

The past academic school year has been a trying one for Eagle River High School (ERHS). Since the November 2018 earthquake, the conglomerated community of Eagle River and Chugiak has become divided over the issue of what to do with the various schools. For example, many community members believe that closing ERHS and combining it with Chugiak High School (CHS) is the best option. However, ERHS has worked hard since it opened in 2005 to create a unique identity and culture. Now that its very existence may be at stake, many students want to show that our school really embodies our motto of “Excellence, Community, Respect” and should remain open. A student government committee of five, including myself, is working to change our school’s street name from Yosemite Drive to Wolf Den Drive, after our mascot. As Senior Class President, I believe that changing the name would help bolster our school spirit, display our identity to the community, leave a long-lasting legacy, and serve as a real-life example of the power of the student voice.

Changing a street name sounds like it would be a quick and easy process with little controversy. In this case, it has been quite the opposite. The neighborhood behind Eagle River High School, Eagle Pointe, uses Yosemite Drive as its only entrance, and all the streets in the neighborhood are named after a National Park. However, ERHS is the only building on Yosemite Drive, and changing its name would not impact any of the resident’s addresses. The first thing we did was reach out to the neighborhood informing them of our desire to change the name and asking their opinions on it. The neighborhood developer responded with an email that said, “No way.” They didn’t want their neighborhood theme to be disrupted by changing the entry road name to Wolf Den Drive. Understanding this perspective, we knew that not everyone in the neighborhood shared this view, so we respectfully continued with the process.

In early November 2019, our group met with Anchorage Assembly member Chris Constant, who was supportive of our idea. He helped us outline a timeline and gave us advice on how to navigate the bureaucracy and policymakers, which is oftentimes especially difficult for younger people who have little experience doing so. Following Mr. Constant’s guidelines, we drafted a formal petition about the name change and surveyed our peers at school, collecting over 450 signatures. With the petition, our resolution, and a letter, we met with the Anchorage mayor, Ethan Berkowitz, who has the authority to approve the name change. While Berkowitz was also supportive, he recommended that we rally support from the Anchorage Assembly and the community first so that he would not be acting alone in signing it off. Our work was cut out for us, and I learned the importance of building support, not just exercising power.

First, we met with Anchorage Assemblyman Fred Dyson, who represents the Eagle River District. He too was supportive, so we attended an Anchorage Assembly Meeting on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, where we presented a formal request to change the street name. Next, we attended the South Fork Community meeting and presented our petition so we could determine how other community members felt. We received verbal support from this local council. Our resolution was then presented at another Anchorage Assembly meeting on December 17<sup>th</sup>, where it was passed and approved. The Anchorage Assembly, with the full authority to request a street name change, officially proposed it to the Planning Department. This was followed by a waiting period for comments and opposition which closed on February 4<sup>th</sup>. At last, the decision was at the hands of Mayor Berkowitz, who signed it off on March 6<sup>th</sup>.

Although the name change to Wolf Den Drive has yet to physically appear, as it is still being processed, we are hopeful that we will be able to present the signs as a gift from the Senior Class at our high school graduation in May. My peers and I who worked on this have learned very much from the process that including speaking, writing, and consensus building to address an issue of social importance to our school and community. We have shown the ERHS student body and the ASD board that we as students have a voice and that we will be heard.