

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Cobb called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm in the City Council Chambers.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The City Council led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

III. ROLL CALL

Mayor Dave Cobb

Council member Karen Ables

Council member Mike Wells

Council member Joe Prax

Council member Dorothy Moore

Council member Steve McCann

Council member Sorum

Also Present:

John Hozey, City Manger

Sheri Pierce, City Clerk

Craig Richards, Acting City Attorney

Members of staff and approximately 25 people in the audience.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the previous meeting minutes was postponed to the meeting of February 6, 2012.

V. SPECIAL CITY MANAGER REPORT – SNOW EVENT

Mr. Hozey stated that the City staff, temporary employees, and volunteers have done a phenomenal job over the past few weeks. They were able to come together to accomplish a very large amount of work in a very short time. He commented that the City has trained and practiced their emergency response plan, but that this event was the first opportunity to actually implement those skills in a real emergency situation.

The City hired approximately 190 people, with 110 who actually were working as of that day. Safety for the crews has been strongly enforced resulting in very few injuries, all of which were minor. Despite brutal weather conditions, the snow removal crews had been in good spirits. At the end of their shift this evening, he reported, the city would be opening up the swimming pool to workers as a “morale booster”.

Up to this point, all school facilities have been cleared of snow. Most of the City buildings had been cleared except for the Library, City Hall, the hospital, and a few water tanks and warehouses said Mr. Hozey. The Junior High would be shoveled as well, but as it had already been cleared once this season it was not deemed at risk.

The biggest issue concerning the snow removal effort was wind. The wind chill dropped temperatures down below zero but also made working on roofs hazardous. The City was continuing to do outreach into the community and had to date assisted 50 residents and several businesses.

The former Sea Otter RV Park has been opened as a snow storage area. The City currently has three dump trucks transporting snow from storage lots in town to expand capacity. Storage areas in outlying subdivisions are currently being assessed.

A structural engineer hired by the city had evaluated all City and school buildings and determined that there had been no damage done to any of the buildings as a result of the snow load. Mr. Hozey stated that there was some confusion regarding what the snow load limit established in our building code represents. Mr. Hozey explained that when a building reaches the code limit it is cause for action, it is not the structural capacity of the building. The structural engineer who examined the elementary school very conservatively estimated the structural capacity of the elementary school to be 25% above the code level. Mr. Hozey stated that no person was ever in danger of being in a building which was unsafe or beyond its structural capacity.

The City was still working at full operations at this time, and was continuing to send out PSAs twice a day every day, but Mr. Hozey felt that operations would be largely complete by the end of the week. Mr. Hozey asked to schedule another special meeting with the City Council prior to the next regular meeting for the purpose of considering budget resolutions related to emergency operations over the past several weeks.

Mr. Hozey stated that he had received calls from Senator Mark Begich and State House Representative Eric Feige who asked about the well being of the city and offered their support as needed.

Councilwoman Moore asked if older buildings would be more structurally at risk under the heavy snow load. Mr. Hozey explained that the structural engineer had not expressed any concern whatsoever as to the age of the buildings affecting their ability to withstand the snow load. However, he did recommend which buildings should be a priority for snow removal when developing a plan. Council member Moore pointed out that residents should take into consideration

the age of their structures and be concerned about the fatigue factor when determining when to remove snow from their roof.

Council member Prax wanted to know if the Council would be presented with a written report from the structural engineer. Mr. Hozey confirmed this, and reiterated that there had been no structural damage to any of the City buildings.

Doug Desorcie, President of PWSCC stated that the college had decided to close down its building last Wednesday due to snow concerns. The college had been reopened the day of this meeting, except for the wellness center which had a fractured beam and would remain closed at this time. Classes would begin a week later than expected, and because of this there would be no late fee for registration before the classes began. Mr. Desorcie reported that UAA had sent down people to help remove snow from their roofs, and while the gym would continue to be closed for the time being, the Ski for Free checkout would be opened up again shortly. He wished to thank the City for providing snow scoops and manpower prior to help arriving from UAA.

Joe Kuchin of Alyeska stated that, like the City, Alyeska was dealing with an urgent but not quite emergency level situation. They had been working on snow removal the past couple of weeks. Mr. Kuchin stated that common practice at Alyeska during the winter was to maintain 10 to 20 people to perform snow removal for their facilities. Over the past few weeks, the number of Houston contract workers has been increased to about 90 with another 60 personnel on order. It has been estimated that there will be another six to eight weeks of snow removal work to bring the terminal back to a comfortable level ahead of the curve. Mr. Kuchin said the snow load on Alyeska buildings and tanks has been measured at 135 pounds per square foot, which is much higher than what the City has been encountering. Typically the terminal receives about 25% more snow fall across the bay than what downtown Valdez experiences. Council member Moore pointed out that the area on top of an oil tank is approximately 1 acre of land.

Councilwoman Ables asked when they had starting clearing snow. Mr. Kuchin explained that they had put in their request to the Laborers Union before Christmas, but that they did not receive workers until after the New Year. Mayor Cobb thanked Alyeska for using union people to remove their snow instead of pulling away the much needed local people.

Jacob Jensen, the Valdez City Schools Superintendent, said that schools are expected to return to normal operations on Friday, if not Thursday. Due to school closures, four days would have to be made up for the elementary school, and two days for the junior high and high school students, he said. Council member Ables asked when the schools had first started preparations for snow removal. Mr. Jensen replied that they had noticed the large amount of snow mid

December, but that the official snow loads issued by the weather service were lower than what the schools snow load testing revealed so work had started the last week of December. Mr. Jensen said that recruiting workers had been difficult as private contractors and residents were paying workers wages much higher than the school district. Mr. Hozey stated that in retrospect he should have established a Unified Command in the emergency operations center which would have included Mr. Jensen as an active participant in the city operations plan.

Lieutenant Trevino, United States Coast Guard, said that they had been working through the weekend to help the City but that they were slowly demobilizing their City work and redirected that to Coast Guard property at this time. Lt. Trevino reported that to date the USCG had contributed over 600 man hours of help to the city. Mayor Cobb extended his thanks to the Coast Guard for their outstanding help during this event. Mayor Cobb stated that as always the USCG members and their families are a tremendous asset to the community. The Lieutenant replied by saying that Valdez is their community as well, and that they were always ready to step up and help out whenever they could.

Sean McAlister, Hospital Administrator, thanked the city for snow removal crews assigned to the hospital this week. The hospital had been sending out public service announcements to notify the public about which entrances, exits, and emergency areas to use during snow removal work.

Wanda Clark of the Valdez Senior Center had a few concerns about their roof, as it was not melting or sliding as it should. However, the Senior Center roof was being done at the same time as the hospital roof. The Senior Center was also being used as a warm up and rest area for the snow removal crews working on the hospital and senior center this week.

Ms. Sharon Crisp, Copper Valley Electric, said that CVEA had been issuing public service announcements this week as well. She cautioned the public to be careful of electric lines when storing snow. Ms. Crisp stated that as most people's electrical meters had been buried, for the month of January CVEA would be making an estimate as to people's usage, based on their usage for that same time period last year. Once the meters are cleared CVEA will do an actual read and costs will be tried up on the users bill. Ms. Crisp stated that at the last City Council meeting she had explained why electric bills seemed so high. She stated that information on their rates will be published in the local newspaper this week. In the month of December rates were close to 22 cents compared to last year when users received a residential fuel cost assistance credit of 5.4 cents per kilowatt hour. The fuel credit was not given to users this year, therefore the cost of electricity was higher. The cost of power for January is estimated to be 25.37 cents and asked people to be prepared for that increase. She stated that CVEA is planning on asking their Board of Directors to implement a fuel cost credit in the amount of 5 cents per kilowatt for the months of January through April. This

will reduce the cost of electricity to 20.37 cents per kilowatt. Ms. Crisp pointed out that she had distributed a document to the council which illustrates a rate comparison over the past few years.

V. PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

Ms. Rhonda Wade admonished the City of Valdez for closing the schools and the need for the City to react in emergency mode. She pointed out that it had been snowing non-stop since November and questioned why snow had been allowed to accumulate on city buildings resulting in the emergency situation the city now found themselves operating in. Ms. Wade said she did not understand how the City got to this point and asked why buildings were not cleared in December. Ms. Wade stated her concern that buildings at or near snow load would have been seriously compromised in the event of an earthquake. She stated that Valdez is known to receive very high amounts of snow in the winter therefore she did not understand why the City was not prepared. Ms. Wade asked the City Council to investigate why the City was currently in this situation and issue the results of that investigation as a report to the community.

Ms. Pricilla Greg said she was a lifelong resident of Valdez. Ms. Gregg pointed out that Valdez is an earthquake community. She expressed her concern that many children's lives could have been lost from a low level earthquake due to the heavy snow loads on school facilities. She suggested that the City adopt a policy similar to our street maintenance call out for our city buildings.

Ms. Becky Wade stated that the current situation the City was in was an act of negligence and a man-made disaster. She pointed out that our public buildings are designated as emergency shelters and questioned what would have happened if they were needed and unavailable. Ms. Wade stated that if the City had been pro-active we would not be closing our schools and placing our children at risk. Ms. Wade stated that she believed the City Council did not require any accountability from responsible parties presently or in the past. Ms. Wade asked that the Council not accept excuses by City Administration.

Yvonne Crume thanked Council member Prax for insisting on an explanation of how this happened. She reiterated that she believed the City had put children at risk by allowing the school buildings to exceed snow load levels. She stated she would like to know who is responsible. She asked why the movie theatre was open when the Civic Center roof was over the safe limit. Ms. Crume asked that the fire hydrants which are buried be shoveled out.

Ms. Jerry Devens said her concerns were with the fact that trailers in mobile home parks are dangerously close together and not in compliance with the municipal code. Snow is currently piled up between trailers with no room for equipment to remove the snow from the narrow area. Ms. Devens said there is

no snow plow driver working in the Aleution Village mobile home park at the moment because he has been hired by the City. She stated that all of the people available to shovel snow are currently working for the City on City buildings. She asked how a resident was supposed to find help. Ms. Devens said the heavy snow on either side of trailers in Aleution is pushing on the walls and causing damage. Ms. Devens said that residents are exhausted, can't afford to pay the wages demanded by snow shovel workers and are still in need of help. She pointed out that residents can't even buy a snow shovel in town. She said that many of her neighbors have called the City for help and are still waiting. Ms. Devens questioned why the City of Cordova received help, but the City of Valdez did not. She reiterated that homeowners are in need of help. She did not believe that things were as under control in the community as was reported by City administration this evening.

Councilwoman Ables stated she was grateful that no one in the community was hurt. Ms. Ables stated that the City must determine how to do this better so we don't get into this situation again. Ms. Ables said that in order to move forward we must plan appropriately. Ms. Ables said although the City was operating under emergency status, she was unsure if in retrospect the City needed the assistance of the National Guard to help residents. Ms. Ables expressed her concern with the problem described by Ms. Devens related to her trailer park.

Ms. Devens stated that not only do the code violations regarding the distance between trailers in her mobile home park cause problems in the winter with snow removal; it also causes a danger in the event of a fire. Ms. Devens said that not only is there a problem with limited distance between trailers, there is also a problem with improperly marked electrical shut offs and the refusal by the Aleution Village trailer park owner to hook up to the City water system. Ms. Devens stated that numerous fires have occurred in her trailer park where there has been at least a twenty minute delay in putting water on the fire due to the inability by fire responders to find the electrical shut off to the structure. Ms. Devens said this is a code violation and the City needs to force Aleut Corporation to bring this trailer court into compliance. Ms. Devens said that in 2007 new water and electric lines were installed in the park but trailer owners were never connected. Ms. Devens reiterated that code violations are being ignored and it is a life safety issue.

Council member Prax stated that the City is not fast to act in these issues. He suggested that the solution to the problems at Aleution was for the residents to stop making payments to the Aleut Corporation. Ms. Devens responded that she had attempted what Mr. Prax suggested and she was threatened with eviction which the Valdez Police Department enforced. Ms. Devens asked why the City was not responsible in enforcing the code.

Council member Prax said that citizens should not turn to the City to help. They should enlist the help of their neighbors and friends. Ms. Devens asked why the City of Valdez did not do a Declaration of Emergency to the Governor and accept help from the National Guard. Ms. Devens said that if this had happened the citizens would have been given help and state funds would be available to those who may suffer damages. Council member Prax said he believed that State and Federal government involvement would not be a positive thing. He stated that his personal philosophy was that looking to the State and Federal government for help does not work. Ms. Devens responded that the citizens of Valdez pay taxes to the City expecting that the City will keep the citizens safe by enforcing codes and giving aide when needed. Council member Prax responded that the City cannot take on personal issues. Council member Prax did agree that the City should enforce any code violation by the Aleut Corporation.

Councilmember Sorum stated that City Administration has not taken accountability for the problem. He thanked all the citizens including the USCG and City employees for responding to the problem but he felt that we should not have been put in this situation.

Council member Ables said she looked toward creating a future policy so that this incident would not reoccur. She suggested the Council and City administration move forward as a team.

Council member Moore stated that code issues are the City's responsibility and the City should enforce code issues. She asked that the issues brought forward by Ms. Devens be addressed. She suggested that the Aleut Corporation appear before the City Council to answer questions and address concerns.

Council member Prax said he had a list of questions he would like addressed relating to this incident. He asked who was responsible at the school district for snow removal on school buildings. He stated that he had heard school administration blaming the City and asked why the district was not the responsible party for those buildings. Council member Prax said that in 2007 a structural engineer had spoke about a snow removal plan for school buildings, he asked if such a plan existed. Council member Prax said there must be accountability as the City and school district did neglect their responsibility to shovel snow from the buildings. He stated that this was not a meteor strike, it was snow. Council member Prax distributed a written list of questions to Mr. Hozey and to the City Clerk. Council member Prax said he was proud that people have worked together to solve the problem much faster than he expected. He thanked the City Clerk's office for the public notices and service announcements provided throughout the event.

Council member Wells asked that the problems regarding electrical shut offs at the Aleution Trailer Park be addressed. He thanked the people who came to the meeting this evening and spoke their concerns.

Council member Wells stated that City employees went above and beyond in responding to the problems with snow removal, accomplishing many things above his expectations. Council member Wells said he agreed that the City Council and City Administration must take a hard look at what transpired and what got us here. Council member Wells stated that questions should not be directed only at the City. He acknowledged that the school facilities are city buildings, but an understanding between the governing body of the school district and the City Council with respect to maintenance of these facilities should be developed to establish clear lines of responsibility.

Council member McCann said he believed Ms. Devens did not get an answer regarding how the City was going to help the residents of Aleution Trailer park with snow removal. Mayor Cobb stated that the City will dispatch help to them tomorrow. Ms. Devens reiterated that the City needs to force the Aleut Corporation to abide by city codes.

Council member Prax stated that if the City does snow removal for residents at Aleution, do we do it everywhere else? Mr. Hozey replied that he did not receive direction from the majority of council. Mayor Cobb responded that the City had a residential response team that could go out and help people. Ms. Devens said she understood that the City should not be responsible for removing snow for every resident, but due to the City taking away workers and plow drivers they now needed help removing snow from between trailers. Ms. Devens said their houses were in danger and questioned if it was wrong to ask the City for help.

Council member Wells said the City had established mechanisms to deal with these issues with our response team.

Becky Wade said that as an owner of a trailer park in town she agreed that the parks were a mess but she did not think the City should be involved in removing snow from between trailers. Ms. Wade thanked the City for making sure there was space available for residents and business owners to place snow in the storage lots. She stated that the State and City Public Works Department had done an excellent job removing snow from city streets.

VII. REPORTS FROM BOARDS/COMMISSIONS – Beautification Task Force – Welcome Sign

Patricia Relay, of the Beautification Task Force, spoke at this time. She stated that the task force had been looking for ways to make Valdez more visually appealing to visitors. Ms. Relay stated that the task force had been working on

an appealing welcome sign over the past few months. Ms. Relay stated that after contacting at least four other companies, the task force had selected GF Sherman Signs, which have done a number of signs for cities around Alaska, as the best candidate for the job. Welcome signs made by Mr. Sherman thirty years ago were still holding up well. The sign itself would cost about \$25-26,000, which would not include the installation or the supports. There was a question about the seasonality of the sign; would it make sense to leave it up for the winter tourists, or would the snow damage or cover it up.

The location selected by the task force was at 18 mile in an area which would provide for a pull out should tourists or residents wish to take pictures. The location of the sign would inform visitors that they were in fact in the city limits. It will also indicate the number of miles from that point to the city center. Mayor Cobb stated that there was money in the task force reserve fund to pay for the sign as well as the installation. It was also determined that the sign would have shale rock rather than river rock at the base.

VIII. CITY CLERK/ MAYOR REPORTS

CITY CLERK

Ms. Pierce wished to thank all of the City workers who had given up their weekends and holidays to work. Ms. Pierce stated that no one she had worked with lost their temper during the stressful past few weeks. Administration support staff worked together to do what needed to be done when it needed to be done. She also extended her thanks to her neighbors who had helped shovel a path to her fuel tanks while she had been working.

MAYOR

Mayor Cobb stated that there was an extremely competent group of people working for the City. These people had shifted jobs to do everything they could to help out. The Coast Guard had been a great support. The Mayor expressed his gratitude, stating he was quite proud of everyone who had worked through this difficult situation.

IX. CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval to go into Executive Session Regarding TAPS Value/Litigation

MOTION: Council member Wells moved, seconded by Council member Moore, to approve the Consent Agenda.

VOTE ON THE MOTION: 7 yeas, motion carried.

X. RESOLUTIONS

2. #12-01 – Adopting the Valdez Coordinated Transportation Plan for 2012

MOTION: Council member Ables moved, seconded by Council member Wells, to approve Resolution No. 12-01.

Councilwoman Moore asked if this was done yearly, and it was confirmed. Tina Russell of Connecting Ties spoke at this time. Last month, she explained, they had given up to 646 rides, with 83 approved riders. A lot of those people needing rides had been senior citizens, the disabled, and those of low income. Mayor Cobb inquired if they would be able to take over the Safe Ride program for those people too drunk to drive home safely from bars. Ms. Russel said they could look into it; they were trying to cover the needs of the whole community if they could get the funding for it. Transportation, she concluded, is more of an issue in this town that what people might think.

VOTE ON THE MOTION: 6 yeas, 1 nay (Council member Prax): motion carried.

3. #12-02 – Amending Fees in the Community and Economic Development Department for 2012

MOTION: Council member Sorum moved, seconded by Council member Wells, to approve Resolution No. 12-02.

Council member Sorum felt that this amendment had been brought up unnecessarily. The fees did little good as is, but mainly did not need to be addressed every year, he felt. Councilwoman Ables concurred; if the City were to drop the end date, they would not need to address this at the start of each and every year. Mr. Hozey said that the Council could do that; they would just need to change the code. He would try and bring this forward again at a later meeting.

VOTE ON THE MOTION: 6 yeas, 1 nay (Council member Sorum): motion carried.

XI. REPORTS

1. 2011 Police/Jail Activity Report
2. Change Order Report - LED Street Lights
3. Address Changes Report
4. Building Permit & Inspection Reports
5. Library Year End Report

6. Civic Center Year End Report
7. Digital Movie Year End Report

Council member Moore asked about how long it takes to close citation files on average, as she had heard complaints that they had been taking too long and inconveniencing people. Mr. Hozey said he would look into this. She also stated that she found the end of year library report to be very interesting.

XII. COUNCIL BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

COUNCIL MEMBER MOORE

Council member Moore expressed her concerns that the hard winter may be difficult on the collective mental health of the community.

Council member Moore asked that new police officers be sworn in at a council meeting so that the citizens would hear it on the radio. Council member Moore informed the council that she would be leaving the next day for the January RCAC meeting.

COUNCIL MEMBER WELLS

Councilman Wells inquired as to the status of the VCVB task force, as they needed to address their issue as quickly as possible. Mr. Hozey said that they were supposed to have their first meeting last Monday, but due to the snow operations they had not had time to do so. Once the operations were over they would meet.

COUNCIL MEMBER PRAX

Councilman Prax felt that the City was in a hard place at the time, and that it only could do so much. His suggestion was that people did not like the service that they were receiving, they should not pay for it.

COUNCIL MEMBER ABLES

Council member Ables said that one of the new street lights had gone out on West Klutina.

COUNCIL MEMBER McCANN

Council member McCann said he would be absent from the next council meeting as he would be in Germany at that time.

COUNCIL MEMBER WELLS

Councilman Wells hoped that after this state of affairs had concluded the Council would receive more information on the subject. He also inquired as to the extent of demobilization, as it would snow for two more months at least. Mr. Hozey said that the City would determine the degree of demobilization as soon as operations had ceased.

MAYOR COBB

Mayor Cobb let it be known that Senator Beigich had called the City. He sent his best to the people of Valdez, and asked that the City let him know if they needed any help.

The Council agreed that the next special meeting would take place Monday, January 23rd at noon.

- XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION
- XIV. RETURN FROM EXECUTIVE SESSION
- XV. COUNCIL TRAVEL
- XVI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Mayor Cobb adjourned the meeting at 9:50 pm.