

RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Notes on meeting of 12 April 2001

The meeting began at 7:00 PM. Present were Mendenhall, Fries, Sell, and Miller. The board did not have a quorum.

Treasurer's report: Ross provided this to Fries. The account balance is \$808.20. There was one deposit of \$20; expenditures were \$300 contribution to the church and \$80 for the post office box. We gained 8 new members for a total of 148; the quorum for a general meeting is 30.

Legislative update: There was no teleconference.

- Bills on the LRSA issue (HB13 and SB75) appear likely to pass. Gov. Knowles vetoed the bill last year; supporters are urged to write him.
- SB133 (school exit exams) is in committee. Sen. Jerry Ward invites comments and suggestions.

Redistricting: Pat Abney reported that the Assembly recommended to the Alaska Redistricting Board that Anchorage should retain the 8.6 legislative districts that it has now. Population changes would require that the districts be expanded 35% beyond their present overall boundary, e.g. to Hope or Whittier. Our district should not add Prince William Sound. The Assembly believes they should speak for the city on this, not the Mayor's office. The board will be meeting in Juneau at times to be announced on the web site (www.alaskaredistricting.org) or one can call them at 465-4637. It is to produce a draft plan by April 16.

Land use issues:

- Case 2000-231 would amend the section of Title 21 that allows property owners adjacent to a rezoning proposal to petition against the change. It would remove MOA lands from the formula that determines how many signatures are needed for a successful protest. The case has not been scheduled yet before the Assembly.
- 2000-024 and -025 would rezone Viewpoint South Subdivision and remove them from the Hillside Wastewater Management Plan. This has been scheduled before the Assembly for May 22.
- 2001-051, amendment to Title 21 to require site plan review for big box stores, is before the Planning and Zoning Commission again.
- 2001-053 is the Living With Wildlife plan, which would encourage conservation of selected wildlife habitats in land-use decisions. It is before Planning and Zoning on May 7. It can be read on the Fish and Game website entitled wildplan.htm. Comments are due to P&Z by April 30.

Candidates for runoff elections (May 1):

- Tim Steele is running for School Board. He favors graduating every student, regardless of grades on exit exams, but with 2 or more categories of diploma. The district needs more state funding, or must make cuts—the local share is now 30% and can't be raised any higher.
- Janice Shamberg (running for Assembly) is here to observe.
- Bob Bailey (for Assembly) supports reduction of fire hazards, more fire stations, and the Hillside District Plan. Planning needs to hire more staff or contractors to take on the next steps in comprehensive planning. The "red dots" ("town centers") are still in the footnotes of the Comprehensive Plan, even though removed from the map.

Assembly report (Pat Abney and Dick Tremaine) [Some items have been moved to relevant topics elsewhere]

- First-quarter budget revisions are being considered.
- Abney has received many Emails about municipal flowers and has recommended no reduction in their budget.
- The Heritage Land Bank intends to transfer Section 36 to Parks and Rec, but they want to get a loan and clear beetle-killed trees first.
- Bear Valley Community Council voted to join the fire district.
- Planning is not in the Mayor's list of priorities.

Neighborhood speed limits: Ron Thiel of the MOA Traffic Department said that speed limits are now 25 mph unless

posted otherwise; they propose to lower this to 20 mph. Some neighborhoods are resisting this, mainly in south Anchorage. They would like to change signs from "Speed Limit X" to "Maximum Speed X." They also are experimenting with speed humps (a gentler version of the speed bumps in parking lots). Two or 3 humps in a row, about 300 feet apart, are most effective. Some neighbors object to humps because cars make noise on them.

Discussion: People are speeding on steep streets. Would LRSA's be allowed to put dirt humps in their roads? People are cutting through neighborhoods (fast) to bypass the congested intersection at Rabbit Creek Rd. and Goldenvue.

Thiel can be reached at 343-8410 or theirl@ci.anchorage.ak.us.

Capital projects for RCCC: Abney suggests that Equestrian Heights (on the southeast corner of 142nd and Picket Street, off north Goldenvue) should be bought as park land. A few lots could be sold to recoup the investment. It has Class A and C wetlands.

Muni Planning is working to get CARA-lite funds to purchase some conservation areas for the Muni.

Anchorage Fire Department: Pete Odenthal of the Rabbit Creek Fire Station. The public can reach Station 9 (Huffman) for non-emergency purposes at 267-5009, and Station 10 (Bear Valley) at 345-2555.

The forest fire season starts May 1. He cautioned that AFD expects that it could not control a wildfire on the Hillside before it caused a lot of damage. They would need outside help (state and federal), which takes 24 hours to organize. A fire could burn from Potter Marsh to Service High in 48 hours. They would try to defend some houses, but not ones that lack a "defensible space."

When will open burning be permitted? Pete doesn't know. Ted Pease suggested it ought to be earlier than normally, perhaps as soon as the snow has melted.

Fire-Wise: Sue Rodman of the Anchorage Fire Department and John See of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, presented a program to increase awareness of wildfire danger.

Risks are high because of a lot of dry fuel on the forest floor, beetle-killed trees, and sloping terrain. Human contributions to risk include lack of fire hydrants in our area, too few fire stations, and few north-south roads for fire engine access or resident evacuation. Almost all fires here are started by people. (All local forest fires have been confined to 10 acres or less up to now, but several nearly went out of control.)

The agencies propose to add three fire stations in South Anchorage, which would reduce response time to 4 1/2 minutes; one should go in the lower Rabbit Creek area. However, they still would have only a fraction of the engines needed to save every house.

However, residents should not expect their houses to be saved from a wildfire, unless they take action beforehand. A fire can leap 1/2 mile to ignite the forest, so firebreaks don't help. Each house needs a defensible space of 30 feet around it for fire fighters to try saving it. (A few isolated trees can remain within this perimeter, if they have clear trunks and don't touch the house). Dead spruce should be removed, and forests should be thinned to reduce density of the canopy. Other fuels should be removed near the house—woodpiles, wood fences, etc. It is much better for the whole neighborhood to improve safety than just a few houses.

If a wildfire catches you at home, you should stay in the house until the "running crown fire" passes. You cannot outrun this "thermal pulse," which is 1800° and will almost certainly kill you. The crown fire will be followed by ignition of trees and ground litter, which will soon burn the house. It will be very smoky and hot outside, but it may be possible to escape at this point.

DNR is modeling fire behavior and mapping "fuel loading" to help in predicting fire behavior. They have \$700,000 for this but need much more. Helicopters can get water from a couple of lakes in the area; tankers can use some

streams, and several water tanks will be placed in the area.

AFD and DNR are working on public education. They offer "Fire-wise" training, and they will put on a "defensible space" demonstration at 10:00 AM on May 12, near the southeast corner of Birch and O'Malley. They are also looking for volunteers for a fire simulation exercise on Woodridge Circle on May 5.

Discussion: Fire-retardant shakes can help, but their chemicals leach out within a few years. Are dead or live white spruce more flammable? (DNR believes data support dead trees as worse, but it's still debated.) Can absentee landlords be forced to remove dead trees from their lots? (Pat Abney suggested possibly through the Uniform Fire Code or nuisance ordinances.) What should be replanted for reforestation? (Birch and white spruce.) How can we well or use beetle-killed logs? (No value as whole logs after 2-3 years; they can be chipped, but there is only a limited marked for chips.)

Can we get fire hydrants on the new water line along Elmore and Longbow? Three valves are there, but AWWU wants local residents to pay for installation of the hydrants (because we aren't in AWWU). More road connections are needed on the Hillside; subdivisions currently are approved with only one exit, roads are too narrow, and they need turnarounds. (AFD is working on some of this.)