

RUSSIAN JACK COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6:30 PM, Wednesday, September 11, 2024

At Zion Lutheran Church – 2100 Boniface Parkway

Present: Ed Leach, Lori Pickett, Kathleen Plunkett, Susan Heuer, Karen Bronga, Roxanna Jeske, Andrew Gray, Forrest Dunbar, Julie Saupe, Bill Wielechowski, Genivieve Mina, James & Rosa Smallwood, Dan & Sherry Wright

Present via ZOOM: Kendra Kloster, Nathaniel Lackey, Mercedes Colbert, Carl Jacob's, Stanley Wright, Nicole Pearce

We did introductions later in the meeting per a request.

Meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm by President Kendra Kloster, then the meeting was run by Vice President Lori Pickett

1. Welcome and Land Acknowledgement We are meeting on Dena'ina Land – grateful for their care and sharing the land with us.

2. Legislative report (3 minutes each)

Sen. Bill Wielechowski – (Seat K) Preference for separating military members hiring bill passed. Military Help Desk to coordinate federal benefits passed. Community solar bill ran into snags with Regulatory Commission on personal property and use, but Chugach Electric will have a 4 megawatt plant and take subscriptions for them. There is no cost to customers (a provision was included that they not pass the cost on to consumers). Should reduce electric bills 10 – 15%. Worked on energy legislation – carbon sequestration (federal dollars available for this) that deals with carbon storage. North Dakota became leaders in this area. Transmission bill for an integrated transmission system under sea line Nikiski to Beluga. Homer to Fairbanks electric line that is down roughly 3 months of the year due to avalanche, construction, etc. Alaska needs diversity in our energy – wind farms, solar power will help. QUESTIONS: North Slope was suggested as a large data center for AI due to its proximity to natural resources and cooler temperature. Bill said there may be something in Nenana coming soon. Snow plow funding came via work with DOT on hiring incentives.

Sen. Forrest Dunbar – (Seat J) provided a handout with his update that will be included in the handouts on the RJCC web page. Forrest spoke about some of the Governor's vetos that impacted our area. A Habitat for Humanity building will be opening in the next couple weeks in Mountain View. He is looking at UAA students to serve as interns, regardless of their course of study.

QUESTIONS: Lori asked if anything moved to allow funding for high GED students (for APS). Forrest will look into it. Renaissance Fair enjoyed being at Polar Bear park (with the exception of the shortage of parking). Ed enjoyed having the fair nearby and didn't mind people parking. Kathleen, on the other hand did not appreciate poor parking etiquette behavior. Kendra loved the location, less dusty and still parking issues at Tozier tracks. Many people did use the bussing offered. They had over 5000 attendees. They did have some theft issues (even with security). A suggestion to use the ball fields for parking, similar to Kincaid during soccer tournaments was made. Congratulations were extended on his wedding.

Rep. Genevieve Mina – Seat 19 – HB 344 became law as a bill to improve Medicaid; health related social needs (much of the costs of health care are the same people using emergency service, that may have other underlying issues that create the health care issues they have); increases income limit for SNAP (goes into effect summer 2025) allowing the Department of Health to make those changes. They are aware of scams that impact folks. Hosting Mountain View Lions Park cleanup Sunday at 2 pm.

QUESTION: Ed asked about medical costs and techs in the villages – how is that working out?

Suggested increasing that statewide, if it is working in the villages and may be a cost-effective way to help.

Rep. Stanley Wright – Seat 22 Spoke about school funding that he worked on. HB 126 signed for associate counselors who have a Master’s degree, but not 3000 hours of counseling experience to be able to bill insurance, which will allow people to obtain mental health care sooner. Peer review for EMT and firefighters have protection when they are answering their call of duty. Patient rights and transparency in billing. Juneteenth will be a state holiday. SB 75 ease transition for military families.

QUESTION: Rosa wanted to hear about the BSA - \$680 per student.

Rep. Andrew Gray - Seat 20 - The requested labeling on alcohol to notify it causing cancer was vetoed. East High pool is still closed. YMCA found several problems and are working on those and his office will help with the staffing issues that have been the primary delay. Boniface put up a snow fence by the tunnel (as the snow removal created a snow mound last winter). East Anchorage book club is available on YouTube. Low property taxes in Soldotna have been due to sales taxes there. Anchorage has the right to no sales tax. Ann Zinke spoke about 5% of patients (that have trouble taking their medications) and resolving that issue helped with some of the costs.

QUESTIONS: FCC Executive Director – some discussion about community council boundaries.

3. Assembly report (3 minutes each)

Christopher Constant Seat 1B – no report

Daniel Volland Seat 1L – no report

Karen Bronga Seat 5H - Alcohol tax strategic plan hoping will make better distribution of the funds. 2022 – 68% went to homelessness. They want the money to work on areas beside the crisis level. Access for youth initiative – earmark funds from alcohol / marijuana for after school programming to build the youth. Pools have been on her mind. Bartlett is the only Olympic size pool in the state. Bartlett school got funding for their diving boards, which has caused tension between diving and swim user groups. She spoke about diet and muscle building pills that are not FDA regulations and may be harmful to youth. Access to Chugach State Park – needs of those that reside in Hillside areas were gathered and the next step is the needs of the general community. Karen is aware of the issues in Russian Jack Springs Park with some of the homeless camps that are building structures (with two story and mailboxes). It is an environmental disaster. Wildlife is being impacted. Fish & Game also are aware of the issues. Kenny Peterson has been working on a day labor plan to help homeless as many are only being offered full time work and the hope is having part time labor available may help many.

QUESTION: Genevieve suggested we have APD come to our council meeting. There is a year round facility that will hold 200 people. Rosa suggested a program that will train people on life skills so that they can live on their own. Ed stated that affordable housing is part of the problem. Substance abuse and irresponsibility contribute. Andrew said Weidner Apartments have a high vacancy rate right now. Ed stated that if we built 3000 Single Room Occupancy units, the rents would come down. Insurance rates also seem to be targeting low-income housing areas. Farina Brown – farina.rown@anchorageak.gov is the MOA employee dealing with homeless camp issues.

George Martinez Seat 5I – no report

4. School board report (3 minutes each) – Carl Jacobs - Community engagements prime issues were reading/math improvement and college preparation. Priority is working on district right sizing plan (based on reduced population). Looking at a rubric to best utilize resources wisely. Consolidation and streamline with minimal impact to families. Co-habiting childcare facility with elementary schools is one idea being discussed. Parental notice regarding bullying issues. Next meeting of the School Board is 9/17.

QUESTIONS: Rosa stated PBIS is an inclusive/collaborative environment. Kindergarten is not mandatory in Alaska, some kids are not starting school until 1st grade. Carl was not aware of this and will look into it. Rosa believes there is a need for universal Pre-K in Alaska. Carl will discuss with her offline. Lori asked about the whooping cough and concern of shutdowns on schools again. That is not being discussed. Clinical term is pertussis – DTAP shots are available. Carl Jaobs 907-632-7285

5. FCC report – Kathleen Plunkett – Community Council Boundaries is the main topic of discussion. Need to take them up for resolution at our October or November meeting. There is a Town Hall on community councils – Sept 23 at Loussac Wilda Marston at 7 pm.

6. Presentation from Northern Compass Group on Project Anchorage – Julie Saupe provided a brochure that explains Project Anchorage which is asking for a 3% sales tax that would lower property taxes, grow our economy, and provide funding for projects to make Anchorage a better place to live, work and play (investing in infrastructure). There would be exemptions for groceries, childcare, medical expenses, gasoline and banking service. Projects will only begin when funding is in the bank. Ideas for projects need to be submitted no later than September 15, 2024.

QUESTIONS: Ed talked about Anchorage spending cap and tying in with property taxes may complicate our charter in that issue. Kendra mentioned how Juneau has done a lot of work downtown to see that it is an indigenous place, and hoping Anchorage will embrace that. James asked if any projects attract specific businesses? Innovative businesses have been the primary type. What will attract big companies? Businesses are attracted when a city reinvests in itself.

7. Community Council Boundaries - moved to discuss at our October meeting and approved.

8. Review and update CIP list for 2025 – moved to discuss at our October meeting and approved. Karen said the MOA Assembly is working on this now. Kendra said she submitted the information and will coordinate with Karen.

9. Neighborhood/Community Announcements - Susie Heurer lives on Bunnell and there is an abandoned gas station at 4950 Taku there that has become an eyesore in the neighborhood. The fuel tank underground has been left. The previous owner stopped paying taxes and the MOA refuses to declare it condemned or they will be liable for the cleanup. There may be federal funds available. DEC also may get involved. Executive Board could write a letter of concern.

Lori said Alaska Literacy Project welcoming event is September 19th from 4-7 pm at the Community Farm near the Shell Gas station in Mountain View. Lori will be resigning her position at Alaska Literacy Program.

Next meeting is scheduled for October 9th at 6:30 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:47 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:
Sherry Wright, Secretary