

**Eklutna Valley Community Council**  
**September 20, 2023**  
**Meeting minutes**

The meeting was chaired by council president Rick Sinnott and began at 6:38 p.m. We met at the Chugach State Park ranger station. Thirteen council members were present: Dan Thompson, Russ Carpenter, Teal Heller, Lisa and Rick Sinnott, Mike Wiedmer, Linda Hilton, Patrick Burns, Steve and Debbie Thon, Skip and Tena Cheely, and Mary Keller. Our Anchorage Assembly member Kevin Cross and his wife Sveta also attended the meeting.

With one change, Rick's request to add a "history minute," the meeting agenda was approved unanimously. The minutes of the April 13, 2023, council meeting were approved unanimously with no changes.

Dan Thompson reported that the council still has \$578.38 in its account.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

**Eagle River-Chugiak cemetery.** Kevin Cross spoke on the first two agenda items. Existing Anchorage cemeteries will be at capacity in a few years. Several community councils, including ours last November, have asked for a cemetery across the road from Eagle River high school. Having been made aware of the community's need for its own cemetery, Cross and Assembly member Suzanne LaFrance realized that existing laws would require Chugiak-Eagle River to come up with funding for a local cemetery but that any municipal resident could be buried there. Cross worked with LaFrance to create a municipal cemetery board and ensure that the bonded indebtedness for any new cemetery would be approved and shared by the entire municipality. A Chugiak-Eagle River cemetery would be managed by the Chugiak-Eagle River Advisory Board (CERAB) with assistance (on landscaping, possible trails, etc.) from the Chugiak-Eagle River parks department. Cross is a strong advocate for the cemetery and is working on funding.

**Updating the Chugiak-Eagle River comprehensive plan.** The CER comprehensive plan was last updated in 2006 but the revision was not radically different from its 1994 version. With so many changes to the community in the past two to three decades, several CER community councils, including ours last April, have asked the Assembly to authorize and fund an updated plan. Cross believes that a federal HUD grant would be appropriate for updating several Anchorage comprehensive plans and has requested \$400,000 for the CER comp plan. This grant would be used to gather information and pay necessary staff to update the plan under the direction of the CERAB.

**Repairing the Eklutna Lakeside Trail.** Thanks to Senator Kelly Merrick, Representative Dan Saddler, and East Anchorage's Senator Bill Wielechowski the Alaska Legislature funded Eklutna Lakeside Trail repairs to the tune of \$234,000. The money will be used to shore up or reroute about six miles of non-motorized trail damaged by high water and storm surges a decade ago as well as 12 miles of ATV and multiuse trail. The work will commence by next spring.

**Cheely's new subdivision.** Skip and Tena said that they have approval from the municipality for their new subdivision; however, they still need to finish clearing a right-of-way for a buried electrical line, drill two wells, and hire a hydrologist to ascertain water-related risks before they start selling lots. They hope to finish that work next summer. The municipality is not requiring any improvements to Tena Street, a costly revision recommended by the planning department.

**Eklutna Lake Road cleanup.** Lisa said this year's road cleanup was a success. About 10 people participated in late May. Teal brought donut holes and Lisa baked muffins, anticipation of which should provide some incentive for next year's participants.

**Invasive weed control.** Lisa also mentioned our efforts to keep certain invasive weeds out of Eklutna Valley. She and Rick have pulled white sweetclover and bird vetch along Eklutna Lake Road for about 15 years, which has minimized their spread into Chugach State Park. Both plants are toxic to moose and other mammals. This summer they noticed a large patch of white sweetclover adjacent to Twin Peaks Treats. With Lief Hovland's permission and the assistance of two employees from Alien Species Control, LLC, the sweetclover and several other invasive weeds were pulled in August. All told, a pickup truck load was pulled along the road and 20 large lawn and garden bags were filled behind the ice cream shop. The outbreak near Twin Peaks Treats resulted from a bad seed mix. Anyone planning to seed their properties should attempt to find weed-free seed mixes (or as close to weed-free as possible).

**Local incident report.** Tena reported a burglary of their CONEX containers near Ryan's house. Rick and several others noticed a white car that had rolled well off the road near Mile 5 this summer, but no one knew any details. Tena asked if anyone knew anything about the person who died in a vehicle parked in the pullout at the top of the long hill last winter. No one did. Rick said he would ask APD if they could share any details.

**History minute.** When the federal government decided to build a railroad from Seward to Fairbanks, Ship Creek was selected as the construction headquarters. No town existed at that time, but the news spread like wildfire and thousands of people headed to upper Cook Inlet in 1914 to work on the railroad or provide essential services. Rick recently discovered the name of the first person to erect their tent in the new town that was to become Anchorage. He was Peter Sinnott, a Canadian. Eklutna Village was initially suggested as the location for the railroad headquarters – which would inevitably become the largest city in Alaska – so Eklutna Valley (and the local Dena'ina) dodged that bullet over a century ago.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Proposed change to zoning ordinance.** Cross co-sponsored an ordinance that would have reduced all zoning districts in Anchorage to essentially one zone. In discussions with the CERAB and others, it became clear that the CERAB would have to be involved in a change of that magnitude and the CERAB wasn't on board. So only the Anchorage Bowl is currently considering a reduction in the number of zoning districts to encourage higher density housing in areas where it is needed and can be supported by infrastructure. Zoning in Chugiak-Eagle River will remain the same for now, at least until a new comprehensive plan considers alternative options.

**Assembly update.** Kevin discussed some recent actions by the Assembly. The municipality has several million unallocated dollars in this year's budget. Much of this is due to the high number of unfilled city positions. He said about 300 positions are unfilled, representing significant proportions in some departments, notably public safety, law, and accounting. The primary reason, he said, was the municipality's low pay. Trained and experienced APD officers are taking better paying jobs with the State Troopers. Municipal attorneys, who are responsible for increasingly high caseloads, are also leaving for state positions.

Cross said he and others are trying to stem the outmigration, but in the short term the excess money will need to be allocated in the next 120 days or so. He encouraged us to submit a list of high priority projects that he could present to the Assembly. After Kevin left, we briefly discussed potential projects. Three that came to mind were helping to restore salmon passage in Eklutna River (Cross had raised this as an issue), school bus service, a cell tower, and various road improvements. Eklutna Lake Road is state maintained, so the municipality is unlikely to contribute to that. One of the issues was the brush that is beginning to encroach on the shoulders. Rick volunteered to notify DOTPF about that. Rick also said he would send an email to council members for additional recommendations. If we have more than three or four projects we will probably need to have another council meeting in a month or two, or at least vote on project priorities via email.

The meeting adjourned at about 7:50 p.m.