

## RUSSIAN JACK COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6:30 PM, Wednesday, December 11, 2024

At Zion Lutheran Church – 2100 Boniface Parkway

Present: Ed Leach, Lori Pickett, Kathleen Plunkett, Susan Heuer, Karen Bronga, Andrew Gray, Bill Wielechowski, Tara & Nevin Blankenship, Clayton Chapman, Forrest Dunbar, Dan & Sherry Wright

Present via ZOOM: Kendra Kloster, Remington Purnell, Katie Giorgio, Mercedes Colbert, Seth Tigarian, Ted Eischeid, Margo Bellamy

Meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm by President Kendra Kloster and then run by Lori Plunkett.

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) Governor's budget comes out tomorrow afternoon. Education bill is anticipated. Federal Judge blocked Kroger/Albertson merger, which will help smaller communities. 4950 Taku abandoned gas station has a new owner. Vehicles have started being removed. Plans are for it to become an office for the assisted care facility nearby. Mercedes has done a great job following up on this. Permit for demolition has a red tag, but Susan isn't sure what that means. Does the ground contamination have to be abated? Susan gave some information on the investors.

Sen. Forrest Dunbar – (Seat J) Bipartisan coalition will be in both house and senate. Hopeful for a productive session. Update is attached. Last year's blight tax bill that did not pass might have been a vehicle to help turn that property at 4950 Taku. He will support if someone else brings it forward this year. Kathleen mentioned seeing what can be done with low income housing insurance, as rates are increasing. Forrest wants to cover all housing, not just low income. Health care insurance is also a challenge that drains many people's budgets. Non-profits are also facing huge hurdles in getting insurance because of various requirements.

Rep. Genevieve Mina – Seat 19 – (Report was provided by Katy Giorgio) Genevieve is in Colorado at a conference. Many of the topics we just discussed (during Andrew Gray's report) will be topics we will be hearing more about. Genevieve will hold a constituent meeting January 7 and there is a link to sign up for the constituent newsletter.

Rep. Stanley Wright – Seat 22 (Forrest Wolfe) no report

Rep. Ted Eischeid – Seat 22 (replaced Stanley Wright as of January 21). He provided committees he will be serving on and is ready to head to Juneau.

Rep. Andrew Gray - Seat 20 - Bills he will be presenting are: housing (tax incentives), safety in foster care, social media for youth and raising age of consent; health care plans in Alaska are limited. Single highest factor in sex trafficking is poverty. Shining a light on poverty may lower incarcerated populations, Alaska's abuse problems and a host of other issues. Tara asked

Andrew to share some of his ideas on addressing poverty. Lowering health care costs is one area that will help allow funding for other needs. Funding for education can be increased by lowering Medicaid costs. Alaska has some of the highest health insurance costs in the U.S. We want to ensure people have health care coverage that is needed, but there are people taking advantage of the system. Only 1/6 of doctors in Alaska accept Medicare. Only 1/2 accept Medicaid. Medical practices in the villages have a lower cost due to providers (who have a lower education). Lower requirements of health care providers will help lower costs. Telehealth is another opportunity to save money. There will be investigations into death in the prison populations, which hasn't been typically done. Andrew spoke about his podcast.

### 3. Assembly report (3 minutes each)

Christopher Constant Seat 1B – no report

Daniel Volland Seat 1L – no report

Karen Bronga Seat 5H - Passed legislative wish list that included snow removal plans. Reformation on crisis behavioral health, raise BSA for public schools, securing energy future, housing for the homeless – modular, tiny homes. State gave \$4 million to use on the Anchorage homeless population with a note not to come back for more. That money was used in full for the shelter (200 people) for one year. Port tariff is necessary in order to get grant funding. Williwaw Community Gardens is supposed to be moving forward this summer. Parks & Rec resolved the water issue there. RVs camping on the streets is an issue. There are a couple new homeless coordinators. There is a desire to designate a space for those living in vehicles. They must have 4 citations prior to being moved. Davis Park is hosting a large population of these folks. There is a buy-back program giving first/last month rent in exchange for their RV. Mandatory IDs passed unanimously (red stripe on their license if they had a DUI). Project Anchorage opinions are welcome. A portion of the sales tax would go toward housing. Addressing the homeless population needs to take a different direction and stay open to other ideas, as what we have been doing (throwing more money at it) is not fixing the problem. One issue that is taking the oxygen out of the housing community is the homeless are kicking out the marginal working population, as they are moved out if they complain about mold, water, shrews, etc. Dan told about meeting the Parks & Rec workers that are doing haz mat work, but not receiving any training for that (nor is it what they anticipated doing when working for Parks & Rec).

George Martinez Seat 5I – no report

4. School board report (3 minutes each) – Margo Bellamy spoke about the right sizing plan and Wonder Park was removed from the cutting block. The schools still being closed or repurposed will occur in one year, rather than three. December 17 is the date for a final decision on the right sizing plan. FY26 budget planning is underway with a \$107 million deficit. School bond for safety, security and structure at \$64 million will be on the ballot. Meeting with the assembly several times per year to discuss mutual concerns, which includes a resolution increasing the BSA. Wendler Middle School is getting a mobile unit metal detector (will eventually go to all middle and high schools on a rotation basis). Question if schools are providing gun safety training? Margo said they have partnered with an organization (Moms demand action group) that provides information on how to lock up guns. ROTC is in some of the schools, but the

schools do not have a gun safety curriculum. The metal detector is a safety feature and parents accountability is a primary need, which the MOA Assembly is working on.

5. FCC report – Kathleen Plunkett – The FCC elected a Treasurer and had one resolution thanking MOA for budget approval that increased FCC funding. This month they will have a presentation on pedestrian safety from DOT.

6. Community Council Boundaries - Ed Leach moved to write a resolution for RJCC area to maintain status quo. Susan Heuer 2<sup>nd</sup>. There were no objections, so passed.

7. Elections for RJCC Board 2025 Lori appreciated the way people work together in our council. Kendra appreciated the things we've been able to accomplish and the all hands on deck when we have issues that we need to work on. Kendra and Lori provided a few words of wisdom to our incoming president which included the following: people will contact the President for agenda items; staying connected with legislators and assembly members is important; the CIP lists getting forwarded to the correct people and keeping up on bigger projects; and keeping the agenda short as an effort of being mindful of people's time.

Motion to Dan Wright to approve the slate of the following officers. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Susan Heuer. Motion carried. President: Clayton Chapman; Vice President: Ed Leach; Secretary: Sherry Wright; Treasurer: Ed Leach; FCC Rep: Kathleen Plunkett; Trustee: Tara Blankenship

8. Neighborhood/Community Announcements - Ed was at the Seward/Glenn connection last night. Fairview will not be split as a result. Gambell and Ingra will be 2-4 lanes each to allow more traffic flow. He provided information on some of the alternate routes. They will most likely use overpass system of roadways in a diagonal from Fireweed to Airport Heights. (Alternative D).

Next meeting is scheduled for January 8th at 6:30 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:28 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:  
Sherry Wright, Secretary