. Legislative report

Sen. Elvi Gray-Jackson (Keith Bauguess) – no report.

Sen. Bill Wielechowski (via Zoom) Election results are just about finalized today on the statewide races. Senate remains substantially the same, but very split. Question of how they are going to organize, which will be whoever can get to a group of 11. Assume they will gavel in January 19, but there is tremendous uncertainty. Probably be a bi-partisan organization on that side. Staring down a 2 billion + deficit, whether we fired every employee or not. There are some things that are necessary (courts, public safety, fish & game were examples). Conservative legislations have not been able to sufficiently make cuts. Fixing oil taxes must be a part of that in a way that isn't detrimental to the oil industry. Therapeutic courts are an innovative way to try and cure the crime issue, primarily with those that have substance abuse or mental health problems. Ability to clear their record and move on to begin productive members of society is the goal. Bill is the chair of that task force which is trying to break the recidivism.

QUESTION: Louis Imbriani – has seen the therapeutic courts work, but the one area that is deficient is the mental health disorder affected people being put back on the streets without housing. Bill responded with the percentages of mental health and drug abuse incarcerated. Transitional housing is a known problem.

Sen. Tom Begich (via Zoom) COVID is more acute over the last two weeks. Governor used an emergency order to encourage the public to social distance. He encouraged us to hold on just a little while longer until vaccines are available. Election results discussion and determination to continue to fight their cause. Expect to be a majority, but if not, will work on those issues. PreK Act provides good advice to educators, renewable energy bills should get some traction. Some of the bills they are working on include: First Responders Education; Equal Pay/Minimum Wage. Hope to work together on the budget. Convene on the 19th, recess while they work on budget subcommittees.

QUESTION from Ed – can legislators authorize ZOOM meetings permanently? Tom said they would have to meet in person to authorize that. Infrastructure is in place and it is in their interest to conduct meetings via ZOOM. Committees have been meeting via ZOOM. They need 40 votes out of 60. Ed asked if they could make this a permanent change for future legislative meetings? Tom said there is a concern of who might be advising those legislators (in the room and possibly out of view).

QUESTION: from Louis – Asked for clarification re: a leg up for first responders legislation? Tom said they are encouraging the University to provide scholarships or low interest loans - for

those who have been on the front lines of the COVID pandemic which includes health care workers, food delivery, grocery store employees – those who have kept the doors of essential businesses open.

Rep. Geran Tarr (via Zoom) She is dreaming of San Francisco (something to do with her computer background...) Thanks for those that voted for her. Video of turtles carrying papers – she said this is like the ballots in Alaska. Taking a look at house majority and spoke about longevity of representatives and how many new representatives there will be. She said it's important for the new representatives to learn from those who have been there awhile, who know what's going on. Citizens will be relied upon to educate these new members. She posed the question – who do you want your decision maker's to be? Governor's declaration is good for 30 days, but that doesn't get us to session. The Governor cannot legally continue to do 30 day emergency orders. She doesn't feel he is leading, rather he is responding. They don't see him engaging them in a more pro-active way. Congress needs to pass another relief measure. The school closures are creating struggles in the home. Criminal justice, child welfare systems need to be modernized so we can save money and have better outcomes. The rape kit reform and consent bill will be coming forward soon. Restorative Justice December 10th at 8 pm, December 11th begins at 11 am – day long.

COMMENT from Ed – election counting – some do absentee ballot, then decide to vote in person, so that registrars around the state must wait till all ballots are in. A place on the voter registration list at polling stations should be able to note if an absentee ballot has been requested. RESPONSE -- We have not had fraud in Alaska. Comments can be directed to the Lt. Governor. Elections are important and the vote is a basic right.

Rep. Ivy Spohnholz – (Meagan Holland spoke for Ivy via Zoom) – positivity for Anchorage COVID at 10% today. Recommending everyone get tested, whether or not you have symptoms. Every year we do legislative citations for members of the public. Email legislators if there are any candidates you would like to honor. This has been a bright spot in a rough year – to work on this.

Rep. Andy Josephson (Tristan Walsh) – no report

3. Assembly report

Pete Petersen – 2021 budget passed last night. Was a continuation budget with a few position changes. MLP sale was a large bank transfer – which went into a long-term investment account. Assembly decided not to have a special mayoral elections and are expecting an election runoff. Vaping products taxed at 50% to try and curb teen use. 26% of teens are vaping.

QUESTION from Louis – Why couldn't the date of the regular election be moved up via ordinance or resolution? Pete responded - Charter would have to be amended. Would not be prudent to amend the Charter for a one-time issue. Louis suggested it should be in code, not Charter. Louis had a resolution for RJCC that he provided at the end of the meeting (attached as a meeting handout).

Forrest Dunbar – Has to leave at 7:15pm. No major changes on the spending side. On the revenue side – integrated payments from MLP sale with vast majority of funds put into Municipal Trust, which has almost doubled, generating income. That is why we were able to maintain the budget. Alcohol tax goes into effect in February and the projected revenue about 12 million dollars. About 11 million of that was allocated to fund a bunch of new programs

dedicated to child abuse prevention, public safety, homelessness services. Mental Health First Responders system within the Anchorage Fire Department is one of the systems to assist with people experiencing a mental health crisis. Behavioral health specialist, with a new dispatch training, and fireman will come to assist. Takes pressure off police and leads to better outcomes. Forrest was recused from the mayor election voting. Declaration of Emergency extended to December 15th. The Assembly created an Executive group to deal with this. Added that CBD products have a separate taxing process.

QUESTION from Louis – Asked about buffing up dispatch pertaining to Mental Health First Responders.

4. School board report – Margo Bellamy – no report

5. FCC report – Kathleen Plunkett (at FCC meeting) – no report

Ed spoke about the COVID and vaccinations with many who are not able to be vaccinated and others that will not. He believes this will be with us just like the flu is with us. The flu is more hazardous for children and we had none of the closures that we have had for COVID. Businesses are facing closures. Grades have plummeted for students with failing or incomplete and summer school only happens if major changes to how we are handling COVID changes. Special education students are losing 2 years.

Geran responded – Food and Farm conference spoke of how farmer's market's adapted to COVID. This is a brand, new virus that we don't know anything about. Some younger people are getting it – lots of unknowns. We know what we know today, and we are learning new things every day – we don't have a play book. Frustration re: education – could have used some of the CARES act monies if it had been prioritized, which would have allowed parents to continue working. What is our selective responsibility to each other? Closures, homelessness due to lack of employment are all things we have to consider. All in the context of 6 months have been terrible, but we just aren't there with knowledge.

Pete responded – Vaccines are reported to be 90% effective. Believes attitudes will change as people start getting the vaccine. 70% of Alaskan's polled indicated they would get vaccinated.

Tom responded – Vaccines are the best path to getting kids back to school. President-elect spoke about various forms of vaccines.

Next meeting is usually our annual potluck. We will not be able to have the potluck, but plan to meet on December 9th at 6:30 pm and will continue to offer Zoom. Happy Thanksgiving to everyone.

Meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:
Sherry Wright, Secretary