

April 7, 2010

Cheryl Frasca
Director of Office of Management and Budget
Municipality of Anchorage
P.O. Box 196650
Anchorage, Alaska 99519-6650

Dear Ms. Frasca,

A subcommittee of the Anchorage Budget Commission was charged with reviewing the "Citizen's Guide to the Budget," to offer revisions in its content and layout to improve the public's understanding and involvement in the people's budget.

A citizen's guide to the budget was developed in 2002 during the Wuerch administration. The guide is a valuable tool in aiding the public's understanding of the development and operation of the budget process within the municipality. The guide includes discussions of subjects related to budgeting which are universal to the operations of the municipality, such as the description of the budget process, types of budgets, revenues, taxes, and a glossary of terms. However, other components of the guide and some narrative within the previous mentioned subjects are specific to an administration, such as mission and measures, or require frequent updates, like budget figures.

To make the guide useful to the public over time and more efficient to maintain, it should be placed on the municipality's website in a conspicuous location that is easily accessed. The present layout of the guide lends its self well to a web format that could be effectively indexed to specific subject areas.

Capturing the attention of the public requires a more visual approach to information. The heavy narrative of the 2002 document should be revised to capture as much information in tables, graphs, charts and time tables as possible. To minimize the need for frequent updates, the chapters on processes and terminology should be more generic, but expanded in content to capture other relevant topics.

We recommend adding a new section on frequently asked questions. The questions could be updated periodically, based upon requests for information that come from the mayor's office and departments. The questions and answers should also connect back to the relevant subject areas contained in the guide.

Another section should be added on citizen participation in the budget. We recommend that this include feedback loops throughout the budget process, including: input into the initial goals and measurements; rating performance measures; input into the development of the proposed budgets (both operating and capital), and first quarter revisions. The public's involvement would be captured through the use of public testimony, community councils and web surveys of the general public and specific user groups. A calendar of key dates for citizen involvement would also be beneficial to the process.

There were numerous editing comments, including additional topics, which would be beneficial to the update of the document. However for the purposes of this report, these comments will be addressed in a meeting with staff assigned to the update. The subcommittee looks forward to further discussions on the "Citizen's Guide to the Budget."

Respectfully submitted by:

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Heather Ireland
Janet Brand