

**Eklutna Valley Community Council**  
**January 12, 2022**  
**Meeting minutes**

The meeting was chaired by council president Rick Sinnott and began at 6:35 p.m. The council met at Chugach State Park's Dolly Varden cabin. Seventeen council members were present: Dan Thompson, Margan Grover, Buff and Deb Rix, Keith and Vicki Darby, Lisa and Rick Sinnott, Gwyn Wiedmer, Linda Hilton, Josiah Trout, Teal Heller and Russ Carpenter, Kirk Alkire, Leif Hovland, Barry Rogers, and Todd Hehl. Kayli Thompson, with Scope Permitting, and Aaron Moore, Leif's facility manager, attended the meeting in support of Leif's proposed plan to request a conditional use permit for his 20 acres of residential land (zoned CE-R-9) behind the ice cream shop. Members of at least five households who regularly attend were unable to be there because they were unavailable, uncomfortable attending a public meeting indoors, sick, or waiting for the results of COVID tests.

The meeting was held at the Dolly Varden public use cabin because it is slightly larger than the ranger station and so our assemblage wouldn't contaminate the park ranger's office environment with COVID. Rick had asked people to consider wearing masks and every person did. This allowed us to have our first indoor meeting in nearly two years, so thanks to everyone for that.

The meeting agenda was approved unanimously. The minutes of the August 18, 2021, meeting were approved unanimously with no changes.

Dan Thompson reported that the council still has \$578.38 in its account.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

**Local crime report.** Nothing significant to report.

**Warning sign.** The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT) approved our request for winter road hazard signs and placed one at the bottom of Eklutna Lake Road and one just uphill from the water treatment plant, where the road narrows and gets more winding.

**Request for guardrails.** At our last meeting Rick agreed to write a letter asking for a guardrail at the bottom of the long hill (aka Auto Parts Corner). The letter was sent to DOT and Senator Lisa Murkowski. DOT is still evaluating our request.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Plan and application for a conditional use permit for a recreational or vacation camp.** Leif and Kayli presented a plan for a recreational facility on the 20 acres of residential property zoned CE-R-9 behind the ice cream shop. The facility would be called Lazy Bear Lodge.

During her presentation on the permitting process, Kayli mentioned that the municipal zoning ordinances and Chugiak-Eagle River comprehensive plan allow recreational or vacation camps on residential property such as Leif's. She also told us that Leif is definitely willing to hear everyone's opinions and get our ideas, and he wants to work with the community.

Rick clarified that recreational camps are not allowed per se, but that they could be allowed if approved by the municipality. Kayli confirmed that this is the case. A conditional use permit isn't guaranteed.

Over the course of the meeting it became evident that the current development plan is asking for more than Leif says he wants or plans to build. Leif and Kayli said the municipal planning staff told them they only have one shot at obtaining a conditional use permit and that they should put every possible thing they might ever want to do in the plan. They also said their architect went a little overboard in drawing both the site plan and the cabin schematics. Leif and Kayli volunteered to revise the plan extensively and bring it back to the community council before they submit their final proposal to the municipality. Council members agreed that this was a great idea and that, if the plans aren't extensively revised, the tenor of our comments will be very different.

**Because members who could not attend have asked to see the original plan, it is attached to these minutes with the caveat that Leif and Kayli have agreed to make many significant changes to it, so the next version they have agreed to share with the community council, before submitting the plan to the municipality, ought to look very different.**

Following is a summary of the proposal and the changes that Leif agreed to make.

In brief, the site maps, cabin schematics and written description of the project indicate that the recreational camp would consist of up to 20 cabins distributed throughout the property (the site map shows proposed locations for 17 cabins). The cabins will be two stories and 1,200 square feet. The schematic drawings of cabin floor plans show a bedroom, loft bedroom, great room, kitchen and bathroom with a toilet and shower. The cabins will be on pilings. Each cabin will have parking for 1-2 cars adjacent to the unit. The cabins will accommodate up to 80 guests. Leif and Kayli said the cabins are modeled after those used by "Salted Roots" in Seward.

A 2,000-square-foot retreat center or "clubhouse," which could be rented out to "businesses, groups or individuals," will be located near the ice cream shop. The facility will also host "group hikes, e-bike trips, and wellness classes." Skip and Tena's former house will become the lodge office. Ryan's former house will be used for a maintenance office and storage. The number of employees at the facility "will vary but will likely be limited." Apparently, no one will live on site as a caretaker.

The municipal use determination, dated October 6, 2021, which was based on information provided by Leif, states that water will be supplied by "wells" and wastewater will be held in holding tanks and emptied weekly or as needed by a local service.

**Permits** – Lisa asked if Leif has permits for the land clearing and other activities already underway. Leif said he has a letter from Jack Frost, the municipality's chief of code enforcement, "saying that I'm fine to continue doing what I'm doing."

**Noise** – One of the major concerns is noise, both current and anticipated. Dan pointed out the value of quiet and how different our community is from Chugiak and Birchwood, in part due to the "amphitheater" formed by the surrounding mountains in which sounds are not as quickly dissipated by the surrounding forest. The most immediate concern expressed at the meeting is the noise created by the dozers and excavator clearing and grading on the 20 acres. Many members complained about the banging and beeping that can be heard from the dam pond to

the Thon's house approximately 6 hours a day every day of the week, even on Christmas and New Year's day. Leif said he wasn't aware that the noise was as bad as it is. He immediately agreed that the noise was excessive and **he agreed to shut down the equipment on weekends and not start work before 9 a.m.** He also offered to put tape over the backup alarm beepers, but several members advised him not to do that due to safety concerns.

Leif said he isn't going to put in additional electrical lines because he doesn't want them to "dig through everything" or put power poles on the property. Instead, he plans to provide each cabin with a diesel generator. This raised concerns about generator noise. Leif said the generators would be under the cabins and "you won't be able to hear them from 10 feet away, probably." However, the architect's drawings show that the cabin floors will be elevated about five feet above the ground and no baffling or other barriers are shown. After comments by Dan, who asked what the decibel level of the generators would be, and Linda saying that based on her experience guests wouldn't want a generator, Leif **agreed that he would not use generators.** He didn't propose an alternative, although he liked the idea of solar power and asked about its feasibility in the valley.

Several members asked about events and the noise they might generate. The plan lists several types of events that would be "ideal," including corporate events, weddings, small group events and reunions. The conditional use determination also lists wellness classes, group hikes, and bike trips. Kayli also mentioned bike tours; however, Leif and Aaron said **they do not intend to lead group hikes or bike trips.** Leif said the municipal planners talked him into providing a gathering area, i.e., the retreat center, adding "but that would be more or less if you were having weddings or something and that would be not something I want to do really." Leif added, "I never planned on weddings." Dan asked about quiet hours. Leif said **he would have quiet hours,** adding "I don't want parties at these cabins."

In response to questions about motorized vehicles, Leif said **he will not allow snowmachines or four-wheelers** unless they are electric. He plans to provide electric golf carts for guests to access their cabins (although the site plan shows parking for two cars at each cabin).

The cabins might only be open in the summer. Linda asked about water freezing in the holding tanks. Leif said that if the cabins are used in winter he won't provide water because he doesn't want to insulate the tanks.

**Number of cabins** – The plans provide for up to 20 cabins. The site map shows only 17 cabins scattered throughout the 20 acres and a retreat center near the ice cream shop. On the map the retreat center appears to be the same size as the cabins; however, the plans say it will be twice as large, about 2,000 square feet. Council members repeatedly questioned the advisability of 20 cabins. The property is zoned CE-R-9, which would allow up to 10 houses on the 20 acres. Several residents pointed out that a 1,200-square-foot cabin would be as large or larger than their home. In effect, 20 cabins will double the existing limit on occupancy. Leif said that the municipal planners told him to indicate the highest number of cabins that he might ever want to build. He said he plans to start slow, building perhaps only a couple of cabins initially.

He said he doesn't have the money to build 20 cabins "right away." He also said he'd like to see how it went with fewer cabins before he built more. Leif said he "never even told the architect 20 cabins," to which Kayli added, "he [the architect] just kind of went for it." Leif also said, "I don't want to manage 20 cabins, so the biggest thing to me is just finding a happy medium."

Leif said, “Honestly, in my mind, I don’t see many more than five cabins going up on that property.” Shortly after that he implied the topography wouldn’t support many cabins so he “probably could only do five cabins.” Later, he said “three, five cabins spread over 20 acres” that others “can’t see from their property, that doesn’t impact the community as far as traffic and noise, sounds okay to me.” Finally, when we were discussing revising the project Leif said, “**We can revise it to five cabins,**” adding at some point, “That’s all it would be and, honestly, it would be on the bottom half.”

**Retreat center** – Vicki asked if the retreat center would be built the same time as the cabins. In response, Leif said, “They made us do that,” and “**Nobody wants an outdoor retreat center.** I mean, will it be used? Probably not.”

**Fires and fire safety** – Leif said **the cabins will not have woodstoves.** He was initially uncertain about providing fire pits for each cabin. Council members convinced him that isn’t a good idea because they won’t be supervised like they are in the park. Leif **agreed to not provide fire pits for each cabin, but left open the possibility of a single fire ring for events.**

Leif said he is clearing trees because they are “all dead” – at least on the bottom 10 acres – and he’s worried about fire. Clearing the property has left lots of piled up tree trunks and slash. When Aaron said something about following municipal guidelines for burning, Leif said **he will not burn the slash.**

**Water and wastewater** – The plan says “wells” but Leif said **he isn’t planning on drilling any wells** in addition to the one that already provides water to the existing buildings. He said **each cabin will have a 40-gallon tank for freshwater, a 40-gallon tank for gray water and a 40-gallon tank for sewage.** He plans to fill and empty tanks weekly or as needed.

Russ asked about the showers in the cabins. Leif said **there will be no showers in the cabins,** even though the plan shows them. He expects guests to shower and do their laundry in the existing facility, the same building as the ice cream shop. Russ also questioned whether 40 gallons was enough for four guests. Leif wasn’t sure.

Presumably, the gray water from the sink and black water from the toilet would be emptied into the septic system installed last summer. According to Leif and Aaron, the existing water and septic lines were not buried deep enough. They have buried them deeper, but they are still having “water issues.”

**Trails** – Leif said he has already built trails throughout the 20 acres and hardened them with gravel.

**Trash and bears** – Leif said **each cabin will have a bear-proof trash receptacle.** He plans to get a bear-resistant dumpster from Waste Management before summer.

**Traffic** – Linda pointed out that with 20 cabins at full occupancy, with two couples per cabin, there could be up to 40 additional vehicles on Eklutna Lake Road on a regular basis. Deb said the road wasn’t designed to handle heavy traffic and never would be. Leif said the municipality hasn’t given them any guidance on the road and only seemed concerned about where guests would park.

**Wi-Fi** – Leif plans to provide a free Wi-Fi signal for all guests.

**Skip and Tena's former house** – According to Leif and Aaron, **no one has moved into Skip and Tena's former house** due to ongoing issues with the septic system, and because the house isn't insured. No one is living in the apartment over the ice cream shop, also due to septic issues. Aaron said they are replacing the staircase in the house because it is too narrow to carry furniture up and down, and the interior walls have been removed down to the studs ("completely gutted" according to Aaron). Leif speculated that he might remove the house's additions, leaving only the original A-frame.

**Other plans** – Leif and Aaron said **the ice cream shop will open April 15**. An Arizona family is coming north to run the facility. They are expected to arrive around April 1. They won't live in either house, which will become office and storage space. Leif said they would live in Wasilla.

The shower and laundry facility will remain open all year if there's enough demand to support it.

Leif had contemplated building a gas station and convenience store on the commercial property; however, he gave that idea up after talking to Linda. He also has no plans to put in a restaurant.

**Project timing** – One of the first steps in obtaining a conditional use permit or zoning waiver from the municipality involves meeting with the community council. This would have been that meeting. However, Lisa observed that the written plan we were looking at bore little resemblance to the project that Leif told us he actually wants, and he committed to making many revisions in this meeting. There are at least 10 instances, for example, where what we heard in this meeting contradicted or clarified what was shown in the plan. Lisa asked if Leif and Kayli **would revise the plan and bring it back to the community council before taking it back to the municipality**. Both Leif and Kayli agreed to do so. Kayli said she had begun drafting a conditional use packet with much more information in it but she had wanted to hear from the community first before she shared it with us. They will also ask the architect to redraw the site plans. Kayli said, "there's going to be a full report," and believed it would be possible to meet again in March or April. Leif said, **"I wouldn't want to start construction this year anyways."**

The meeting adjourned at about 7:45 p.m.