

Eklutna Valley Community Council
December 9, 2014
Meeting minutes

The meeting was presided over by council president Rick Sinnott and began at 7:12 p.m. The council met at the new Eklutna ranger station. Fifteen council members attended: Bonita Howard, Debbie and Steve Thon, Vicki and Keith Darby, Margan Grover, Dan Thompson, Randy Bangerter, Buff Rix, Jeff Schweizer, Greg McConnell, Glenn and Mary Keller, and Lisa and Rick Sinnott. Guests included Ric Davidge and Paul Sheehan representing the Alaska Veterans Association.

The minutes of the August 27, 2014 meeting were approved with no changes. Lisa reported \$466.64 in the council's funds. This amount has not changed in at least two years.

Vet Village. Ric Davidge presented a plan for the Vet Village, and he seemed confident it will succeed. The Alaska Veterans Foundation has proposed building a village for homeless veterans on Eklutna Lake Road just east of the AWWU water treatment facility. The 80-acre property would be leased from Eklutna, Inc. The foundation had hoped to obtain 80 acres of adjacent private property. That deal fell through, but they haven't given up hope of acquiring that property in the near future.

Davidge estimated about 80-90 homeless vets live in Anchorage. Most are what Davidge called "chronic" homeless people, with one to three mental or emotional problems, who are not capable of taking care of themselves. Based on interviews of homeless vets, Davidge doesn't believe they'll use a housing facility in Anchorage. The Department of Defense has refused to allow the foundation to build homeless veteran housing on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. The foundation tried and failed to find a suitable location in Eagle River Valley. They believe their third choice, Eklutna Valley, is close enough to Anchorage for the residents to work in town and have access to counseling and health care, but still satisfy the veterans' desire to live "in the woods."

The Alaska Veterans Foundation plans to build a 25-unit apartment building and 75 cabins, with associated mess hall/meeting area, offices, and maintenance garage. To provide employment for the vets, they plan to build a lumberyard (and possibly a sawmill) and a commercial greenhouse. A proposed water-bottling factory on the site is on hold, but they hope to build it a year or two after Phase 1. Ultimately, they hope to house additional homeless vets from other jurisdictions and to use the adjacent property for a separate village to house female veterans who, according to Davidge, would rather not live near the men.

Every resident will be required to give one-third of his or her income to the facility no matter how much they earn or receive in benefits. Everyone will be required to work. Residents will be ferried to Anchorage for jobs and other business by three vans. Davidge said residents would be forced to leave the facility if they violated the law or any Vet Village rules. If the evicted vet addressed the problem, they could come back after six months.

The emphasis is on "village," not subdivision, because the foundation hopes the municipality will rezone the property from R-10 to special use and waive the municipal subdivision regulations to keep costs down. The access roads will be gravel, for

instance. Prefabricated cabins would be sized to accommodate one or two residents or a family. The initial plan was that all cabins would have wood stoves and residents would be expected to use them to supplement Toyo heaters; however, the foundation is presently planning to offer electric heat rather than wood stoves. The site doesn't have city water or sewer, so they plan to provide a well and septic system for the apartment building/offices/mess hall, with additional wells and septic systems for groups of 5-10 cabins.

A question was raised during the meeting whether the Vet Village residents would be members of the Eklutna Valley Community Council. After the meeting, Municipal Ombudsman Darrel Hess confirmed that individual residents would be eligible to join our community council and vote, according to our bylaws and the governing municipal laws for community councils. Live-in staff could also join the community council, and the Alaska Veterans Foundation would also have one vote as a non-profit organization with a facility in Eklutna Valley.

The Alaska Veterans Foundation was given a grant for \$300,000 to develop the Vet Village proposal. Davidge said he would send a copy of the completed proposal to the community council in a week or so. They still hope to secure an additional \$6-7 million in state funding, municipal rezoning, land use waivers, and permits in time to break ground in mid-2015.

Members agreed to postpone a vote on any resolution until the completed proposal was received and reviewed.

Internet service. The current maximum Internet download speed in upper Eklutna Valley is 768K, but actual speeds are closer to half that. The community council has sent emails to MTA asking them to provide faster Internet service. MTA responded, saying it isn't cost effective to provide faster service in upper Eklutna Valley. An email was also sent to GCI Alaska, inviting the company to look into providing Internet service in Eklutna Valley; however, GCI Alaska never responded.

Randy Bangerter has recently started using a satellite service called Excede provided by Microcom. He told us the installation fee for a two-foot-wide satellite dish was \$70-80. The company told him they wouldn't charge the fee if they couldn't pinpoint their satellite from his home. Randy is happy with the service so far. He said he was supposed to get 12 Mbps download speed, but it seems faster. Because satellite communication has "latency" or a tiny lag in initiating signals, he said the service wouldn't support fast-paced Internet gaming; however, it was much better for streaming movies from services like Netflix than the current MTA plan.

Microcom is offering two options. "Evolution" has, for a limited time, unlimited access for email and web pages plus 15 GB/mo for everything else for \$50/mo. After a six-month promo period, the access "for everything else" would drop to 5 GB/mo, with unmetered access from 3 a.m. to 8 a.m. daily. Their "Freedom/Evolution" plan would provide "virtually unlimited" access to everything for six months for \$70. After the promotion ends, the "Evolution 20" plan will provide unlimited access to email and web pages plus 20 GB/mo for everything else. Or you could elect to stay with the "virtually unlimited" option and pay \$100/mo.

Randy thought that under the 15 GB/mo plan one could only download three HD movies a month. He has purchased the “unlimited” plan and is paying about \$110/mo (additional charges applied). More detailed information is provided in the two links below.

http://microcom.tv/images/ex_freedomplans_broch-bleed.pdf

<http://www.exede.com/freedom>

Chugach Access Plan update. Rick summarized recent events regarding Chugach State Park’s access plan. The access plan was developed by the state during many years of public meetings to help identify potential routes into the park. In some parts of the municipality, particularly on the Hillside and in Eagle River, public access to the park is blocked for long stretches by private property.

Some additional access to the park is needed to cope with the high demand at some existing trailheads and to help reduce trespassing and other conflicts. However, the access plan is a wish list, not a project list. The park cannot legally “take” private property for recreational purposes. The access plan anticipates ways in which future access can be acquired from willing sellers, donations, or (most controversially) through the municipal platting authority when a landowner applies to subdivide a property.

Because State Parks and the Municipality need to coordinate development of potential access points, the municipality is attempting to either adopt the state plan by reference or at least ensure that it will be suitable as a reference tool for future platting actions.

The Chugiak-Eagle River Advisory Board met a month ago and found the access plan still needed some work. Eklutna Valley Community Council is currently represented on the CER Advisory Board by Rick, who was a dissenting vote. The Eklutna Valley is well supplied with park access.

Election of community council officers. An election was held, as discussed at the August 27 meeting and listed in this meeting’s agenda. No one in attendance nominated new officers and the current officers agreed to serve another two-year term. Motions were made and seconded to elect Rick Sinnott president, Debbie Thon vice-president, Lisa Sinnott treasurer, and Steve Thon sergeant-at-arms. The motions passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.