

SPECIAL ASSEMBLY MEETING 2023-20

REVISED MINUTES

August 07, 2023 at 6:00 PM



Assembly Chambers/Zoom Webinar

<https://juneau.zoom.us/j/95424544691> or 1-253-215-8782 Webinar ID: 954 2454 4691

Immediately followed by Assembly Committee of the Whole Worksession

A. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting No. 2023-20: The Special Meeting of the City and Borough of Juneau Assembly was held in the Assembly Chambers and called to order by Mayor Beth Weldon at 6:00p.m. An at ease was taken to resolve technical difficulties and the meeting resumed at 6:14p.m.

B. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Assemblymember Greg Smith provided the following land acknowledgement: We would like to acknowledge that the City and Borough of Juneau is on Tlingit land, and wish to honor the indigenous people of this land. For more than ten thousand years, Alaska Native people have been and continue to be integral to the well-being of our community. We are grateful to be in this place, a part of this community, and to honor the culture, traditions, and resilience of the Tlingit people. *Gunalchéesh!*

C. ROLL CALL

Assemblymembers Present: Mayor Beth Weldon, Maria Gladziszewski, Greg Smith, 'Wáahlaal Gídaak, Wade Bryson, Michelle Hale, Alicia Hughes-Skandijs, and Loren Jones

Assemblymembers Absent: Christine Woll

CBJ Staff Present: City Manager Rorie Watt, Deputy City Manager Robert Barr, Acting Municipal Attorney Sherri Layne, Municipal Clerk Beth McEwen, Engineer/Public Works Director Katie Koester, Assistant Attorney Emily Wright, Community Development Director Jill Maclean, Port Director Carl Uchtyl, Deputy Clerk Andi Hirsh, Deputy Clerk Diane Cathcart, Parks and Recreation Director George Schaaf, Public Information Officer Meredith Thatcher, Deputy Parks and Recreation Director Michele Elfers, Senior Planner Irene Gallion

D. AGENDA TOPICS

- 1. Resolution 3036 A Resolution of the City and Borough of Juneau Declaring a Local Emergency in Response to Historic Flooding Due to the Release of Water from Suicide Basin and a Request for State and Federal Assistance.**

Mr. Watt noted that there was a version (b) of the resolution provided as a Red Folder item under Supplemental Materials.

MOTION by Deputy Mayor Gladziszewski to adopt Resolution 3036(b) A Resolution of the City and Borough of Juneau Confirming a Local Emergency in Response to Historic Flooding Due to the Release of Water from Suicide Basis and a Request for State and Federal Assistance. and asked for unanimous consent.

Mr. Smith objected for purposes of a question.

Mr. Smith asked if staff could state what the effect of declaring a local emergency does and the process with respect to the hope for resources and opportunities are along with timelines involved with that declaration.

Mr. Barr stated that declaration of a local emergency allows them to do a number of things, one of the key items is circumventing the some of the purchasing code requirements. A local emergency declaration allows them to procure goods and services faster without having to go through some of the stringent requirements to get the lowest bid possible. It is also one step, not the only step, but a step in a positive direction in getting a disaster declaration at a state or federal level, which could provide public and individual assistance depending on those levels of government.

Mr. Smith removed his objection.

There being no further objection, the resolution was adopted by unanimous consent.

Engineering/Public Works Director Katie Koester then gave a slide show presentation on the recent flooding/release of water from the Suicide Basin Jökulhlaup. Ms. Koester noted that flooding from past jökulhlaups have ranged from minor to the highest level at 11.99 ft. From all the modeling that had been done by the National Weather Service (NWS), they did not have any indication that this one would go above the 12ft mark however, during this most recent event, it turned out that the flooding high was at 14.97 ft.

She said that CCFR and others were monitoring the river and flood levels as they were climbing and at 12 ft, everything was still contained within the river. However, once the waters went between the 12-13 ft marks, storm drains started to backfill and things quickly started to escalate from there. She stated that around 6pm on August 5, they started to see the loss of trees and losing river bank. She said that CBJ activated the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at 7:30p.m. at JPD. CCFR was responding and evacuating residents. JPD was responding with crowd control measures on and around the bridges. She said that we were very fortunate that there was not rain involved with this event as it could have been much worse. She noted that the EOC partners included American Red Cross, NWS, State Dept. of Transportation/Public Facilities (ADOT), and Dept. of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and they continue to have EOC meetings with those partners.

Her presentation then provided some drone footage courtesy of Martin Murphy. With respect to the damage assessment, View Drive, Meander Way, River Road, and Riverside Drive were all impacted. There were two homes that went into the river, one home that partially went into the river. There were another five structures that CDD has condemned and that represents eight different structures and two dozen households. She said that, aside from those homes who were affected by river bank erosion, many more homes were impacted by flooding on View Drive and Meander Way. ADOT inspected the bridges that cross the river which included Brotherhood Bridge, the Back Loop Bridge, and the Pedestrian Bridge at Dimond Park. The bridges themselves held strong due to the depth of the pilings for those bridges. However, the approaches to those bridges, ADOT is going to continue to monitor since there had been some bank erosion at the edges.

Ms. Koester stated that there were multiple fuel tanks that were washed out and DEC was notified, the U.S. Coast Guard has been doing flights and looking for fuel tanks, sheen, and debris and DEC has been doing the same. She said that the massive volume of water has mitigated some of those effects. She noted that the homeowners have done a great job in reporting directly to DEC when they had a fuel tank spill or disappear. She noted that the

DEC phone number is available in the press releases and on the Flood Response website for the public to be able to report to DEC directly.

Ms. Koester then noted that the damage was primarily to private infrastructure and private homes but with respect to damage to CBJ infrastructure, there were three lift stations that were totally submerged which means that there was not sewer to those homes. She said that there is still one lift station on View Drive that is vulnerable. It is currently functional but they are working on repairs to provide for long term repairs. She said that the Mendenhall Wastewater Treatment Plant also loss property and some fence line and they had to move some equipment back from the river to prevent additional loss of vehicles. She said that we will need to look at where the outfall line is for the treatment plant to look at reinforcing that. That will not need to be done as an emergency repair but definitely something they want to do before fall storms come in. She noted that the Dimond Park Field House sustained some damage and some of the storm drains were full of silt and partially damaged. She said that we will need to do a full evaluation of all CBJ assets along the river to assess their status and any further damage that needs to be fixed.

From a debris perspective, mother nature took care of a lot of the debris removal along the streets. She then showed before and after ariel photos of the neighborhoods as well as some of views of the river and paths of the river between 2013-2023. She said that when considering the impact of the flooding, it can be looked at similar to the way one looks at an earthquake Richter scale where the impacts of a higher level are exponentially higher. The difference between a 12ft flood level vs. almost 15ft is an 180% difference. The volume of water is tremendously different.

Ms. Koester thanked Deputy Director Denise Koch for leading the EOC efforts while Director Koester was in travel status at the beginning of this event. She said that at this time, they are in recovery phase at this time. They are working with all the affected residents in trying to get a damage assessment. They are asking them to send information to the floodresponse@juneau.gov email address. She said that at this point, they are not aware of any sheltering needs but if there is anyone from the public with sheltering needs, she strongly encourages them to send an email to the above address so they can be assisted with their sheltering needs. She said the community response to help our neighbors has been tremendous and she thanked everyone who have provided assistance to our friends and neighbors. She said that this event has been getting a lot of national media attention including from the LA Times, New York Times, FoxNews and others.

Ms. Koester said one of the key challenges going forward will be working on waste disposal. They are working with Waste Management on ways that we can help residents with potentially expanding hours but also caring for any hazardous waste factors. They will be sending staff to Juneau this week to help with waste disposal. She said that anyone affected is asked to contact the CBJ Permit Center as some of those pre-approvals requirements have been waived provided they keep CBJ informed of what they are doing. She said that the Mayor and Senator Dan Sullivan worked with getting some waivers to Army Corps of Engineers pre-approval processes waived as well. Everyone still has to follow all the applicable laws, they are just trying to help make the processes go faster with the measures they have taken. The Resolution 3036(b) that the Assembly just passed will also help them get expedited permitting with State of Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR).

Ms. Koester said that they are also coordinating with homeowners and their insurance agents. Human Resources/Risk Management (HRRM) Risk Manager Chelsea Swick can

help by providing photo documentation and anything that the EOC has that can help support the community's work as they work with their insurance companies.

Ms. Koester noted that the last piece they are working on is trying to help the community coordinate local assistance to those affected and those who want to help. She said that community members and others such as Kensington Mine, Green's Creek, JSD, Dawson Construction all reach out to offer assistance and they are trying to determine the best way to organize that in a thoughtful manner. She said that CBJ will not be coordinating volunteer response as that is not a good role for us and there are a lot of reasons we should not be doing that but they are trying to connect people with those organizations such as Red Cross and others. She stated that Assemblymember Jones, wearing his Red Cross hat, is the EOC liaison from the Red Cross and is helping with those efforts. Others include the Salvation Army and St. Vincent DePaul are also coordinating donations and food boxes for those affected. CBJ will continue to amplify the community efforts through the press releases and the Flood Response website.

Ms. Koester then responded to questions from Assemblymembers.

Ms. Gladziszewski asked if it is known how many fuel tanks were lost. Ms. Koester said that she can check with DEC to see how many may have been reported but she did not know how many fuel tanks have been lost at this time.

Ms. Gladziszewski asked about the jökulhlaup monitoring/forecasting efforts that might be done across the nation or around the world. Mr. Barr said that he is not aware of any other areas that monitor or forecast jökulhlaups. He said they have partnered with NWS and UAS on this and he pointed to the study that was on the website. He said that despite all the best efforts of our team, this is an unprecise science and there are many factors involved that are unknowns about the bottom of the glacier and movement of the glacier and the impacts those call. He said the team will be continuing to work on refining and improving those tools and forecasts in the future.

Ms. Hale said that her question is also about prediction and potential mitigation and she will be interested in continuing to monitor this and improve future forecasting if possible.

'Wáahlaal Gíidaak asked about the condominiums, in looking at it overhanging the river, it would end up blocking the river if it were to fall in. She asked if there were any thoughts from staff on that. Mr. Watt said that the condominium association is working with a contractor/engineer and Mr. Watt spoke with the contractor this morning and they thought that they could save the building. He said that from a permitting standpoint, that is somewhat complex. They have given emergency authorization to protect structures from further damage. That is not the same as authorizing work that will make something habitable. The resolution that they just passed will be forwarded to the governor will let the governor likely waive some of their rules. The association with their engineer and contractor will then try to navigate repairs. He said that he doesn't think that it would block the river, certainly not at this stage. The man-made efforts are small compared to the forces of nature.

Mr. Smith thanked everyone for their work on this over the weekend. He asked if the river has now returned to its normal channel or if it has forever changed or if it is all unknowns at this time.

Ms. Koester said with respect to whether the river has returned to normal, the level is normally around 6 ft and it is currently at 7 ft high, however the path of the river has

changed and is a new river with a new route, new debris and new obstacles. She said that it is not a river to take your kayak down at this time and to use extreme caution. She wanted to be sure the public was aware of those concerns.

Mr. Watt said that there is no normal, the river is going to meander over the course of time and it is not going to stay fixed at any given time and we can expect continued change. He said that we have heard over the years the concerns that homeowners have had with bank protection so as the land rises and the river cuts, it wants to get wider. This event has just accelerated a lot of those processes. A lot of gravel, sand, and silt has been mobilized by the river and they will need to watch it over the course of the next year but they should expect changes over time.

Mr. Bryson asked if we know what level the river has to be before we have backflow in the storm drains. He asked if there was even something they could do is to prevent storm drain backfill.

Ms. Koester said that the last flood at 12 ft, there was no storm drain backfill. The unprecedented nature of this flood meant that the storm drains were submerged and filling. She doesn't know about backflow prevention. She said that in this instance, the storm drains were alleviated when it was between 12 and 13 ft but once it exceeded that is when they began to back flow.

Mr. Watt said that in the Mendenhall Valley they have large infrastructure with 36 inch pipes. They were put in place in the 1980s but now that we have had this record flood event looks like, it is likely to be introspective and look at whether this is realistic. You want your storm drains to work for at least 99.99% but we may need to reassess what we have in light of the record flood.

Ms. Gladziszewski spoke to the 50 ft setback for all the homes that had been built on the river. She said that given the new river banks, some of those are less than a foot from the river so it may be difficult for them to be able to rebuild in that same location.

'Wáahlaal Gíidaak asked if there was a central location for lost/found for members of the public to report lost items or to turn in found items.

Mr. Barr said that those are some of the things they have been working on. For now, the best solution at this time is for people to reach out to the FloodResponse@juneau.gov email address and they will try to connect people with their lost/found items. He said that social media has also provided a good venue for members of the community to connect with each other on lost/found items.

Mr. Bryson spoke to the 2017 or 2018 when the river made its last change when the oxbow blew out and you can see the walking bridge now when you are on Brotherhood Bridge. He said that if that had not happened previously, it would have been blown out with this event.

Mayor Weldon apologized for the haste in which she asked the Assembly to pass the resolution. As Ms. Koester was doing her presentation, she and the Clerk signed the resolution and a copy of it has already been sent to the governor.

Ms. Gladziszewski spoke to concerns about homeowners flood insurance status.

Ms. Koester said that is not in our purview unless we can help individual homeowners get individual assistance. She said that would depend on the state and FEMA federal assistance programs but that in other landslides that happened in other Southeast Communities, there was not much individual assistance provided by FEMA. She said that

regardless of whether or not they have insurance, there is a lot of paperwork involved and she encouraged folks to document everything.

Mayor Weldon also noted that before homeowners do make any changes, that they may need to get an adjustor from their insurance company to come and assess the situation before any work begins. She reminded folks that the banks are undercut and cautioned everyone to stay away from the river banks.

Mr. Barr said that the path to individual assistance may be long and hard but that they should take pictures and keep all their receipts.

Mayor Weldon said that CBJ has been in contact with the landfill and they are working together to try to get help for everyone there.

E. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Mayor Weldon said that there was not anyone signed up under Non-Agenda items so she was taking a different process as an at ease before adjourning the meeting. She said that during this time, if members of the audience had questions for staff, they could ask those and she asked Mr. Jones to step down and put his Red Cross hat on to answer any questions that he might get asked.

F. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

2. Resolution 3036(b) A Resolution of the City and Borough of Juneau Confirming a Local Emergency in Response to Historic Flooding Due to the Release of Water from Suicide Basin and a Request for State and Federal Assistance.

3. Mendenhall River Flooding Update - Presentation by Katie Koester

G. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Assembly, the Assembly meeting adjourned at 6:59p.m.

Signed: _____
Elizabeth J. McEwen
Municipal Clerk

Signed: _____
Beth A. Weldon
Mayor