

Eklutna Valley Community Council
October 4, 2022
Meeting minutes

The meeting was chaired by council president Rick Sinnott and began at 6:35 p.m. The council met at the Chugach State Park ranger station. Twenty-four council members were present: Dan Thompson, Margan Grover, Buff and Deb Rix, Glen and Mary Keller, Erlinda Downing, Lisa and Rick Sinnott, Gwyn and Mike Wiedmer, Josiah Trout, Tom and Helen Bohn, Teal Heller, Derek and Melissa Lampert, Bob Reagan, Linda Hilton, Debbie and Steve Thon, Brian and Debbie Slater, and Shane Sherwood. Dave Briseno, the park's winter caretaker, was also present.

The meeting agenda was approved unanimously with one addition. Erlinda asked for an update on the Salmon Relay. The agenda was erroneously dated October 12, but nobody caught that. The minutes of the May 12, 2022, meeting were approved unanimously with no changes.

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

OLD BUSINESS

History minute. A piece of Eklutna Alex's cabin washed ashore near the lake's outflow in September. The cabin was built in 1927 and fell into the lake about 18 years ago. Steve Thon found it, Debbie Thon reported it, Dan and Margan investigated it and reported the find to the Native Village of Eklutna and state authorities, and Rick wrote about it. The two gable-end logs were rescued by Ranger Keith Wilson and returned to the village. Eklutna Village is hoping to display the piece with interpretive information, and details may eventually help in the reconstruction of the cabin for historical purposes.

Eklutna Alex was a chief and the last self-professed shaman of the local Dena'ina tribe. People from the Native Village of Eklutna were very grateful for the effort.

Local crime report. A report that Russ and Teal's property had been robbed twice this summer was corrected when Teal arrived a little later and told us it happened once. No other suspicious activity was reported.

Ice cream shop and proposed recreational lodge and cabins. Leif Hovland sent Rick an email dated September 26 regarding his plans for this winter, and Rick relayed the main points. Leif has been busy and has not pursued the conditional use permit application, so the vacation rental cabin project is on hold for now. He said he is no longer contemplating 20 cabins – maybe 5-8 cabins if possible – but he thought that five would be more manageable. There won't be any equipment operating this winter other than a loader to plow snow, and we will more than likely only see him and his family at the property.

907-E-Bike. The e-bike rental business that operated all summer next to Twin Peaks Treats is closing down. Leif said insurance was prohibitively expensive. Leif will more than likely move the Conex box office and storage off the property, and he has parted company with the business owners Aaron and Sierra Moore.

NEW BUSINESS

Kevin Cross visit. Our Assembly member expressed an interest in attending this meeting but didn't make it.

Restoration of Eklutna River. The Assembly has been considering a resolution in support of restoring the Eklutna River. Assembly member Cross was in support of this resolution. Rick, unaware that it had been passed, prepared a draft resolution in support of the Assembly resolution (AO No. 2022-262), with a request to add Eklutna Valley Community Council to the list of collaborators. During the discussion Brian mentioned that the Assembly had just passed their resolution. It was too late to ask to be an official collaborator; however, Rick is an unofficial collaborator, so all is not lost.

Proposal to add Chugiak-Eagle River to the municipality's Building Safety Service Area. Debbie Ossiander, chair of the Birchwood Community Council, shared a concern they have with a proposal to add Chugiak and Eagle River to the municipal Building Safety Service Area. This would require individuals to obtain building permits, rather than land use permits, and require that municipal safety inspectors supervise construction of new buildings. We believe this may be in response to a municipal report which attributed the many building failures found after the November 2019 earthquake to inadequate adherence to building safety requirements. Everyone in the municipality is already required to conform to the building safety codes, but adherence is left to the builders and there seems to be little enforcement. One Assembly member appears to be pushing this issue, believing that the Assembly can just make it happen. However, others in the community have argued that we would have to vote for the change.

The Chugiak-Eagle River Advisory Board will meet on October 15 to discuss and, if necessary, send the Assembly a resolution. Bob Reagan, our representative on the advisory board, led the discussion at our meeting. Comments ranged from (I'm paraphrasing) "we don't like government telling us what to do" and "waiting for inspections will take too long" and "this is just a way for the muni to raise money" to "a lot construction in Chugiak and Eagle River is shoddy because it isn't inspected" and "who wants to buy or try to sell a house that can't pass a safety inspection?" Bob will use our input to help him decide how to vote on the resolution. Because some relevant issues are still unclear, Bob will send us the latest information he has before the advisory group meeting so council members can have an informed say. I will immediately pass on whatever new information he sends to me and you can communicate with Bob directly.

Wildfire planning and mapping. At our last meeting Jen Schmidt, a professor with the University of Alaska-Anchorage's Institute for Social and Economic Research, showed us maps she has compiled that assess wildfire risks in the Municipality of Anchorage. Jen is now planning for future wildfires, and our community council has been invited to attend a series of six workshops in Anchorage.

Margan attended the first two meetings and it seems like a worthwhile effort. The municipality's existing Community Wildfire Protection Plan is about 15 years old and inadequate. It predominantly focused on Anchorage's Hillside and gives only lip service to Eklutna Valley. Margan and I, with your help, intend to correct that. For instance, at our last community council meeting, we discussed how Eklutna valley, of all the community councils in Anchorage, has the most wildfire hazards, mostly dead and dying spruce; we have no fire stations in the valley; we have no public water supply or fire hydrants; we have only one road in and out and it's the longest such egress route in the municipality; much of the road is uphill, which will slow heavy fire and rescue vehicles; we have a large public campground with open fires and potentially hundreds of park visitors will share our sole evacuation route; we have no cell phone service beyond Mile 6 of Eklutna Lake Road; and if a fire takes down the phone line we won't have the Internet or wifi-assisted phone service either. In other words, we need all the help we can get.

Margan asked for a show of hands to indicate how members would respond if told by a police officer or fire official that a wildfire was bearing down on their property: prepare to shelter in place, evacuate immediately, or wait and see. Because of our remote location, lack of public services, and an independent streak in many residents, we appear to be more likely to shelter in place to protect our property than people who live on the Hillside. We also appear to have relatively few people who would require assistance from officials to evacuate. We will take that information to subsequent meetings and hope to address the Eklutna-related inadequacies in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

The municipality has offered firewise education to Eklutna Valley residents; however, there has been no systematic, strategic hazard fuel reduction like in some other parts of Anchorage, primarily the Hillside, and the municipality's wildland fire response capability has made little, if any, headway in our valley in recent decades.

Clarification from the municipality on conditional use permits. Several neighbors have expressed concerns over the increasing number of residential properties that have or might become commercial recreational or vacation camps under the terms of a conditional use permit. The overarching concern is that too many such camps will undermine the rural residential character of our community.

Rick wrote a letter listing hypothetical issues to the municipal planning department in August and received a response (attached). The questions and responses were read at the meeting. Generally speaking, a conditional use permit is "the highest level of planning entitlement that the MOA reviews" and "any deviation from the plans and narrative approved would constitute an amendment and would require approval in accordance with AMC 21.03.080E."

After a conditional use permit is issued, the municipality may consider minor and major amendments. A minor amendment is typically a change to the building envelope, setbacks or other similar provisions of 10 percent or less than what was approved. Minor amendments do not require public notice. Major amendments – in other words any other changes to the conditional use permit – require a new hearing and public notice. Our community council has an important advisory role in the initial public hearing process as well as in any major amendments to a conditional use permit.

Return the Salmon Relay. This event was a joint effort of the Native Village of Eklutna and the Eklutna River Restoration Coalition that took place in late September. It involved carrying two ceremonial, stuffed salmon in a relay from Eklutna Village to the Eklutna Lake dam where the salmon were passed from hand to hand over the dam into the lake. The idea was to keep the river restoration issue in the public eye. No one at the community council meeting attended but a short video of the event can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FR6mBlfO768>.

Election of officers. No one attending the meeting, except the existing officers, was interested in running for office at this time. A proposal was made to elect Randy Bangerter, who was not present, as president. But in the end the existing officers were re-elected unanimously for another two-year term: Rick as president, Margan vice-president, Dan treasurer, and Randy as sergeant at arms.

The meeting adjourned at about 8:15 p.m.