

To the people of Sutton,

We will meet on July 15th, 2017 at the Alpine Inn at 7 pm to decide by vote the best course of action and expenditure of Revenue Sharing Funds allocated to renovating the community hall. As we make this decision, we will be considering two things - past history and present practicalities of construction. I have no expertise in construction so I will speak to the past history.

I have been involved with the hall for almost 50 years, both as a resident and sometimes as an officer of Alpine Civic Club or Sutton Community Council. When the hall was abandoned, I took leadership in having it recognized as a Historical Site and in forming the non-profit Alpine Civic Club Board which is now the legal owner of the building and the land on which it sets.

Over time and especially at the last two meetings many ideas and changes at been discussed. We will be voting on two ideas;

(1) lift the building, replace the basement walls, and renovate the building

(2) tear down the building, store all reusable materials, and reconstruct from scratch using saved materials

In the time ACCB has owned the building, we have removed all sheetrock, furred the walls to make them 6 inches, put new insulation in the walls and we

purchased insulation for the attic. Otherwise, the building is basically in original condition.

In the early 50's miners at the Evan Jones coal mine pledged money to be taken from their salaries to build a community hall. They built the basement, then in 1954, moved a building donated from Eklutna power plant to set on that basement. They used equipment from the mine and all work was volunteer. The mine provided coal for heating. When coal was no longer available, keeping the hall heated became a problem and that was the problem that eventually made it impossible to keep the hall open.

For almost 50 years the Hall was maintained and kept open to the community by local residents serving on the Alpine Civic Club. Funds from weekly Bingo, donations, from users, and other fund raisers kept the building open. Many activities charged a small fee and donated part of that fee to the hall. Small periodic grants provided for more expensive repairs such as a furnace and a new roof. In the mid-60's the local 4-H cub got a grant to fix up the back half of the hall and landscape around the hall. At that time trees grew close all around the building. With the help of prisoners from the adult camp and locals, land was cleared, steps built and flowers planted around the building.

Since ACCB was formed and before the sheetrock was removed, we had inspections by two building engineers, the state fire inspectors and the state

historical society. Their recommendations were to repair basement walls, provide more headroom for stairs to basement and replace the main breaker load center. The fire inspectors approved the building for use but suggested we not open the basement to the public.

From 1968, when I came, to the late 80's the hall was used almost daily. Youth group and club meetings, community schools, pre-school, gymnastics and dance classes. roller skating, children's plays, political meetings, voting, birthday parties, weddings, funerals, fairs, lectures, community college classes, weekend retreats for teen leaders, week long statewide hunter safety and ATV safety conventions, sewing and cooking lessons from CES, church services, holiday dinners, dances (remember the Anchorage disc jockeys), musical groups, turkey shoots in the basement, annual summer festivals, and other activities were held at the hall. In emergency situations, the hall was used to prepare food, house people or meet together to share information and prayers. Some parents from Chickaloon, Palmer and Wasilla brought their children to join clubs in Sutton because they wanted their children to be involved with our youth. I think the hall played a big part in making that happen.

In 1972, I started the Sutton Strutters, a group of 22 Sutton girls (and for a very short time 5 boys who

wanted to use their batons as swords), for 5 years, practiced at least 3 days a week in the hall. The Strutters won first place at Colony Days, Fur Rendezvous, Golden Days Parade in Fairbanks, and for 5 years participated in state twirling competitions and performed at the state fair and at many school assemblies. Mothers brought sewing machines to the hall to sew costumes. Some of the girls even placed in the national championships. The Strutters served dinners to 40-50 people on two Sundays a month after church to pay their expenses and for use of the hall. I remember the Boy Scout cake auctions. Back then there was no fee for local groups to use the hall but most groups held a fundraiser to help with hall expenses. Everyone left the hall clean and I notice today that the young adults who used the hall as children are often the first to pitch in when there is clean up to be done. The hall was often used by young people of the valley for weekend retreats and for school groups all over the state to stay when they attended the fair or for housing on field trips.

When I picture activities I attended at the hall, I first remember how people from all walks of life seemed to be so comfortable there. Almost to a person, visitors expressed how lucky we were to have the facility. Lecturers commented on the excellent acoustics and how welcome and 'at home' they felt there. Groups said they appreciated the simple accommodations and how easy it was to clean up. The hall was pretty

crowded for Halloween and Christmas parties and for dances. It got pretty loud and sometimes we had to open doors to cool off. When little ones dozed, we made them beds under tables against the walls. When parents would walk in and put toddlers down, the little ones would run and run in the spaciousness.

I think some of the things we talk about changing might have played a part in the very success of the hall. The low ceiling might have enhanced the feeling of closeness and comfortableness, especially with children, and it certainly helped with warmth. The simple openness made cleaning easy. Before the furnace was moved upstairs, heat in the basement with grilles in the floor above made heat cheaper and more efficient. Larger and more weather resistant windows are a must and plumbing must be consolidated in one area to prevent freezing but the hall worked for over 50 years as is. It provided for activities that no other building in our community can fulfill. People appreciated the simplistic quaintness of the building and I think they will again.

These are my thoughts about the renovations of the Sutton Community Hall. I hope others will share their memories and suggestions before we make a decision on June 15th.

