

Eklutna Valley Community Council
October 14, 2015
Meeting minutes

The meeting was chaired by council president Rick Sinnott and began at 7:00 p.m. The council met at the new Eklutna ranger station. Twenty-seven council members attended: Skip and Tena Cheely, Debbie and Steve Thon, Randy Bangerter, Greg McConnell, Cindy and Bob McElroy, Steve and Cheryl Remme, Buff and Deb Rix, Bob Reagan, Vicki Darby, Arthur Jensen, Kevin and Jessica Menken, Josiah Trout, Dakota Keller, Vennessa Spurling, Jake Tramp, Miguel Angel Moreno, Jesse Keller, Rosie Keller, Terry Tramp, and Lisa and Rick Sinnott.

This was a record attendance for a community council meeting, with many new residents, and may represent as many as one-third of the adults living or owning property in Eklutna Valley who are eligible council members.

The minutes of the February 25, 2015, meeting were approved with no changes. Rick reported the council's funds were "the same as at the last regular meeting," which is \$466.64.

Eklutna River bridge replacement project. Rick asked the project manager, Van Le, for an update. He said they had intended to complete the project this November, but rainy weather delayed work and they weren't going to be able to surface the bridge this winter. Thus, construction will be suspended in November and the bridge should be completed in mid-summer 2016.

Update on Title 21 land-use revisions proposed for Chugiak-Eagle River.

Assemblymembers Amy Dembowski and Bill Starr met with the Chugiak-Eagle River Advisory Committee to discuss proposed revisions to local land-use regulations. Rick is on the advisory committee, but missed the meeting due to a last-minute conflict. The advisory committee's chair, Debbie Osslander, sent a brief summary of the proposals to Rick, who read them at the meeting. Without details, council members were a little unclear as to what the specific issues were in some cases; however, the potential revisions that might have the most impact to our council are:

- Rural road standards – The municipal traffic engineer has objected to attempts to limit street lighting and allow narrower paved roads without sidewalks in rural areas.
- Accessory building size limitations – Our representatives want to continue to allow accessory buildings larger than principal structures in rural areas. Municipal planning staff have objected.
- Larger setbacks for large domestic animal facilities

Any proposed revisions are likely to come before the Chugiak-Eagle River Advisory Committee again, once they've been introduced to the Anchorage Assembly. Stay tuned for more information on these issues in upcoming months.

Update on Chugach State Park's access plan. After approximately seven years, Chugach State Park's access plan has made its way through a number of public reviews

and revisions at the state and municipal level. The purpose of the access plan is to identify potential new access locations for the 700-square-mile park, particularly in areas where public access is currently limited by private property.

A summary of the final round of public comments and how they will be addressed will soon be available. The final version of the access plan is supposed to be advisory to the municipality, allowing the state to purchase critical access from willing sellers or request new or improved access points in new subdivisions through the normal platting process. Eklutna Valley has lots of dedicated public access to the park and the access plan didn't propose any new access sites in our council area; however, the plan was controversial in other parts of Chugiak and Eagle River because potential access sites were identified for planning purposes on maps.

Three new public-use cabins in Eklutna Valley. Chugach State Park is building three new cabins for people to rent. One is on the south side of Eklutna Lake, about halfway to the end. It's nearly finished and should be available for reservations next summer. Construction on the other two cabins, in the day-use area, will begin this fall.

Proposal to rename Thatchkatnu Creek to Łach Q'atnu Creek. Thatchkatnu Creek is better known as Twin Peaks Creek. It's the creek that enters the west end of Eklutna Lake near the parking area. Thatchkatnu, which means "clay hole creek," is the local Dena'ina name for the creek that was proposed by the Alaska Mountaineering Club and/or Chugach State Park in 1984 and adopted as the official name by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.

Dr. James Kari, a linguist who specializes in Athapascan languages, including Dena'ina, has proposed to rename the stream Łach Q'atnu Creek because it is a more accurate rendition of the word. The best I can tell, the "Ł" is pronounced something like "Thl", which explains the current spelling.

Council members chose not to send a letter or resolution in support of or opposition to the name change to the Alaska Historical Commission. The general consensus seemed to be supportive; however, concerns were raised that the change would be confusing and unpronounceable to most park visitors. Some members suggested including a pronunciation guide such as "Thatchkatnu" in parentheses under the new spelling. Rick said park superintendent Tom Harrison is already planning to do so. Whatever the final decision on Dr. Kari's proposal, expect the small metal sign with the name "Twin Peaks Creek" to be replaced.

School bus. Years ago the Anchorage School District suspended its school bus route in Eklutna Valley because not enough children were using the bus, particularly on the ride home, due to after-school activities. A second reason arose several years later when Eklutna Lake Road was surfaced and bus drivers objected that the narrower road was more dangerous.

Several new families have school-aged or younger children, bringing the total to at least 20 potential bus riders in upcoming school years. This seems to meet ASD's threshold for reinstating bus service; however, the safety issue remains. Josiah said he's talked to school officials several times and they seem to be insisting on guardrails, at the very least. Steve Remme made a motion that the community council send a letter to the ASD, informing them of the increase in school children and asking for a bus, perhaps a

shorter bus that would be safer on the narrow road. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

It's likely that the ASD, even if it has the wherewithal to provide a bus, will continue to insist on guardrails and refer us to the municipality or Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Rick said he would write the letter and forward a draft to council members for review before sending it to the ASD. This request, as important as it is to some families, has a high chance of failure but, as Cheryl said, "We won't get it unless we ask for it."

The ASD's requirements for school bus route extensions are provided on their website (<http://www.asdk12.org/transportation/routepolicies/>). Are there any substantive differences between Eklutna Lake Road and other Anchorage roads, like Hiland and Basher, where school buses currently serve the neighborhood? If anyone who looks at the ASD requirements has any ideas, let Rick know.

Cell towers. South Addition Community Council requested support from other community councils for a resolution asking for revisions to Title 21 to encourage the use of smaller, less conspicuous cell towers in neighborhoods and removal of abandoned towers. Most of Eklutna Valley has no cell phone service and many council members would rather have an ugly tower than none at all; however, there seemed to be support for South Addition's resolution. Rick believed South Addition's resolution, as currently written, is confusing so we'll wait for clarification before submitting a resolution in support.

This discussion raised the issue of the lack of cell phone coverage in our council area. Tena said an AT&T representative talked to her last summer about erecting a tower on her commercial property. She hasn't heard from him since then. Rick agreed to write a letter to AT&T, reiterating residents' wishes for cell phone service in the valley and reminding them of the increasing number of park visitors who might also appreciate cell phone service, particularly in an emergency. Tena will try to find the AT&T representative's business card for contact information.

Mailboxes. Debbie Thon raised the issue of mailboxes. Currently, the U.S. Postal Service will assign residents a mailbox at the far end of the frontage road that loops past the Eklutna overpass. These boxes are not secure. Most council members in attendance expressed a desire for lockable mailboxes.

A discussion of potential sites ensued, with some members recommending they be placed in the vicinity of the AWWU water treatment plant while others preferred the beginning of Eklutna Lake Road. Some members liked the idea of having the mailboxes under the oversight of the AWWU surveillance cameras, but others pointed out that there isn't enough room at the newspaper tubes and AWWU would need to agree. The location at the start of Eklutna Lake Road is owned by Eklutna, Inc., which might want to sell or lease a site, unless the mailboxes were in the road right-of-way and there are state laws and policies which regulate how close to the road structures can be built. Some members believed the mailboxes must be purchased and installed by the customers, others thought the postal service provided them. In addition, Deb Rix pointed out that the rural carrier's contract would need to be amended if the current mailboxes were moved. So there are lots of questions and hurdles. Deb agreed to

contact the post office and do some additional research to answer some of the questions raised.

Vet Village. Bob Reagan asked about the status of the Vet Village proposal. We passed a resolution at our last meeting and sent it to the proponents, municipal planners, and state and municipal government representatives. Rick agreed to send a copy of the resolution to council members because new members aren't familiar with our council's concerns. The proponent's grant request for several million dollars was not passed by the Alaska Legislature this year and, with the state hurting for revenue, it's unlikely that the legislature will fund the project in the near future.

The meeting adjourned at about 8:30 p.m.