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Opinions

Opinion: Anchorage needs a framework for economic discipline, resilience and shared success

By George Martinez

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Anchorage, September 2023. (Loren Holmes / ADN)

Anchorage has no shortage of ideas. What we've lacked — until now — is a clear framework to align them, measure them and hold ourselves accountable for how we build and spend over time.

In June, the Anchorage Assembly will consider [AR 2025-159](#) to adopt the Anchorage Economic Development Framework – Core Principles, a strategic foundation for how we approach growth, investment, and resilience. It's not a plan with pages of projects. It's a compass — four clear principles that help us stop spinning and start building smarter.

Why now? Because the ground beneath us is shifting. As federal priorities change and state government offloads more responsibility to local jurisdictions, cities like Anchorage are increasingly left to manage the consequences. The legacy of over-subsidized development — where large-scale infrastructure was built with outside dollars and little thought to long-term sustainability — has caught up with us. It has left us with systems that are too big to maintain, too fragile to adapt and too shallow to generate meaningful local returns.

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This framework starts with what I call economic truth: the honest recognition that we've built an economy dependent on extraction and subsidy, not local capacity.

Admitting that doesn't weaken us, it positions us to change course.

Next is the principle of stackable ROI — a simple but powerful idea. Every public investment should do more than one thing. Improving pedestrian infrastructure should support year-round livability, destination tourism, and mixed-use and attainable housing developments. When dollars reinforce each other, they create depth, not just motion.

And we've seen that model work. Just look at the Dena'ina and Egan convention centers, which are funded through a forward-thinking bond package tied to future hotel bed taxes. With no burden placed on property taxpayers and a structure prioritizing long-term capital reserves and cultural relevance, this public-private partnership has outperformed its projections while protecting community values. It's a case study in layered returns, intelligent planning, and civic stewardship.

Third is preemptive resiliency. We can't wait for disruption to react — we must build now as if the next earthquake, budget crisis or supply chain breakdown is already on the way. Resiliency should be part of every capital project, every permitting process, and every budget line.

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And finally, equity and opportunity. This isn't about charity — it's about stability. When people have fair access to jobs, housing and civic life, communities are stronger, safer and more self-reliant. Equity isn't an afterthought. It's smart governance.

This framework doesn't add red tape. It adds clarity. It gives our departments, partners and residents a shared lens through which we can shape a stronger future, measured not just by how much we spend, but by what we build together.

Anchorage is ready to move forward with an approach that honors our legacy of rugged optimism by calling us to be more disciplined, deliberate, and united in

how we grow.

It's time to stop reacting. It's time to start building our future with purpose, transparency, and all of us in mind.

George Martinez represents District 5, East Anchorage on the Anchorage Assembly and serves as chair of the Assembly Community and Economic Development Committee.

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