

RUSSIAN JACK COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

6:30 PM, Wednesday, March 12, 2025

At Zion Lutheran Church – 2100 Boniface Parkway

Present: Ed Leach, Kathleen Plunkett, Will Schneider, Earl Malpass, Clayton Chapman, Susan Heuer, Tara & Nevin Blankenship, Karen Bronga, Arianna Bellizzi, Daniel Holland, Dakota Orm, Dan & Sherry Wright

Present via ZOOM: Mercedes Colbert, Bill Wielechowski, Claire Bredar, James Holzenberg, Purnell Remington, Carl Jacobs, Ted Eischeid, Geoffrey's iPhone

Meeting was called to order at 6:39 pm by President Clayton Chapman

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) Looking at a \$400 million deficit budget for the coming year. House passed education bill which will come to the Senate. Bill to ban cell phones in public schools, which is anticipated to resolve many of the discipline problems in schools. Expectation that CIP projects will not happen as there will be very limited capital budget. They are trying to figure out some of the potential changes if the Federal Department of Education is shut down. Alaska has benefited from lots of federal dollars in the past.

Ed understands Department of Education would shift to the Department of Treasury and the states would determine how and where to spend it.

Kathleen asked about the deficit effect of the Education bill that passed the house. The deficit changes with the price of oil. The deficit of \$150 million is for this fiscal year (till June 30). There are constitutional obligations that have to be paid.

Question from Dan Wright re: HB 89 (Red Flag gun law issue). Bill pointed out this needs to be a question for one of our representatives. Bill doesn't think it is going anywhere and not aware of a similar bill in the Senate.

Karen asked about Elvi Gray-Jackson's bill of rights for homeless and how that will affect abatement efforts. Will come before State Affairs committee. He will take a look at the bill and it will be thoroughly vetted. Bill understands the value of our public lands to our neighborhood.

Sen. Forrest Dunbar – (Seat J) (James Holzenberg provided a report) – 10 bills this session. SB 12 – PFD/Child Support passed out of Senate Judiciary moved to Senate Finance. SB 50 supports local government housing plans on affordable housing. SB 24 e-cig tax bills requiring a person to be 21 years old to purchase. SB 121 re: health insurance reimbursement, setting minimum standards based on market. April 5 Cuddy Hall at 2 pm can get some face time w/Dunbar. Job Fair at North Terminal Ted Stevens Airport tomorrow.

Rep. Genevieve Mina – Seat 19 – (Remington Purnell provided the report) Changes to HB69 included: BSA increase without inflation proofing, allows open enrollment statewide, adopting

cell phone limits, creates an education task force to assess funding and accountability measures, creates provision on charter school contracts, requires Dept of Ed to submit a report on reducing statutory and regulatory burdens on school districts, expands Alaska Reads Act to include from kindergarten to 6th graders. Also working on access to behavioral health services, investments in childcare, public transit and engagement in DOT issues, improvement in EMT services, extend ACA tax credits. Behavioral health legal services and debt credit reporting are bills that have not been introduced yet.

Rep. Ted Eischeid – Seat 22 - Education Committee passed HB 57 – cell phone ban bill. HB 69 \$1000 BSA increase passed. Goes to the Senate next and anticipate some changes. Judiciary hearing today on federal workers that have been terminated (mostly probationary workers). 138 cases are in the queue now for unemployment. Expressed concern about some of those laid off. STIP round 2 presentation from DOT was provided. Meeting at Kava's 10-11:30 am.

Dan asked about HB 89. Ted looked it up – if it moves out of State Affairs it will come to Judiciary. Ted isn't a gun control person. It's not a priority of the House. There are no statistics that these types of legislation actually protects anyone. Education, public safety and roads were the things Ted heard from constituents to work on, and that is what he intends to work on.

Tara asked what steps are being taken to increase public safety in Anchorage? Ted believes that defined benefit pension bill HB 78 is important for law enforcement officers retention which would be anticipated to help with public safety issues.

Rep. Andrew Gray - Seat 20 - (Claire Bredar provided the report) March 22 town hall at the Mexican Ice Cream shop on Tudor. Judiciary Committee heard from recently terminated federal employees. Bill to raise the age of consent from 16 to 18 in Alaska. Property tax relief bill for owners that keep rent affordable and first-time homeowners.

3. Assembly report (3 minutes each)

Christopher Constant Seat 1B – no report

Daniel Volland Seat 1L - MOA is implementing a universal services 1 stop application process for MOA jobs. AMATs plans include both short term (TIP) and long term (MTP) comments on amendments are appreciated. March 18 another meeting on the sales tax proposal and opportunity for public comment.

Karen Bronga Seat 5H - Supports the sales tax that will help with housing and maintenance issues and infuse funds. Public safety efforts are putting cameras in Town Square Park that will allow officers to actually witness and then hopefully arrest those engaged in public drunkenness. Allowed parking for homeless is in discussion, but haven't identified where those places might be. Trash and bathrooms will be provided. March 20 – 21 a conference on homelessness is happening. Karen keeps trying to make some requirements for homeless people that are using public amenities, but the Assembly resists this effort. Ellen Devine new revamp of Adopt a Park which you can choose to participate in helping keep our parks clean.

Sherry Wright commented that she doesn't mind picking up litter when out on a walk, when it is here and there, but the camps would require several dump trucks to pick up all that has been left

behind and citizens should not be expected to clean those up. Tara added that she has observed hazardous waste and materials around campsites.

George Martinez Seat 5I – no report

4. School board report (3 minutes each) – Carl Jacobs a bond proposal on April ballot that include secure vestibule, infrastructure upgrades and snow removal. ASD has paid off many bond debts (from property taxes revenues).

Arianna asked about any adjustments to school start times? The plan right now is to keep them as they were this year. It will be reviewed to see if it is in fact helping student focus. Attendance did improve and tardiness was significantly reduced.

Clayton asked about some of the upgrades included in the bond.

5. FCC report – Kathleen Plunkett – training this weekend that Kathleen, Clayton and Tara attending.

6. Merrill Field Runway Construction Update - Earl Malpass – wanted to be a good neighbor and let us know summer plans. Rehab of the East/West runway will be happening. Same footprint, just leveling. Expecting a 60-day project and flights being re-routed over 15th/DeBarr. They will be working 24 hours per day/7 days per week in order to minimize the duration of the project. They are doing an economic impact study on Merrill Field. It is a lifeline to remote Alaskan communities – mail, freight, transportation, medivac. 844 planes are home boarded at Merrill Field and over 41 businesses. They are 2nd busiest airport in Alaska. The airport is 95 years old with a 100-year celebration planned for 2030.

7. Catalyst Cannabis Company – Will Schneider This group has purchased the old First National Bank property near Boniface & Northern Lights. We had a discussion of special land use permit and Memorandum for our consideration. Will is manager and is finishing application process with state and MOA. They will use 2500 sf in the northern end of the building and plan to rent spaces for other businesses in the southern portion of the building which includes El Gringo and hopefully Chugach Coffee Roasters shop, and plan to have an open cafeteria area so people have meeting space. Part of special land use is bringing their proposal to the community council. Will brought an MOU to our meeting which includes room to address how they will deal with any problems that may arise. Attendance at a community council meeting is one of the last pieces of MOA requirements and they anticipate opening their business mid-June.

Susan recommended we back up and see how the council feels about another Cannabis store opening up in RJCC area.

Ed believes those that are using cannabis will benefit by having a retail outlet closer to their home. Clayton prefers seeing vacant businesses having tenants. Dan & Sherry Wright questioned why we need another place for people to get intoxicated with all the substance abuse problems we have in Anchorage. Will spoke about the tax benefit their sales represent.

Ted appreciates all the perspectives being expressed and believes these businesses often elevate the property values of the area as they purchase run down properties and remodel them.

Ed moved that we support the MOU for the shop at 5305 E Northern Lights. 2nd by Nevin. After some discussion, Sherry Wright moved to table the motion on the MOU so that item 6 of the proposed MOU can have specific issues added and allow time for consideration, then we can vote on it at next month's meeting. Susan Heuer 2nd. Motion to table carried.

8. Federation of Community Councils – Ariana Bellizzi is the new Executive Director (since last March). FCC is funded by an MOA Assembly grant. FCC provides technical support, administrative support, weekly newsletter with issues of importance and consideration for our councils, fiscal sponsorship, and training opportunities for council officers. They have You Tube tutorials. Arianna will talk to Clayton about the Capital Improvements survey at the training session coming up this weekend. FCC is also working on a new website that should be up soon.

9. Neighborhood/Community Announcements - March 13 ADF&G Kenai Brown Bear Research presentation will be online at 7 pm. Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) comments are due by Thursday, March 20. Clayton has a meeting with Mayor next week and Tara will also attend to discuss homelessness, safety and security issues, and Clayton also wants to add a discussion of illegal vehicles. Homeless camp behind the RJSP softball fields is one that Ted runs and was reported last May and is within 100 feet of a groomed trail, violating MOA ordinance, but still present and growing. Lots of us purchased property and even moved to Alaska because of proximity to our beloved parks. They are being abused and ruined by the homeless camps that have, in some cases become emboldened to even putting up "No Trespassing" type signage near their campsites. These are public lands that need to be maintained for public use. The abated camps need to be put back to their natural state, rather than the garbage that has been left behind when camps were initially abated. It is a health and a safety hazard, where we have found condoms, needles, etc laying around the park. While we appreciate the work that has been done, it needs to be more complete.

Next meeting scheduled for April 9th at 6:30 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:
Sherry Wright, Secretary