

RUSSIAN JACK COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6:30 PM, Wednesday, October 9, 2024

At Zion Lutheran Church – 2100 Boniface Parkway

Present: Ed Leach, Lori Pickett, Kathleen Plunkett, Tara Blankenship, Nevin Blankenship, Susan Heuer, Jason McKeel, Stefen Meow, Officer C Grigg, Officer J Rivera, George Martinez, Clayton Chapman, Thea Agnew Bemben, Bill Wielechowski, Forrest Dunbar, James Brian, Genivieve Mina, Stephan Stererock, Lloyd Stiassny, Mike Braniff, Dan & Sherry Wright,

Present via ZOOM: Rachel Gunn, Kendra Kloster, MiLee, Aaron Stiassny, Remington Purness (Rep. Gray), Maxine (Sen Wielechowski) Ted Eischeid, Carl Jacobs

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.

1a – Thea (Mayor's Office) - excited on taking the new role with the Mayor's office. Her attendance is due to constituent reports about issues in the RJSP. We are at 100 days in office. They are strategizing on reports – MOA website to report on camp locations. They use that and APD, Healthy Spaces teams, outreach partners with ACEH, HOPE team engaging with unsheltered people. Preparing for more beds to help with winter shelters, which is going through Assembly this month. Untreated health needs are also being assessed and attempts to treat those individuals and make connections to enable better responses and hopefully better outcomes. Identifying pathway to connecting people with care. MOA Budget handout was provided.

Mike Braniff - Parks & Rec spoke next about Healthy Spaces, a work force in Parks & Rec that clean areas affected by unsheltered folks.

QUESTION: Williwaw Community Garden project – how is that coming since there is a homeless camp there. Will it be useable? ANSWER: We don't have a timeline for the Williwaw Garden project and it has taken a step backward. Both the camp there and activities on Pine/DeBarr are considered one group. There was a utilities challenge.

QUESTION: double occupancy rooms at Aviator – are those still available? ANSWER: Thea hadn't heard, although it was on the news. Until contract is awarded, the bids are sealed.

QUESTION: Any plan to abate the Mountain View Drive camp? ANSWER: It is being discussed. There is no time frame of abating. It is mostly about having space for people to shelter. The goal is to connect people with both shelter and services. They desire creating a pathway to help people move out of homelessness. Camping in Anchorage is not safe on many levels. Healthy Spaces reported they haul 9-20,000 pounds of garbage per week out of camps.

The homeless population began around 300 population (around 2018). They don't think they had good data. Most of it was concentrated around Bean's Café and that shelter. After 2018, the Coalition stepped up their efforts to collect better data. The 2400 people experiencing homelessness are not just the unsheltered – some of those are couch surfing, living in vehicles,

etc. Approximately 400 are truly homeless. January “point in time” counts was about 325 people, even at -35 F. The majority of Williwaw are living in some kind of vehicle and at least one is a major Fentanyl dealer. Vehicles are tagged with 10 days to move their vehicle or be impounded, and many will temporarily move their vehicles to avoid getting impounded.

QUESTION/DISCUSSION: Is there any plan for a place designated for those living in vehicles. Camping in the right of way in a vehicle isn’t really parking. Perhaps some type of new code language may be needed. We had good discussion about frustration of reporting to no avail with APD. If someone is shooting a gun, we should file a report. How is the administration going to address criminal activity, which seems to be decriminalized? Our children are at risk.

Appreciate those that are trying to work on solutions, but how is law enforcement going to NOT coddle these people that are dealing, illegally shooting firearms in our neighborhoods. Thea spoke about lack of personnel, working with private funding, state funding. Lori spoke about the lack of equity in RJCC area vs South Anchorage and the resources that are being allotted. The need for greater equity in their approach is something they hear loud and clear. They have a chief equity officer in place. Some of the most vulnerable people working two jobs are in this situation. There is a nuisance policy (AMC880) – after 8 qualified calls APD can collect \$500 per call. This only applies to actual properties, not homeless camps. The law is specific about what counts as a nuisance property. Contact information will be available on our Facebook page. Reporting is critical, as the Assembly uses those reports in crafting legislation.

Officers Jesus Rivera III can be reached at 907-729-7681 or JRivera@muni.org. He is part of the Community Action Policing (CAP) team. He and Officer C Grigg attended our meeting.

2. Legislative report (3 minutes each)

Sen. Bill Wielechowski – (Seat K) - HS mentor is attending w/Bill. 90% of crime in AK is drug or alcohol related. 50% crime committed by mental health beneficiaries. Bill spoke of various bills that they have tried to fund that were vetoed by the Governor. APD has the worst retirement system in the US, but we appreciate APD being here. Letter sent about gas station on Taku and there has been some removal of junk. Bartlett diving boards issue has resulted in the diving boards will be getting moved to East High pool. 80 megawatt storage plant at Chugach Electric for a load slow event – it will instantly turn on the system to reduce power outages. It allows better integration of other energy resources that are coming. Education maintenance of equity – amount of funding for schools must be maintained, which didn’t happen. Federal Government is withholding federal funds, phase 2 will be several hundred million dollars withheld.

Sen. Forrest Dunbar – (Seat J) provided a council update handout, which he went over at the meeting. Forrest did a ride along with APD and observed them resolve several issues. Manor House issues – he wants to talk with those folks who attended tonight’s meeting. Ted Eischeid participated in the Citizens Academy – link <https://www.anchoragepolice.com/citizens-academy>.

Rep. Genevieve Mina – Seat 19 – Early voting starts October 21. SNAP EBT scams – contact Genevieve’s office if they’ve had any issues. Claims will be covered through the end of September and there is also information on the Public Assistance web page. Also people that have been scammed need to make a police report.

Rep. Stanley Wright – Seat 22 (Rachel Gunn) - East Anchorage received capital funding for the first time in years. Let them know if you haven’t received PFD.

Rep. Andrew Gray - Seat 20 - (Remington Cornell) – Bettye Davis East High pool is open 5-7 pm for open swim and FREE for the month of October during this time. The East High swim team has been able once again to use the pool. There was a constituent shot by APD – that web cam is available. Podcast series on AK Health Care (with various speakers). Lisa Akina CEO Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center will be the next guest. ANHC includes mental health care services.

3. Assembly report (3 minutes each)

Christopher Constant Seat 1B – no report

Daniel Volland Seat 1L – no report

Karen Bronga Seat 5H (Genevieve Kikukawa)- no report, although several new attendees reported they were informed of our council meetings by Karen.

George Martinez Seat 5I – thanks for keeping the space to hear concerns and find solutions together. Appreciate Mayor’s office being present at our meeting. Police Reporting is important, as it backs up what we discuss at our meetings. Reclaiming spaces for families that have been lost in our community. Approved sale of the sprung structure (Tudor/Elmore tent). George went over the historical events regarding homelessness in Anchorage. Port is a user-based enterprise and the sale of the structure will allow tax payers to recoup dollars. Now we must make investments. We have a right to fail, but not necessarily in our public spaces. Work force opportunities are part of the options. A firm hand is needed. Over 185,000 calls to APD last year. The sheer volume of calls have a mental health component, which has not been dealt with effectively in the past. This places another burden on the criminal justice system. There are more prosecutors coming online, that will help deal with case-loads. Code changes are under consideration, so if we have ideas, please send them. October is smoke detector awareness month.

Kathleen hopes the other Christopher Constant and Daniel Volland hear our concerns, as they have not attended our meetings.

Jason had a question about prosecution and the law that allowed criminals to be released (revolving door) and is the rehabilitation portion of that law being discussed? SB94 was repealed. When there are abatements, some of the people move into the stairwells of apartment areas. MOA is talking about what follows abatement with APD follow up.

4. School board report (3 minutes each) – Carl Jacobs - School districts continue to deal with deficits because the formula hasn’t been updated since 2017. October focus on math proficiency. Recordings of school board meetings are on YouTube. Reading proficiency has improved. Federal Award of Blue Ribbon Dept of Education – 3 schools in Anchorage received the award. Board passed amendments regarding parental notification for bullying/harassment. They are working on updating nicotine policies in 1st meeting in November. Freshman Career Expo held at the Dena’ina Center was a collaborative effort with businesses to make connections with students.

5. FCC report – Kathleen Plunkett – Board training continues – next one October 21, then November 18 at the Wilda Marston theatre in Loussac Library.

6. Eden Management Group – Uncle Herb’s – Aaron Stiassny provided report for an endorsement on the Boniface Store to open a consumption area for edibles. City requires they come before the Council. QUESTION: How will you control when people over-consume? There is a level of consumption regulated, but it is harder to detect with cannabis. They desire the options for folks to go somewhere other than to a bar. They will work on appropriate staffing. Impaired driving is up 30%. We have enough impaired people driving on our streets. Tolerances are very low – 10 mg is the allowed amount. TAMS cards are required for any server (including marijuana). Requiring someone to relinquish your keys, which was suggested, is what TAMS training is for. They are trying to elevate the sales of cannabis in the community. A couple of members voiced opposition to another vice in an already saturated city of alcohol/drug addictions and issues.

7. Community Council Boundaries - will move to next month.

8. Review and update CIP list for 2025 - need the explanations that include costs, which were in the Google Docs. Kendra has another project she’s interested in – driving down DeBarr and saw a number of bus stops that don’t have places for people to sit while waiting for the bus. Is there any interest in that? Would need to drive around to check which ones don’t have a bus stop. Will follow up at November meeting. Our CIP lists have a number of ways to be reviewed. 3 benches were hit by snowplows last year. Public transit department has a form for amenities (trash removal needed). Bart Rudolph is Director.

9. Neighborhood/Community Announcements - Bettye Davis East Anchorage High School pool is holding FREE open swim M-F from 5-7 pm through the month of October. YMCA is taking over running the pool and more information can be found at YMCAAlaska.org or calling 907-563-3211. Pools are operated by Parks & Rec. Facility Maintenance operates the pool. The pools are approaching 50 years and will be in need of repairs. Also vote by mail ballots must be requested by October 26.

Next meeting is scheduled for November 13th at 6:30 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:
Sherry Wright, Secretary