

## **Sutton Community Council - communications concerning the foot bridge**

On 8/22/17, telsche wrote:Mark Bertels

As I am sure you can imagine, your letter to the community regarding the Chickaloon Village pathway project has sparked intense dialogue. Much of what you chose to put in your letter was hateful, and perhaps even more importantly, downright untrue.

Your opinions are your own. You have every right to them. However, to use your position in the community and the Community Council mailing list to send an opinion piece disguised as an official, objective statement of fact is politically and morally wrong. After reading the letter, I reached out to Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, researched the Alaska Historical Commission Guidelines on Geographic names, and investigated your claims about the history of our area. I quickly discovered that you had done no fact checking before sending your letter; if you had, I believe you would have hesitated before sending it.

I am writing to encourage you to do a few things:

1. Allow someone else to chair the Community Council meeting tomorrow, as I do believe you owe the community an opportunity to address you directly without sitting in a position of power.

2. Draft an apology letter to Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, and to the community. We all deserve better from our elected officials. Have it prepared in advance of tomorrow's meeting.

I have drafted an apology for you. It is attached to this email. Take it or leave it of course. It is just a starting place for your consideration.

Best,  
Telsche Thiessen

Telsche Thiessen attachment:

August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
To Whom It May Concern-

A pedestrian pathway is under construction in Sutton along the Glenn Highway on state and federal road easement. Part of this project is a pedestrian bridge crossing Eska Creek. It is generally acknowledged that this project will benefit the community by continuing the existing pathway so that all the neighborhoods of Sutton are connected from Granite Creek to Eska Creek, making it possible for children and families to walk to and from school, the general store, the clinic, the library, the park and both major creeks without having to walk on the highway. Additionally, the bridge will benefit Eska Creek by eliminating the ATV traffic that previously passed through its waters. Chickaloon Village Traditional Council

is responsible for making this happen.

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017, I issued a formal letter to the community with concerns, primarily about an official or public naming of this pathway, and with concern that the community council had not been notified of the design or construction. I have since learned that both of these concerns were unfounded, and I feel obligated to retract my original letter and issue a formal apology to Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, and to the community at large.

Public process was indeed followed, and the Community Council did have prior involvement in the project. The community council issued a letter of support for the pathway, signed by George Rauscher, which acknowledged the benefits of the pedestrian pathway, and which helped Chickaloon Village secure the necessary funding to move the project forward.

In regards to my concerns about the naming, I have come to understand three things. First, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council had no intention of publicly naming the pathway or the bridge. The name in question was used as a title for grant submissions and project plans. Secondly, I have come to understand that Dene' Tene is Ahtna Athabaskan, and loosely translates to "People's Path," indicating that the bridge will be for pedestrians. In learning this, I have also learned that if language questions arise, I can contact Chickaloon Village Traditional Council for translations. It was rude and insensitive of my letter to suggest that the language selected had no meaning, and for that I am sorry. Third, I have learned that the Alaska Historical Commission

Guidelines for geographic names does not apply to man-made structures, as I incorrectly stated in my letter. Nothing about the naming of this project violates anything in state law or federal guidelines.

I should not have issued a letter to the community without contacting the parties involved to ensure that my facts were correct, and I sincerely hope that any damage I have done to the public image of Chickaloon Village and the pathway project can be repaired.

Sincerely,  
Mark Bertels (Written by Telsje)

On August 23, Mark Bertels wrote"

Telsche,

After reading your message I thought it deserved a proper response. And, since it involves my position on the Sutton Community Council, it deserves to be made public.

I've lived in this community for 43 years and served on the Sutton Community Council for the last 8 years. One of the reasons I joined the Council was because of the collusion and conflict of interest observed by myself and others previously displayed by a monopoly of Chickaloon employees formally serving on the Sutton Council. Of all of the grant programs they approved through the Council to benefit their organization, not one was verified by any actual documentation, grant application language or criteria to qualify their objectives,

and none to date.

In spite of Chickaloon's lack of transparency, the current Sutton Community Council has made a positive effort to work with them for the general good of the community. The Sutton community supported their organization's Moose Creek salmon project grant, the grant for their greenhouse, grant money for their commercial kitchen, and more grant money for the upgrade of their first health clinic. We also supported their proposal to use Federal Scenic Highway funds for a pedestrian path – a project that benefits them financially.

When I was contacted by community members about the starting construction of the new pedestrian path, I had no information to give. The reason was because the community was not included in the planning, design and naming of this project. I contacted the General Contractor and Federal Highway Inspector because of some of the safety and design concerns local residents expressed to me. They were both very surprised to learn that the community was not informed or involved pre-construction.

The Chickaloon organization had every opportunity to include the community of Sutton in this process. They decided not to, why? My letter that you address was in response to the rude exclusive manner of Chickaloon's modus operandi. It's very insulting to people in this community to be inundated by a private organization that perceives themselves as a sovereign tribal entity to the

extent of changing the identity of Sutton to a conceptual, new Chickaloon Village. The reality of this situation is or should be based on historical facts, legal statutes and civil discourse.

Your argument that the pathway has not been publically named is incorrect. It is registered under the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration as: [AK TTP Chic 2013(1) DENE' TENE' PEDESTRIAN PATH]. I have the document to prove it.

The Alaska Historical Commission Guidelines also mandates a process for naming or renaming public infrastructure. It requires public consensus. The letter of support from George Rauscher years ago before 2013 does not exclude the public review process for the design and naming of this project. Yes, I do "fact check".

Your reaction to this particular issue demonstrates my point. You contacted and collaborated with the Chickaloon organization to accuse me of wrong doing without ever speaking to me personally. Then you have the audacity to write a ridiculous and condescending letter of apology – in my name. Really? Who the hell do you think you are? I speak for myself, so please don't put words in my mouth.

Telsche, you once came to the Sutton Community Council with a request for nine thousand dollars to fund a traveling music show using Sutton revenue sharing money. Although we supported the local concert series,

which was successful, the Council didn't approve of the full allocation request and was accused of being a bunch of old people without culture. Well, we do have culture in Sutton. It includes our history of native and white cultures, coal mining, homesteading, community building, subsistence, recreation, a library, historical park, business ventures and independent minded people. This includes Native people who contributed to this construct. (Music was always here too.) There wasn't a separation between town and village. We worked together, played together and lived together.

The main reason I'm serving on the Sutton Community Council is because I love this community. My responsibility is to chair the Board of Directors (Council) who represents Sutton in an advisory capacity to the Borough and State. My goal is to be fair and transparent, more than most. I don't accept your premise of "hate" just because I question purpose and process. We all came from tribes, all of our ancestors subsisted and we're all indigenous natives of planet earth.

As a community we must recognize that nobody is special, we're all equal in a civilized society. Common respect, ethics and honesty goes a long way. Believe it or not, there are folks in this community that appreciate my voluntary service on the Council. I don't facebook or tweet. Instead, I write letters to inform people of what's happening in their community. All I'm saying is that when a private

group receives millions of taxpayer dollars to spend on projects that impact a small diverse community there needs to be accountability. What's wrong with that?

See you at tonight's meeting.

Sincerely,  
Mark Bertels  
Sutton Community Council – Chair  
745-7686

**From:** telsche <telsche@gmail.com>  
**Subject: Re: Your letter to our community**

You are right about one thing, and really only one Mark. You will see us at the council meeting this evening.

You can't even see your own hate speech. You truly are an embarrassment to the position you hold. Perhaps it's time to retire. Fortunately, your personal stats "43 years living in Sutton and eight years on the council" gives us hope that the days of bigotry, and racist remarks are ebbing.

Roberta Mason, Vice President of Sutton Community Council, adds:

The community council issued a letter of support for the pathway, signed by George Rauscher in 2011. That was a simple request with no plans or other information. I find no information about the bridge in any monthly minutes

since then.

A look at our state law identifies the problems to date and the conflict should easily be solved by following the laws.

### **AS 35.30.010. Review and Approval By Local Planning Authorities.**

**(a)** Except as provided in (b) of this section, **before commencing construction of a public project,**

**(1)** if the project is located in a municipality, the department shall submit the plans for the project to the planning commission of the municipality for review and approval;

**(2)** if the project is located within two miles of a village, the department shall submit the plans to the village council for review and comment;

**(3)** if the project is located within one-half mile of the boundary of an area represented by a community council established by municipal charter or ordinance, the department shall submit the plans to the community council for review and comment.

**(b)** Prior approval by a municipal planning commission may not be required before the commencement of construction of a highway or local service road if

**(1)** the department and the municipality have entered into agreement for the planning of the project under AS [19.20.060](#) or [19.20.070](#) and the plans for the project are completed in accordance with the terms of that agreement;

**(2)** the municipality has adopted a municipal master

highway plan under AS [19.20.080](#) and the highway or local service road is consistent with the plan adopted; or **(3)** the department has entered into agreement with the municipality for the planning of transportation corridors under AS [19.20.015](#) and the plans for the project are completed in accordance with the provisions of that agreement.

**(c)** If final disapproval by resolution of the **governing body of the affected municipality or village** is not received within 90 days from the date the project was submitted to the municipality or village, the department may proceed with the project.

### **Alaska Native names**

The Alaska Historical Commission asks the proposer to establish that:

1. the name is or was in common local use and that use is documented
2. the name is linguistically appropriate to the area in which it is to be applied
3. the land owner has been notified of the proposed name and given a chance to comment on it

Being told that Eska is a native word I looked it up. Eska, as a first name said, "Eska is an Inuit name meaning a creek in Sutton Alaska." The surname, Eska, came from several European countries.