



## NORTH STAR GROUP

# Joint Meeting Notes & Summary Anchorage Municipal Assembly and Native Village of Eklutna May 27, 2021

On May 27, 2021, the Municipality of Anchorage and the Native Village of Eklutna held its first joint meeting following the historic, first-in-Alaska/second-in-the-nation [adoption of a formalized government-to-government agreement](#) between a tribe and a municipality/city.

The purpose of the meeting—chaired by Assemblyman Felix Rivera—was to allow the two government bodies to get to know each other, to understand the roles of the members, and to identify and begin to discuss issues that may be the subjects of future meetings and collaborative work activities. Chairing and hosting the twice-yearly meetings is a responsibility that will alternate between the assembly and the Tribe.

**NVE tribal council members present:** Aaron Leggett, Maria Coleman, Dorothy Cook, Angeleen Waskey, and Tresia Coleman

**MOA assembly members present:** Felix Rivera, John Weddleton, Jamie Allard, Suzanne LaFrance, Pete Peterson, Forrest Dunbar, Christopher Constant, Crystal Kennedy, and Meg Zaletel

Specific issues raised at the meeting (identified for future consideration) included:

- Prioritizing issues, given the participants' limited time to work on them,
- Renaming places and locations that have significance to Indigenous people.
- Providing advance notice about new local legislation.
- Educating students and public about Tribes.
- Educational system improvements to benefit Alaska Native students.
- Inadequate Alaska history education in public schools.
- Housing for Tribal members.
- Improvement and future expansion of the NVE family court system.
- Eklutna River salmon run restoration.
- Joint staff position to serve both the assembly and NVE.
- Land information confidentiality.

**Minutes summary** – The following is a summary of the discussion that occurred at the meeting.

Chair Rivera called meeting to order at approximately 5:08 p.m., followed by land acknowledgement and agenda approval.

F.Rivera: Appreciate having the Tribal Services sheet, describing the services that NVE provides to its members. Good to see where Tribal services may overlap municipal services.

M.Coleman: Much of the public has never been taught about Tribes or the history of Tribes, leading some to doubt that Tribes exist. Collaboration makes things happen. Important issues are

education, housing, homelessness, better communication, taxing authority, public relations, and police interaction. NVE members are few and stretched thin (on issues they can work on).

A.Leggett: NVE previously had a memorandum of agreement with the Mayor of Anchorage. NVE views were sometimes considered (in municipal deliberations) and sometimes not. Now, we can create continuity over time. This is an opportunity for meaningful progress, to open up lines of communication, obtain mutual benefits, find new ways to tackle solutions and problems, and find funding sources. NVE wants to be part of the municipality's overall direction.

T.Coleman: Committees could be formed to work on issues and take (results) to the larger meeting. Easier to exchange ideas (in smaller group).

C.Constant: We have limited time, need to choose issues. Figure out with great care (what we take on). When people propose renaming something within Anchorage, ask them to talk to NVE. I might receive 30 or more calls per year about renaming. Need to be conscientious about how we use our time. Not want to take away from the important work NVE is doing, but instead support that work.

J.Middleton: Curious about phrases “assimilation era” and “abandoned by own tribe.”

A.Leggett: “Assimilation era” reflects the old mindset of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to “kill the Indian and save the man,” (and government actions that implemented that policy). “Abandonment” mainly pertains to blood quantum requirements and determining enrollment in lower 48 tribes.

M.Coleman: Refer to statistics on Alaska Native education. Would like to have Eklutna people speak in schools about the Native heritage of the Anchorage area.

A.Leggett: Have a statewide problem in that the teaching of Alaska history is woefully inadequate. High schools don't have a central system for updating (Alaska history) curriculum. Not just a problem with Indigenous history, but entire Alaska history curriculum is inadequate. Look at lack of knowledge about the Permanent Fund Dividend.

F.Dunbar: (Regarding heritage) A statue of an Indigenous woman is located along Ship Creek, though not widely known.

A.Leggett: That's Grandma Olga, installed in 2018. Project dates back to 2004 and an agreement to construct something (as part of an improvement project). Decided on a statue to mark the location of a traditional Dena'ina fish camp, used up until World War II. An eventual Fairbanks-Seward trail system will provide opportunities for Indigenous naming. Have identified 26 specific Dena'ina sites in Anchorage with \$1.52 million needed to install Indigenous place names and information.

C.Constant: Would like to fully identify the project and break it into smaller parts we can accomplish.

A.Leggett: The project also ties into revitalizing downtown Anchorage and its cultural component.

J.Middleton: A trails plan is also underway.

P.Peterson: I've been on the Anchorage Assembly for seven years and see the joint meetings as a ways to enable more communication and avoid getting into ongoing legal disputes with Eklutna.

C.Kennedy: Saw recently that a high percentage of Alaska Native children far in state (foster) custody. The assembly is about to consider changing the municipal code regarding domestic violence. Are you familiar with that? Any comments on the impact?

M.Coleman: Had not heard about that. Try not to use the adversarial court system. NVE works on cases. Find parents have more successful outcomes with Tribal collaboration. Not an adversarial process.

C.Kennedy: Request ordinance change information be forwarded to NVE.

C.Constant: Like the idea of identifying an NVE person to send potential legislation for review.

F.Dunbar: Did not realize NVE had a court system.

A.Leggett: We're working on one. At present, it's a family court. Hope to grow it (into a larger purpose). Working with Alaska Native Justice Center, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Knik Tribal Council, and Kenaitze Indian Tribe court system on NVE court plans.

F.Dunbar: Raises interesting questions about jurisdiction, territory covered, etc.

A.Leggett: These are questions for the future. But having discussions early is important.

M.Zaletel: Is U.S. Housing & Urban Development Tribal housing funding available to be used throughout the municipality?

M.Coleman: Funding can be used wherever Tribal members reside. (NVE members live throughout Anchorage.)

F.Dunbar: Current situation with Eklutna River (salmon run) restoration?

A.Leggett: Same as it was last year. No forward movement. Everything takes a long time. Studies are underway on can water be released, how much water, and what is impact on downflow.

C.Constant: Agree that "everything takes a long time." Our challenge is to identify systematic ways to make changes that will improve operations and functions far into the future. Educational improvements (are an example).

A.Leggett: An idea to consider is funding a joint position that reports to both bodies and tracks all these issues.

C.Constant: With the homelessness problem, people are here but they come from someplace else. One concept is to have an MOA office established to build relationships with communities across the state. It may give Anchorage a better idea about what to expect.

A.Leggett: NVE also deals with other big landowners – Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson and the Alaska Railroad. NVE has direct government-to-government meetings with the military regarding historical property sites.

(Unidentified): Goal is to identify important cultural properties for consultation with NVE concerns considered in the decisions.

M.Coleman: Tribes are allowed to keep site information confidential.

C.Constant: Assembly is restricted on confidentiality. Best option on maintaining confidentiality is for property information to be the executive branch's responsibility.

A.Leggett: As background on land ownership, a federal government executive order in 1925 set aside 328,000 acres around Eklutna for a BIA vocational school, which operated 1925-45. The acreage included JBER, Eagle River, and extended to the Knik River Bridge. When the Tribe was federally recognized in 1961, the land had been reduced to 1,200 acres, the village site only.

### **Audience Comments**

Carl Haberman: Given the room configuration (Mayor's conference room), this meeting was difficult to hear. Future official meetings such as this should be held in the assembly chambers.

### **Closing Comments**

J.Allard: Represent the area of Anchorage where Eklutna village is located and want to work with NVE.

C.Constant: List the priority issues for future work – systems, communication, potential legislation, education improvements, tradition & history, Eklutna River restoration, place names, and joint position.

F.Rivera: Look forward to future collaboration.

Meeting adjourned at 7:07 p.m. The next official joint meeting will be held late in 2021.

*This summary was prepared by Karl Ohls, [North Star Group](#). View the full meeting on the [Municipal YouTube Channel](#).*