

Birchwood Community Council
Minutes for 22 Jan 2014 Meeting

Co-Chair Barbara Trost called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

Persons attending:

Minutes: There were no comments or corrections, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Presentation on the **new Three Bears store at the North Birchwood interchange**. Steve Mierop of the Three Bears Corporation, Kyle Scalise, project manager for the contractor who will be building the store, and Laquita Cheloski, an engineer with Enterprise Engineers presented. Steve showed the elevation drawings for the store, which will be a 'typical Three Bears store, with about 50,000 sq ft of retail space, including groceries, outdoor gear, a liquor store, and a gas station. There will be just under 200 parking spaces. The entrance will be off North Birchwood Loop, slightly north of the Birchwood Crossing church entrance. (Required setbacks from the Glenn off-ramp meant that they could not align with the church driveway.) They are required to do a large retail review, and are scheduled before P&Z for a final review on February 3rd, and before Urban Design Commission (to review highway screening requirements) on Feb 12. They have been through the comment process and now they are before the zoning commission for final review. There will be landscaping, including 30' between the highway and the store that will not be cleared, and additional landscaping with trees between the building and North Birchwood. DOT has approved their traffic impact analysis. There will be separate right and left turn lanes out of the entrance, but (as per DoT standards for this level of expected traffic) no traffic light. The analysis showed satisfactory traffic levels after opening, becoming unsatisfactory only toward the end of 20 years. One resident expressed concern about traffic coming from the Airport direction (from the North on N Birchwood Loop), around a blind corner at 45 mph and suddenly faced with traffic turning left out of the store. Several residents also expressed concerns about traffic on Sunday when the church lets out. Steve says that Sunday is actually their slowest time, and stores don't get busy till mid afternoon. However, Paul (Three Bears operations officer) allows that at end of the 11 AM service could be a rush and traffic problems. Discussion of traffic concerns continues, but the Three Bears presenters reiterate that DOT has reviewed and approved their traffic analysis, and that analysis indicates that separate turn lanes out of the facility will be sufficient. Another resident asks about lighting at the store and parking; P&Z will review their site plan to ensure adequate lighting for safety without minimum light spillover onto other properties. Another resident expresses concern that trucks may park for extended periods of time there; Steve replies that store managers will chase them out if necessary, but this has not been a problem at other stores. Jill asks alcohol policy? Will there be outside signage; how will you keep people from hanging out? There will be just one liquor sign on the face of the building, like the 'grocery' sign. Barb asks if anyone wants the community council to comment at P&Z, and reminds everyone that they can make individual comments on line or at the P&Z meeting. **John Copenhaver moves that we bring our concerns about traffic issues at the new Three Bears store and the possible need for a traffic light**, to the planning and zoning meeting. **Kevin McNamara seconds the motion**, and mentions that we also may need some oversight around plowing and snow berms that impede sight lines. **2 opposed, many in favor, the motion passes.**

Glenn Highway Eagle River Bridge realignment. Barbara Trost introduces Brian Shumacher from DOT, who the co-chairs invited to the meeting to present their project to realign the outbound Glenn. Brian introduces Julie Jesson with HDR, which is helping to develop the RFP. This project will add an additional (third) lane from where it currently ends to somewhere midway between the 2 Eagle River exits. Current funding levels mean that this project will only deal with the outbound (northbound) side of the highway. In addition to adding a third lane, the project will change the alignment so that it will be straight rather than curved, and reduce the grade from 6% to 3.7%. The existing alignments will become frontage roads. The bike trail will stay where it is, on what will become a frontage road. A large cut will start the downhill grade earlier than it does now, and the bridge will be higher. DoT is 1-2 weeks from advertising RFP for this design build project. They should get responses in April or May, make an award later this year and begin the project, which will finish in 2016. There is more information and the opportunity to comment on the project website: eagleriverbridgenb.com. Also, the design-build contractor will have public information and input requirements. No meetings are scheduled yet, but stay tuned; they will e-mail the Council once meetings are scheduled. The infrastructure will be there to eventually add a 4th (interior, HOV) lane. The substructure on bridge will also be adequate for 4 lanes. The initial budget estimate was \$30 to \$40 million, but now it's \$40 to \$50 million. They discovered that Enstar's gas main will need to be relocated, which increased costs. Alan Peck asks where the fill will come from. Much will come from the cut uphill of where they need fill. Kevin McNamara asked about emergency vehicle access to the bike path, once the new road is complete. The existing road and bridge will connect to VFW road and the Eagle River Campground road. It will be great to have alternate bridges. One resident asks about planning to address seismic issues. There are ASHTO seismic guidelines, which the project will follow. Will there be any changes to the off/on at Artillery Road? That is not called for in the proposal, but could be an enhancement if proposers chose to add it. And they will try to coordinate with the Eagle River traffic mitigation project. They would like to isolate the far right lane so that drivers can't weave around – but that's a muni project. Construction will occur off peak hours, over a 3 year period. They will break ground this year, and finish in 2016. The specifics will be up to design build team. The Landfill will accept material they have to get rid of, so trucks to take it away won't be an issue. They've done a noise study, and they will need to put in permanent noise walls along the highway north of artillery road.

Jill Crosby reports on the **MEA substation**. She testified at the P&Z hearing, and Amy Demboski and Kevin McNamara were also there. MEA's application to enlarge Justine Parks substation was denied. Commissioners were concerned that MEA had not followed the public process; that the size made it an industrial development in a residential area; that MEA relied on an inaccurate drainage plan; that the commissioners disagree with MEA's assertion that this is the only possible site; that MEA ignored Bill Starr's offer to help find alternate site. Kevin mentioned that the big issue was definitely the lack of public information. Information was withheld, while much work was done on the site. Amy commented that she was pleased with the outcome. And also happy that that Debbie Osslander, who was instrumental in developing Title 21, was at the meeting to say that this sort of development was not what they envisioned. Amy feels that MEA misrepresented many things in the Star article; she feels that MEA had plenty of time to talk to the P&Z commissioners, and that neighbors did indeed understand the project. Amy sees this as an Anchorage wide issue – it would be a bad precedent to put this kind of massive project in a residential neighborhood. Jill commented that it's a pity that the lots have been cleared, and that MEA paints the opponents as just denying residents reliable electricity. Ms. McNamara thanks everyone for their support.

North Birchwood gravel pit CUP close out. The Muni has closed out the CUP – there is no public input associated with that. Barb notes that there was a landscape plan in the CUP, which she believes was not fully implemented. The Muni requires that their arborist review the area in the spring, to ensure that there are 8” of topsoil on the berm, and in 2015 that the 1400 trees that were planted are still thriving. The muni will also ensure that Eklutna has provided will monitoring data after project close out. Steve Connelly and Jim Arneson are here, and would like to respond to folks’ concerns. Barb says that at the last meeting, nearby residents mentioned that there wasn’t much topsoil, and that the trees were just seedlings. Steve mentions that they were always intended to be seedlings, and the trees he planted averaged about 12”. Eklutna is are required to guarantee that they thrive for 2 years. Jim notes that near the entrance to the site, natural re-vegetation is starting to take over. The Council will monitor this – we are not taking any action now. Jim also notes that they extended the berm somewhat when a neighbor asked. They have a temporary tenant in the property – a contractor working for MEA, putting in electric lines for their new power plant. The contractor is using the area as their staging ground for the poles, which come in by rail, and are trucked from there to where they need to be installed. This contractor should only be there about 6 months, and will generate only about 10 truck trips per month over that time. Jim offers to show residents the property in the summer. Eklutna is advertising it, and the Alaska RR may be interested in using it. Jill asks if we are moving towards more tenants there, will it increase traffic? Jim replies that the property is well suited to users of train traffic, which will limit road traffic increases, but eventually traffic on North Birchwood Loop will increase. All of us need to convince DOT to upgrade the road. Kevin thinks it would be difficult to upgrade the road because of right of way limitations. Jim thinks there could possibly be an alternate road; and Eklutna would like to see an additional interchange on the Glenn Highway between North and South Birchwood as well.

Jim also speaks to the **Eklutna Overlay district**, by the village of Eklutna. The tribe would like to preserve this area as an indigenous community, with their traditional life ways. Many things already run through the village area – the RR, utilities, etc–the village wants to protect itself from overdevelopment. Amy tells us that the Assembly wants to CERAB (the new Chugiak Eagle River Advisory Board) to look at it – since the initial board members will be approved Jan 28, once they have time to meet and send the issue back to the assembly, it will be at least March.

Eric Croft from the Anchorage school board presents about the **Anchorage School District Budget**. ASD can only spend what they bring in. For the last 4 years, the State Foundation Formula funding has been flat. The district has worked hard to control costs, but there are cost increases nonetheless. This year with no budget changes there would be a \$45 Million deficit, last year ASD had to cut \$25 million to stay out of deficit. Last year they cut administrative and support positions, but not teachers. This year they will have to cut teachers as well as more administrative and support positions. He is often asked why they don’t move money around. The Legislature has provided capital money for a variety of projects, but those are separate pots of money, and can’t be used for operating costs. First, they legally must be used for the legislative intent, and second, these are one time dollars, and it would be foolish to fund on-going operating expenses with one-time money. The Legislature has also provided grants to help with unfunded pension liability costs. This is helpful to the district, but that money, also, can not be diverted to operations. We have unfunded pension liability because the state-managed PERS and TRS funds (Public Employee Retirement System and Teacher Retirement System) charged the districts too little in in the 90s. Now we are trying to put enough money into the funds to pay the pension obligations when they come due. Local property taxes to school districts are capped, and the district cannot ask for more local taxes than are already in the budget. The district is currently discussing funding of SROs (School Resource Officers, policemen assigned to the schools) with muni, because the district budget cannot support them. Cost

control has included careful labor negotiations. But health care is driving everyone's costs up. Anchorage doctors charge more than doctors elsewhere. Eric notes that they are working hard to both control costs and improve student performance. Kevin asks how the employee share of health care costs compares to private sector employees. The current contract caps ASD's increases in health care costs – anything over the cap falls onto employees or the trust that runs the insurance. The State has proposed taking over the trust that runs the health insurance, but Eric is not sure that would be an improvement. Another person notes that military pensions are on the block right now, so perhaps teacher pensions can be reviewed. He also thinks SROs are valuable. Kevin asks how adding an extra class period will save money. Eric explains that the savings come from increased student loads on each teacher (so fewer teachers). But with an extra period, schools don't have to reduce their course offerings. The trade-off is that there is less instructional time for each class, shorter passing times in some schools, and teachers have increased workloads. Kevin is concerned about the reduced instructional time for students. If we stay with 6 periods, we will offer fewer classes and still cut teacher positions. ASD will ask the State for an increase in the base student allocation, and is asking Muni to take over SRO costs.

Amy Demboski has several items to tell us about. She spoke with Jeff Hartley, of the Birchwood Community patrol, because she had a complaint from a constituent about partying. On the issue of SRO funding, she has asked for a review of the program's funding and effectiveness. Perhaps they need to look at the APD contract. The Chugiak Eagle River Advisory Board (CERAB) membership is on the assembly agenda for Jan 28th. CERAB will review Title 21 and chapter 10 issues across the Chugiak and Eagle River area. The Labor ordinance vote must go on the ballot, but mayor's veto of the April date stands. She thinks the Assembly probably will not override the veto, and must decide on new date. The tennis court issue is resolved, which released the money for the McDonald Center renovations. The Chugach State Park access plan has passed P&Z, and is on its way to the Assembly. That plan identifies potential access points to CSP. It is somewhat controversial because it identifies some private parcels that could be acquired for access. It is not what it means if your parcel is identified in the plan.

The Community Council ordinance is on the agenda for Tuesday night's meeting (January 28), and she thinks it will be passed at that meeting. Barb lists things that might affect our council. 1) Councils would be required to hold 4 meetings each year, and at least one per quarter. This would affect us, but not a lot. 2) Ordinance would make 16 and 17 year olds voting members. 3) There is a section that allows assembly review of CC activities – Bobbi did not like that. Amy notes that another change is in whether councils can require prior meeting attendance for members to vote. Councils have varied on this. The Downtown council particularly wants this prior attendance requirement. This ordinance would remove that ability, except for voting for officers. Alan asks why 16 year olds as voting members is in there? Dick Traini really wants it, and the ombudsman feels it brings parity with some boards and commissions that allow 16 year olds. Others wonder if that age group is able to understand some of the issues that come before councils. (The ordinance does note that members must be 18 to hold a fiduciary role.) Alan is concerned that he sees kids at meetings as government homework who try to vote, without being engaged in the council. Eric, and Bobbi, and Barb, all think that a well-meaning effort to provide guidance has gone too far and is too restrictive. It's also been difficult to participate in the meetings about this ordinance as they've been during the work week. Lexi moves that ***the Birchwood Community Council resolves that the proposed Community Council ordinance is too prescriptive, and should be shortened to only those sections necessary to ensure councils operate legally and responsibly. Because public input has been largely restricted to the work week, Councils have not had time to determine what those sections should be,***

and we ask the assembly to not take any action on this ordinance but to table it until Councils can provide more specific guidance. Seconded by Ray. The motion passes.

Jill reads **report of Birchwood Community Patrol**. All appreciate.

It is moved, seconded and passed to extend the meeting 5 minutes.

Barb solicits input on development of NW quarter, since Parks and Recreation wants to move forward on this in the summer of 2014. There is no time to discuss the issue tonight, but a group has been working on what should be done, and we will send out their recommendations. John Rodda may come to our next meeting.

Federation of Community Councils representative: We do not have one, and have not had one for some time. FCC has a Community Council training all day on March 1. They want names by Friday, Feb 14th. John Muldowney introduces himself. Lives on Snowflower court off Peters Creek and is a chaplain's assistant. He is interested in FCC, but lives in the Chugiak Community Council area.

Theresa Daily reminds us that the Monofill has not gone away, this issue will rise again.

Maria Rentz (Chugiak CC) mentions Parks and Rec's request for feedback on potential skateboard park in Loretta French Park. For more info, go to next P&R meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:04