

# NECC

## Northeast Community Council      General Meeting Minutes April, 2020

Call to order: 7:05

### Introductions

- **Board members present:** T'Shalla Baker, Rachel Boudreau, Donna Mears, Stu Grenier, Charles England, Carla McConnell, Bob Reupke (FCC delegate), Rick Phillips, Liz Snyder
- **Board members absent:** Selina Metoyer

### Legislative Reports

- Senator Wielechowski: Passed a comprehensive bill addressing the COVID-19 crisis; with many, many components. He worked on the ban against price gouging; this lasts for the duration of the emergency disaster declaration. Also worked on a bill to prohibit vehicle repossessions during the emergency. Added a provision that authorizes vote by mail for the November election.
  - He worked on ensuring Alaska gets the \$1.25 billion dollars of federal aid. The question now is what will we use it for, and how can it be used? His office worked on a letter to the Gov. asking for clarification for what he plans to do with the funding. Also requested a legal opinion on how it can be used. Questions about whether the federal aid can be used for items that the Gov. had previously vetoed. The vetoes, if left as is, will result in large increases in property taxes.
  - A big question now is will and how will the Legislature reconvene? Questions over whether votes can be done by Zoom; do the votes have to happen at the LIO? There will be a meeting tomorrow to discuss this in more depth.
    - Question from Rep. LeDoux,: If we convene before the 122 days, do they still need 2/3? Answer: Probably no. But the uniform rules will have to be changed to meet outside of Juneau.
- Rep. LeDoux: Additional items to the COVID-19 bill: sanitation rules for grocery workers, stop on evictions, addressing state loans. As a result of the Legislature going home so early, very little in the way of personal legislation (non-COVID-related) passed the House and the Senate. But some noteworthy ones did: HB 301. Addresses the apprenticeship program, which is great, but the Dept. of Labor came out with new regulations that would gut the apprenticeship program. During public comment, almost no one agreed with the changes. Thus, HB 301 put the current (good) regulations in statute so they couldn't be changed by the Dept. of Labor (future changes will have to go through the Legislature). Another bill relating to the Pioneer Homes passed. The big thing besides the COVID-19 bill was the budget. LeDoux did not vote for the budget because it originally didn't have a PFD in it; and when it came back from the Senate,

it had a \$1000 PFD plus a \$1000 stimulus payment. She is disappointed those funds did not pass, even when there is broad and diverse support for it.

- She's concerned about some of the Gov.'s vetoes, and the use of federal funds to backfill the vetoes. We can't afford to lose any of that federal money. But, there is one veto she did support: vetoed a bunch of money being put away.
- Rep. Spohnholz: They were working on a lot of policy measures before COVID-19 came to the forefront. E.g., the education bill had to be put aside for the time being. Telehealth, however, did get expanded – which is very helpful in our response to COVID-19. Knew unemployment would become an issue; so she introduced a bill (HB 308) that loosened up many of the restrictions on unemployment eligibility (allows people who technically have a job, but don't have any hours assigned to them, i.e., underemployed; don't have to be actively looking for work). She also worked on SB 241 – turned into the omnibus bill to address COVID-19. It started as a disaster bill, but grew to address other concerns (like those listed by Rep. W. above). There was a lot of pushback on the moratorium of evictions (and she's also a landlord), but didn't want to possibly exacerbate the homeless problem.
  - There have been concerns voiced that one party is more likely to vote by mail than the other; but research has not showed this to be the case – it simply increases turnout.
  - In SB 241, they gave the Gov. the authority to declare a disaster to last as late as November.
  - The Legislature can't meet telephonically (like the Assembly can). This should be changed.
  - The Gov. vetoed \$200+ million out of the budget last week, and does not agree with them. The veto cut money to education.
  - It's important to understand how serious our fiscal situation has become. Oil is at \$16.65/barrel. The PF has lost \$10 million in value since January. It's a perfect storm for Alaska. Our budget is typically based on assuming about \$40/barrel. Our budget will be underwater by \$100 million even with no PFD next year, even if oil prices double from today. We've already cut 100s of millions of dollars from the budget. We have several thousand fewer employees than in 2013. We have to find a new way to pay for Government. It's a challenging situation, but we need to be honest about what we're facing.
- Rep. Pruitt: Wants to highlight some additional things that haven't yet been touched on by previous presenters. There is a bill out there to allow a nurse's compact. It didn't move forward due to competing priorities, but important to consider.
  - We are technically still in session. The legal question is whether we can meet via distance. Additional questions about how various committees are supposed to be in the same room to do business. So, there are several legal issues that need to be figured out.
  - The federal funds that will be coming through should be able to be disseminated through existing channels.
  - Now focused on constituent issues now that they're not in Juneau – e.g., unemployment.
  - Checking in on teachers – they're doing a lot of good, hard work. There will be a lot of work to do next year, too.

- Rep. Spohnholz: follow up to unemployment: the CARES act provides a \$600/week benefit to those who are unemployed. But the processing is going to take quite a while, possibly through June. Go ahead and apply though, because the sooner you do it, the closer to the front of the line you are.

## **Assembly Reports**

- Assemblyperson Peterson: They extended the business and personal property tax due date. Been extended 30 days to May 20. Property tax payments now due Aug. 15 and Nov. 30. At most recent meeting, they funded dust control. They also postponed the land exchange between Alaska Sled Dog Association and HLB – want to make sure trail connectivity will be maintained after the exchange.
  - They also voted to strongly encourage the use of face masks in the public by everyone. Masks are being made and should become available soon.
  - 33% turnout for the vote by mail election that just occurred.
- Assemblyperson Dunbar: Peterson is the longest serving Assemblyperson. On Tuesday night they also passed a 25% reduction in permit fees for construction, retroactive to March 12.
  - All the bonds except the Girdwood bond passed. He is pleased.
  - Assembly extended the Mayor's emergency declaration to June. Mayor originally was going to match the Legislature's November date, but backed off due to the rationale for November for the state.
  - Assembly is meeting remotely.
  - Ended utility shutoffs.
  - There will soon be a meeting about the HLB land exchange.
  - Vote by mail has been a wonderful thing. It allowed us to have elections safely. This was a record for a non-Mayoral year.
    - Question: Is the Catalyst application date still happening? Answer: There's a chance the public hearing will be on the 19<sup>th</sup>, but it could be delayed. If the council doesn't get our comments in by the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, we can probably get an extension.

## **Q&A on COVID-19 with UAA Response Team Member (Dr. Liz Snyder, also NECC Board)**

- Please see recording posted to the NECC Facebook page; transcript will be included