



# GOVERNMENT HILL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

c/o Community Councils Center • 1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100  
Anchorage, AK 99503

Jody Sola, President

Stephanie Kesler, Vice President

Peter Partnow, Secretary

Susanne DiPietro, Treasurer

Bob French, FCC Representative

Pete Murphy, Greg Miller, Ron Clark, At-Large Board Members

## GHCC Meeting Minutes

### March 18, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Submitted by Susanne DiPietro (substituting for P. Partnow)

Meeting conducted via Zoom called to order at 6:32 p.m. by President Jody Sola.0

1. **Introduction of Attendees.** Attendees identified via Zoom appearance and noted on the virtual sign-in sheet provided with these minutes.
2. **Approval of Agenda.** Stephanie Kesler moved to approve the agenda; Pete Murphy seconded and the motion passed unanimously.0
3. **Approval of Minutes.** Pete Murphy moved to approve the meeting minutes from February; Stephanie Kesler seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.0
4. **Legislative Updates**

#### State Legislature - Senator Tom Begich

Senator Begich explained that outbreaks of COVID had occurred at the Capitol in the Senate and now the House. The outbreaks hampered legislative business, but did not stop it. One Senate staff member was hospitalized.

Senator Begich discussed the budget and revenue plans. At Day 60 the Governor has yet to submit a budget plan, so legislators have put forward bills to fill the gap. An income tax bill would generate about \$1.4B but is unlikely to pass. The Governor has talked about a sales tax, which Sen. Begich said he could support with an exemption for medical, food, and other essentials, and assurances that it would not negatively impact rural Alaska. On the revenue side, Senator Begich has introduced a bill to increase property taxes by 1% on oil companies, which could raise about \$220M. The funds would go to munis to reimburse them for tax exemptions and to the state education fund. Another bill, by Sen. Wielechowski, would repeal oil company tax credits. Senator Begich also explained the need to revise the Permanent Fund Dividend formula. He has discussed this issue with Governor, and they both believe the formula should be locked into a constitutional amendment. He reminded the group that the permanent fund dividend is the largest portion of state's budget. The Permanent Fund needs to be about \$8B more than it is now at a minimum. Sen. Begich has supported the idea of a spending cap tied to inflation that would account for emergencies, but he would not support a constitutional spending cap.

The American Recovery Act is expected to amount to about \$1.1B in revenue for Alaska. The House is considering staying in session through Day 130 to be able to put parameters around that spending, to ensure meaningful expenditures and not simply excess dividends. The Governor has indicated he would like to see a jobs bill and also an infrastructure bill. Now the question is whether the Legislature will authorize a general obligation bond to be placed on the ballot for consideration by the voters.

A number of minority bills are moving right now, including Senator Begich's own education bill. Although the committee substitute will contain some components that he does not support, there will

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be future opportunities to fine-tune it. In the bill currently is free tuition for frontline essential workers, for those who lost jobs or kept jobs but had to put themselves at risk to work. The third referral will be to the Senate Finance Committee. The bill can be funded with CARES Act money. Other bills currently moving address climate change and retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency. Senator Begich listed projects he had included in the capitol budget at the request of and for the benefit of Government Hill, including fencing for the Commons (\$70K), an irrigation system for the Commons(\$20), and \$20K for park improvements, signs and wayfinding. Other capitol budget items include a water source for Sunset Park (\$10K), and Richardson Vista Park improvements (\$20K). If these items ultimately are not included in the capitol budget, and the Legislature does move forward with the general obligation bond, Sen. Begich will attempt to include them in the GO. Alternatively, the federal CARES Act also has infrastructure money that potentially could be used. Funds could be available after July 1. (Mr. Walch indicated that the House is looking at these as well.)

**Anchorage Assembly - Christopher Constant.** Mr. Constant said that Anchorage will be the first city in the nation to host a drive up, no appointment vaccination event. He shared that folks in Anchorage generally are embracing opportunities to get vaccinated, and the city is on the verge of opening back up substantially more. Middle schools and high schools are now open. First quarter budget revisions are coming up. Because of FEMA spending, the MOA has underspent in some areas. Also, the Assembly will soon begin a robust public process to discuss CARES Act funding, how the MOA spent money previously received, and how additional funds should be spent going forward. Six meetings are scheduled over the course of the next month. MOA will receive the first half of the funds soon and the rest 12 months later. MOA probably will spend about 25% very quickly on pressing needs.

Mr. Constant reminded the group that we should soon receive our municipal ballots in the mail. He urged everyone to vote.

Follow up from last month's discussion of the Tract J Property: DEC will write letter saying that the property is ready to go.

**State Legislature - Rep Zack Fields.** Tristan Walsh, aide to Rep. Fields, explained that the House is working through the budget process, and the session probably will last at least 120 days or longer. There is a proposal for a child care tax credit for employers who want to help their employees afford child care. There is a bill to make permanent the Governor's emergency regulations regarding raffles. Other bills being worked on by Rep Field's office include a bill to help address links between apprenticeship and credits at high school, a resolution urging more federal funding for the Port of Alaska, and (filed this week) a bill to prevent the state from closing or privatizing certain rural Division of Motor Vehicles offices.

5. **Treasurer's Report.** Ms. DiPietro reported no deposits and no expenditures since last month and the balance is unchanged.

## 6. Community

**Mayoral Race.** Ms. Sola explained that Mayoral candidate Bill Falsey had asked to be on the GHCC agenda, and she had scheduled him to address us, but she inadvertently sent him he wrong date. He indicated he would try to drop in.

**DHSS COVID Vaccine Information.** Dr. Olp and Cassi Campbell are with DHSS . Dr. Olp

explained that the goal of all vaccines is to prevent the worst outcomes of a disease. With COVID the worst outcomes are death and hospitalization. The three approved vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson) are all highly effective at preventing the severe outcomes (about 89% effective generally but almost 100% effective protecting against death). Common Side effects of the vaccine: 1-2 days. pain at injection site, which can migrate. Vaccines elicit an immune response to build up natural defenses (B cells and T cells), and this can manifest with muscle aches, headache, fever under 100 degrees, and some fatigue. Those who've had COVID in the past might experience these symptoms a little bit more than those who haven't. Some experience a little more of a reaction with the second shot. Severe reactions are very rare, but can include severe rash on the body, and severe swelling particularly in throat (anaphylactic reaction). However, these rare reactions also are seen in other vaccines, medicines, and even from eating food and breathing air. The federal Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration are collecting information about adverse reactions. The trials of the vaccines involved about 30K volunteers, but now that millions are being vaccinated, they are on the lookout for any other rarities. Information about reactions will updated as time goes on. Those receiving the vaccine get a form explaining how they can submit their information to the monitoring project.

The ultimate goal is to get as many shots into arms as possible, and ultimately to achieve "herd immunity." Some aren't able to get vaccinated and some will refuse for whatever reason, but the more people who get vaccinated the better. High vaccination rates enable communities to start to open and get back to a sense of normal. Also important is for people to be vaccinated before these variants start to come into our space. We might be looking at boosters to combat the variants.

Bob French asked about the best way to convince friends or colleagues who have a "wait and see" mindset. Dr. Olp explained that you can wait and see but COVID won't wait for you. The risk is that a person could infect others. One tactic is to model the behavior - share our stories of getting the vaccine and positive experiences. There is a lot of negative misinformation. Those with specific worries can be directed to these types of community outreach events to ask their questions. Folks are well within their rights to ask about their concerns. The public health community wants folks to feel heard.

Mr. Constant said he saw a study showing that talking to a trusted personal doctor is an effective approach for vaccine resistance. Dr. Olp agreed that talking to any trusted individual is effective, including an elder in the community or faith-based leaders.

In response to a question about the presence of variants in Alaska, Dr. Olp did not have the most recent numbers but confirmed that Alaska does have documented cases of the variants. They are being tracked on the DHSS web site.

**8. JBER Update.** Denny Hostetter, JBER public affairs representative said the honorary commanders program is coming up soon. Unit commanders are partnered with a member of the community. Those who have a passion for the military or who are influential are encouraged to apply. He also reminded the group that if you want to recreate on JBER, you must register through I-Sportsman or call 552-8609.

## **9. Old Business**

**Tract J Dog Park.** Steve Ribuffo said the POA heard back from JBER and the Army Corps of Engineers that they no longer have an interest in the property, and any current restrictions are solely related to environmental conditions. POA is waiting for the Department of Energy to send its concept design for the proposed solar array. POA would then overlay the solar with what the community is proposing. POA has the plat including Tract J and the terms and conditions of the quitclaim to review as well.

Bob French noted that Tract J is a very large piece of property, and the community is wondering if it could include a buffer area. Mr. Gerlek asked if the transfer process were started soon, could we have something going this summer. Mr. Ribuffo said that is possible.

## 10. Business updates

**Alaska Railroad.** Tim Sullivan, spokesperson for the Alaska Railroad, said the summer schedule will not start until May 29. Reservations are slow. The schedule will include regular service to Seward and the Spencer glacier. The normal schedule to Denali will be reduced. There will be no spring service. Mr. Sullivan said freight is picking up a bit but is still lower than pre-COVID.

**Crowley.** Greg Miller not present.

**Port of Alaska.** Steve Ribuffo, Port Director, said that the 2021 construction season is being planned. Mooring dolphins will be installed this summer to finish the in-water portion of project (expected to be completed in August).

Regarding the lawsuit with MARAD, Mr. Ribuffo reported that the trial is over and the judge has asked both sides to prepare a summary of their cases in lieu of closing arguments. The summaries are due July 2, after which the judge will schedule a Q&A session with attorneys, and then rule.

Following up on a question from last month re: vapor recovery systems on the petroleum dock, Mr. Ribuffo said there are none on the petroleum cement terminal. There is no requirement for vapor recovery inbound. The POA ships fuel out only. He added that all the tanks have floating roofs. Bob French noted that the local air quality improved drastically after installation of floating roofs on the older tanks. Mr. Gerlek said fuel can still be smelled from the greenbelt trail, although most of the problem was resolved.

## 11. Committee Updates

**Federation of Community Councils.** Mr. French said he had missed the most recent meeting.

**Anchorage Metro Area Transportation Solutions.** Mr. French said AMATS has not met since GHCC's last meeting.

**Parks.** Mr. French reported that a small group working on the Parks master plan is planned for Monday March 22. Public meetings will be coming late April and May.

## 12. President's report

March 18,2021

Minutes

Ms. Sola said it is time to put together our list of requests to be included in the MOA's Capital Improvement Project funding stream.

Ms. Sola said she received a speeding complaint from last month about Harvard. She asked for and received an immediate response from Officer Reiberg. He wrote a report explaining that a few tickets were issued but it was pretty quiet. APD may set up a speed study one or two times next year to follow up.

Mr. French moved to adjourn; John McKay seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:59 pm.