

Chair LaFrance Report Archive, 1/10-4/25/2023

Suzanne LaFrance served on the Anchorage Assembly, representing District 6, South Anchorage, Girdwood and Turnagain Arm from 2017-2023. She served as Assembly Chair from July 2021 - April 2023. Read her archival chair reports below.

Chair Report - 4/25/2023

Welcome and thank you for being here tonight – whether in person or online. A special welcome to the Assembly members-elect and their friends, families and loved ones. I also want to welcome our youth member Jacob Matthews, our alternate who is serving for his first meeting tonight.

A Note about Live Meeting Updates

As a courtesy to members of the public following along, our staff will be posting live updates on our home page with links to meeting documents, including laid-on-the-table items and floor amendments. You can find these updates at muni.org/assembly under the News section on the home page.

Golden Lion Opening

This morning my colleague Felix Rivera and I joined with the Mayor and members of his administration to announce that we will bring the Golden Lion online for housing no later than June 30. First off, I'd like to thank the Mayor and his administration, especially Alexis Johnson, as well as the Assembly members who have pushed for the former Golden Lion to be opened as low-income housing for getting us to this point. We are finally at a place where we can announce the opening of the former Golden Lion as housing!

Although the Assembly and Mayor may disagree on some policy issues, I think I can safely say that we are in alignment on one of the biggest needs in the Municipality – the need for more housing. That's why the Assembly, the Mayor, and private and philanthropic partners have worked together to get the former Guest House, former Barratt Inn, and the newly named Lakehouse Inn opened as housing, creating almost 300 units of housing in the span of a year. Turning on the former Golden Lion as housing will add another 85 units so we can continue to chip away at the great need we know exists. So again, I want to thank everyone who helped us get here today. This really is an event to celebrate as a community!

Covenant House Sleep Out

Last Friday I was honored to participate in Covenant House Alaska's annual Sleep Out event, where individuals sleep outside for a night to raise funds and awareness and show solidarity for at-risk youth experiencing homelessness or trafficking. At this event, we heard directly from a member of the Covenant House staff who had been a youth in the program and who spoke firsthand about how Covenant House not only provides a safe place to sleep but also acceptance, support and life changing help. I congratulate Covenant House on a successful event and thank you for the invaluable service you provide our community.

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Annual Professional Municipal Clerks Week, April 30 through May 6, 2023

Next week is the 54th Annual Professional Clerks Week and there is a resolution on tonight's agenda to recognize our Municipal Clerk team. You might ask, what do clerks do? And the short answer is everything, because no task is too big or too small when it comes to making our local government work. The Clerk's Office oversees the work to carry out Assembly resolutions, business licenses, regular/special/committee meetings, worksessions, agendas, addendums, minutes, amendments, ordinances produced, records requests, phone calls, emails, Robert's Rules, phone testimony sign up, email testimony, TEAMS, microphones, security, elections, run-off elections, special elections, the Open Meetings Act, research, budget analysis, communications, snacks, flyers and binders, to name a few. Municipal clerks make our local government work. On behalf of this body, thank you to this incredible team of dedicated public servants on the Municipal clerk team who go above and beyond to ensure that the Legislative branch can fulfill its duties to the people of the Municipality.

We are also very fortunate to be served by the Office of the Ombudsman, Assembly Legal and Legislative Services. I extend deep gratitude to all of you who work together to enable the Legislative branch to function successfully.

Election

A very significant duty of the Municipal Clerk is to ensure that our local elections are safe, secure and accurate. As we prepare to enter another election in the books, I want to acknowledge and thank everyone who worked to make this election a success – from the Election Officials and Workers, to the Elections Commission, to the observers, volunteers and community members who dedicated many hours to ensure that this election was transparent, safe and secure. A very big thank you to Jaimie Heinz, Liz Edwards, and Amy Solberg.

Assembly

As this is my last chair report, I'm going to go a bit long and take a few minutes to reflect on our system of local government and the role of the Assembly. A thank you to Ombudsman Darrel Hess for the historical information. For those of you who may be new to Assembly meetings, the Assembly is the legislative body of the Municipality. With two members elected by voters across six districts of the Municipality, we represent constituents from Eklutna to south of Girdwood on Turnagain Arm.

Per the Charter, at least twice a month, on Tuesdays, we take up the business of the municipality at the Loussac Chambers. Our work mostly focuses on setting the annual municipal budget, appropriating money to municipal priorities and authoring Anchorage Municipal Code to establish local law.

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The broad-based powers of the Assembly are balanced with the broad-based powers of the mayor. When Anchorage was incorporated in 1920, the mayor had limited powers. In 1947, a council-manager form of government, where the council hires someone to run the city, was adopted. When Anchorage unified as a Municipality in 1975, public opinion polls at that time showed that people preferred a system of a mayor with broad powers that was balanced by a strong Assembly with broad powers. And actually, a member of the Charter Commission put forward an amendment for a council-manager form of government, which failed 5-5.

So we have this system of two branches of government as established by the Charter: The Legislative Branch, the Assembly, sets the direction of the city through legislation. The Executive Branch, the mayor, carries out the business of the city and provides core services to our residents. Police, fire, snow removal, public transit, road maintenance and planning/permitting.

There are checks and balances:

- The mayor appoints heads of depts, assembly confirms (or not) based on professional qualifications;
- The Assembly approves legislation, mayor can exercise veto, assembly can override with supermajority;
- The Mayor proposes annual budget, assembly can amend and approve, mayor can veto, assembly can override with supermajority.

Being on the Assembly is an honor, there is opportunity to help people – connect with others who can help, advocate for constituents – work with a whole bunch of smart, dedicated people in our community, work on code improvements and collaborate with the administration, the public, and other members of the Assembly.

There has always been tension between the two branches of government, with every mayor raising issues related to separation of powers, and each branch checking the other branch. This aspect of the job has escalated dramatically in the last 22 months – I'm not going to go into this here.

But I'm going to say that some degree of conflict can be good, it can be productive and in fact I believe it is essential to yield a better result. The key, however, is that it must be respectful, with everyone agreeing to act in good faith and follow the rules. Sometimes people have said to me, why doesn't the Assembly just approve everything, why do you have to amend amendments, why can't you go along to get along? That is not our job. The taxpayers of this community deserve a legislative body that uses the broad based

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powers granted by our Charter to ensure that we are delivering the best results to the people of this community.

When you see the Assembly asking tough questions and challenging the people who bring forward proposals, it isn't because we are trying to be difficult. It's our job to dig into the details, ask questions and challenge others to put forward the best legislation possible. It's our job to set a high standard. We hammer out budget and legislative proposals, sometimes right here on the dais, to ensure the municipality is going in the right direction -- to steer our community in the best possible direction, to make our community a better place to live for all people. And because of the Open Meetings Act, and our commitment to transparency, we don't do it behind closed doors, we do it right here in the open so the public can see how the decisions are made.

Our community deserves nothing less. And we must do this work with deep respect for the process and for one another, in whatever role we play in our local government, keeping focused on what really matters, which is ensuring that our community moves forward.

I truly believe that local government is where it's at, it's what matters in the daily lives of all of us. I am profoundly grateful for having had this opportunity to serve on this Assembly and to serve as Chair. Thank you all for this honor.

Chair Report - 4/11/2023

Welcome and thank you for being here tonight – whether in person or online. Congratulations to all of the high school basketball champions out there. We have some very accomplished student athletes in our community.

AFD Academy Graduation

Congratulations to the graduates of the Anchorage Fire Department Academy class of 2023-01. I was happy to attend the April 1 ceremony, along with Vice Chair Constant and Members Zaletel and Dern. We are so fortunate that this group of new graduates is willing to serve our community in this critical public safety role.

A willingness of individuals to serve our community as municipal employees is what enables our local government to provide services such as police protection, fire protection, snow plowing, public transit and park maintenance to residents and visitors. Those services also rely on people performing accounting, purchasing, legal,

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administrative, permitting and other functions. Thanks to all the hardworking employees of the municipality who have chosen to serve our community in this way.

Election

Thanks to the voters for participating in the April 5 Regular Municipal Election and a heartfelt thank you to the Election officials who continue to finalize election results. Certification is scheduled for the Regular Assembly Meeting of April 25.

Body Cameras

Last week the Assembly learned in the Public Safety Committee meeting that the implementation of body cameras is further delayed. Given that the voters approved funding for body cameras two years ago, this is unacceptable. At our next Rules meeting, I will bring this topic up with members so the Assembly can discuss options and plan possible paths forward.

Live Meeting Updates

Tonight is a full agenda and there are multiple Laid on the Table Items that are not on the published agenda. As a courtesy to members of the public following along, our staff will be posting live updates on our home page with links to meeting documents. You can find this at muni.org/assembly under the News section on the home page.

A Note on Procedure

A quick note on procedure: when the Mayor brings forward legislation, the practice is that it is “submitted by the Chair of the Assembly at the Request of the Mayor.” The Chair does not see such documents in advance and is not a co-sponsor (For example, item 14.D. on the agenda tonight, the S version of AO 2023-35 pertaining to facial recognition). I just wanted to let everyone know that with our processes, you will often see something brought forward by the Mayor that is submitted through the Chair.

Special Meeting on April 18

I want to remind everyone that we have a special meeting scheduled for next Tuesday, April 18 here at Assembly Chambers. Members should keep in mind that April 18 and April 25 are both available for items that need to be postponed tonight.

Chair Report - 3/21/2023

Welcome and thank you for being here tonight – whether you’re joining us here in the Chambers or online. I hope everyone has been able to enjoy a spring break. Happy Women’s History Month!

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Municipality Occupational Safety Issues

The Assembly continues to work on the urgent situation regarding the Municipality's response to the State of Alaska Occupational Safety and Health Enforcement Section's placement of the Municipality in the Severe Violator Enforcement Program. In fall 2021, the state brought a list of occupational safety citations to the municipality and in spring 2022, the state agreed to lessen the fines if the municipality agreed to several conditions and reporting requirements.

We recently learned that the municipality unfortunately did not meet those conditions and now is at risk of paying the full citation amount plus additional fines. Failure to do so puts taxpayers at risk for footing a \$628K bill that could go up to \$1M, with a total exposure of \$12M, if the situation isn't remedied. To address this situation and improve safety and working conditions for municipal employees, as well as protect the resources of the municipality, I am introducing an ordinance tonight that seeks to elevate the Municipality's safety and health program by granting more authority to the position of the Director of Health and Safety. The intent is to enact best practices for safety and health programs here at the Municipality. We are looking at March 31 as a date for a worksession. I'll be extending an invitation to the administration in the hopes that they can participate in this important discussion.

Joe Gerace Investigation

As the next step in getting the facts about the administration's investigation of Joe Gerace's tenure as the Anchorage Health Department Director, who was hired under fraudulent credentials that were fabricated, the Assembly filed an appeal last Friday with the State of Alaska Superior Court last Friday regarding the final administrative order by Mayor Bronson that denied Assembly Leadership's February 14 request under the Alaska Public Records Act to access the records detailing the investigation.

To recap, on February 14, Assembly Leadership requested two documents from the internal investigation. On February 16, the Mayor issued a response that denied the Assembly's appeal to access of the records, citing the constitutional right to privacy and an Anchorage Municipal Code provision that establishes the confidentiality of Municipal personnel records. This filing officially delivers the question of the records release to the court to decide that matter.

The Assembly is not asking for any confidential information. We're trying to do our due diligence to make sure that the report that the Mayor's team promised to the public is shared with the public. If there is confidential information in the report, it can be blacked out. This is a very simple request and it's frustrating that it's taking so much time and effort and that it had to go to the courts to resolve. This amounts to additional costs, which are paid by the taxpayers.

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Arctic Recreation Center

We will talk about this later, but I want to say a few words about the Arctic Recreation Center. As some of you know, this facility had been identified as a possible shelter location by the facilitated working group in 2021 (the small group of members of the administration and the assembly who were collaborating on finding solutions to homelessness). Last month, it was officially recommended by the Emergency Shelter Task Force as a potential facility and has been briefly discussed a few times in meetings of the Committee on Housing and Homelessness. And those of us who went to Juneau talked about it as a possible location and facility.

Some residents living near the Center have had strong responses to this idea, which is understandable, because through the years we have seen problems at low-barrier places like the Brother Francis Shelter, which now operates differently without those problems of the past, and the Sullivan Arena, which is a mess. The fact is that there have only been initial conversations, no money has been expended and no decisions have been made. There is no plan, there is no proposal, there is only an idea to consider.

One thing that is clear is that these are really difficult conversations. What I have heard from people is that as a community we need to figure out a way to talk about homelessness that is grounded in fact and builds consensus among all of us about how we can move forward. The Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness has offered to engage with all of us in a three to four-month process to have these foundational conversations. I am hopeful that the Assembly, and the administration, will choose to engage in this process of bringing together our entire community – our neighbors, people experiencing homelessness, providers, businesses, non-profits, other stakeholders and policy makers, because this is a really difficult and challenging conversation. If we're going to make progress on this issue, we need to commit to making these decisions together.

Chair Report - 3/7/2023

Happy Fur Rendezvous and happy Iditarod to everyone! I hope you got out to enjoy some of the recent festivities.

Last Friday was Employee Appreciation Day. A big "thank you" to all the hardworking employees of the Municipality! Your service to our community is deeply appreciated.

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Assembly Delegation Visit to Juneau

Two weeks ago, a delegation of Assembly members, including Members Petersen, Quinn-Davidson, Cross and me went to Juneau to meet with legislators to advocate for funding for the Port, housing and education. Adequate state funding is critical to the functioning of our city and Assembly members are committed to speaking up to urge the State of Alaska to invest in and take care of its local communities. You can learn more about the Municipality's legislative priorities under the State Priorities button at muni.org/assembly.

While in Juneau, we also attended the Alaska Municipal League conference where Mr. Petersen was recognized for his years of service to the organization, including as a board member and President. Congratulations Mr. Petersen for that recognition and for completing your final AML conference as an Assembly Member!

Municipality Occupational Safety Issues

Last week the Assembly held a worksession to address the urgent situation regarding the Municipality's response to the State of Alaska Occupational Safety and Health Enforcement Section's placement of the Municipality in the Severe Violator Enforcement Program. In fall 2021, the state brought a list of occupational safety citations to the municipality, totaling over six hundred thousand dollars. In spring 2022, the state agreed to lessen the fines to ninety-two thousand dollars if the municipality agreed to several conditions and reporting requirements.

We recently learned that the municipality did not meet those conditions and now is at risk of paying the full citation amount plus additional fines. While these violations happened under a number of mayoral administrations, the buck stops here with Mayor Bronson. First and foremost, we need to ensure the Municipality is a safe place to work. I urge the Mayor to take this issue seriously and get into compliance by March 24 as required by the State. Failure to do so puts taxpayers at risk for footing a \$628k bill that could go up to \$1M, with a total exposure of \$12M, if the situation isn't remedied.

Housing Update

The issue of housing and homelessness is top of mind lately and I want to address the positive accomplishments we've made as a community in this area. After coming together in 2015 to create the Anchored Home Plan, the municipality, service providers, community members and funders have worked together to launch new and innovative housing and services, and it's paying off. In September 2022, there were 500 fewer people experiencing homelessness than when the pandemic started.

The Municipality invested \$54 million in federal relief and alcohol tax funds in housing in

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2021 and 2022, and private funders have invested millions in recent housing facilities and shelters as well, including the Alaska Mental Health Authority, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Richard L. and Diane M. Block Foundation, Calista Corporation, Chugach Alaska Corporation, CIRI Foundation, Doyon Corporation, Gottstein Foundation, Premera Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alaska, Providence Alaska, Rasmuson Foundation, San Francisco Jewish Community Foundation, State of Alaska, Weidner Apartment Homes, Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation and the United Way of Anchorage.

You will note the presence of many Alaska Native Corporations on that list and I want to make sure they get their due credit for being such strong partners on this issue. There is great diversity in the people experiencing homelessness in our community and I'm proud to say that there is also great diversity in those working on solutions. I thank everyone who has contributed to ending homelessness in Anchorage.

Mayor Bronson Mismanagement Issues

We heard a little bit from the mayor tonight, but we have not heard a substantial response from the mayor concerning issues of mismanagement in the municipality. I'm tired of hearing of something new and saying once again, that the actions of the mayor are concerning, that the situation is worrisome. I want this community to know, especially our hard-working municipal employees, that the Assembly is doing everything within our power to safeguard the Municipality's interests and people. The process of inquiry takes time and Assembly leadership has not ruled out any options.

Mr. Mayor, once again, I extend an invitation for a moment of person privilege for you to address what is going on in your administration. Our community deserves a response. I know you will not speak to confidential personnel issues, but there is no legal cause that prevents you from responding to the community's questions regarding the financial health of the city, low employee morale, repeated issues with improper contracts and financial paperwork errors, and the mass exodus of your executive staff.

As always, you have a standing invitation at any Assembly meeting to address the public and answer the serious questions about what is going on in your administration.

Chair Report - 2/21/2023

Before we begin, I want to acknowledge the terrible accident this weekend at Turnagain CrossFit. My sympathies go out to the family and loved ones of the individual who

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passed away and to all of those who were impacted. Thanks to our first responders and the volunteers who responded so quickly to the incident.

Welcome and thank you for being here tonight – whether in person or online. I hope everyone enjoyed the President’s Day weekend. Serving as an elected official requires leadership, dedication, vision and a servant’s heart, so it is right that we recognize those who have served in this highest office on behalf of the people of our country.

Community Events

Last week I attended the opening of Catholic Social Service’s 3rd Avenue Resource & Navigation Center, which will provide basic services, long-range support and employment services to people experiencing homelessness. This is a critical piece in the housing safety net that the Assembly and community providers have been working to bring online through the Anchored Home Plan. I also attended the Bettye Davis African American Summit, along with the Vice-Chair, pertaining to Health & Equity, which featured uplifting speakers and important conversations on health and education. Congratulations to both of these groups for your accomplishments on behalf of our community, and happy Black History Month.

Snow Removal

The Assembly continues to look into the snow removal situation and how we can keep our city streets and sidewalks running safely and efficiently. At a committee meeting last week, we heard from snow removal operators and got feedback on some of the problems surrounding this issue, and later on tonight, we will take up an ordinance that proposes authorizing temporary snow disposal sites so we can clean up excess snow around town.

Paid Parental Leave Ordinance

I do want to note that the parental leave benefit ordinance which the Mayor mentioned in his remarks is only the agenda for introduction tonight. If accepted for introduction, the public testimony and debate on this ordinance is scheduled for the meeting of March 7, 2023 and more will be said on this issue at that time. I will say that many organizations have figured out a way to make this work and I think this is something the Municipality can do as well.

Assembly 2023 Workplan

Item 10.B.1. on the agenda tonight is the Assembly’s 2023 workplan. If approved, the Assembly’s 2023 priorities will include launching a housing initiative, supporting the Port of Alaska Modernization, monitoring the Municipality’s financial health, promoting public health and safety, and conducting the business of the Assembly in an open, accessible and transparent process.

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The document also reviews the Assembly's accomplishments from 2022, which include investing \$40M in affordable housing through 3 hotel to housing conversions, a Providence supportive housing facility, affordable family rental facilities at Cook Inlet Housing and Shiloh Housing, and support for emergency shelters at Covenant House, Catholic Social Services and others.

The Assembly also helped the fire and police departments move to 24/7 service for mental health first responders, and we made considerable investments in parks, trails, childcare, mental health services, and workforce development.

Increasing Funding for Schools

On the consent agenda is a resolution proposed by Members Rivera and Zaletel and myself, as well as Vice-Chair Constant, asking the legislature to inflation-proof the Base Student Allocation and forward-fund school funding. This resolution recognizes that prioritizing and investing in public education is critical to student success and essential for our community to be an attractive place for families to live, and for our economy to thrive.

Mayor Bronson Mismanagement Issues

There's a lot to say about mismanagement of the municipality, however, I'll keep it short. I want this community to know, especially our hard-working municipal employees, that the Assembly is doing everything within our power to safeguard the Municipality's interests and people, including approving emergency ordinances to add more controls to municipal spending and to clarify the powers of the Municipal Ombudsman, as well as continuing our inquiry into the investigation on the tenure of Mr. Gerace as the Health Department Director. We've also added meetings so that we can assure that municipal business is conducted in a timely manner with these additional levels of oversight.

Mr. Mayor, once again, I extend an invitation for a moment of person privilege for you to address what is going on in your administration. I know you will not speak to confidential personnel issues, but there is no legal cause that prevents you from responding to the community's questions regarding the financial health of the city, low employee morale, repeated issues with improper contracts and financial paperwork errors, and the mass exodus of your executive staff.

As always, you have a standing invitation at any Assembly meeting to address the public and answer the serious questions facing your leadership. Our community deserves a response.

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Chair Report - 2/7/2023

The Seriousness of the Allegations Against Mayor Bronson

I wanted to note that we started the meeting a little differently tonight when we went straight into some business about the mayor's administration that has been casting a dark shadow over our community for many months now. Normally we like to start our meetings with positive items, like recognition resolutions, that highlight all the good in our community. Unfortunately, the issues around the mayor's mismanagement are interfering with our ability to conduct the Municipality's business and we needed to take up that item.

I cannot underscore how serious this issue is and how expensive it will be for the Municipality. Taxpayers will pay the cost for this unprecedented mismanagement, through legal expenses and settlements, consultant contracts to fill in for staffing gaps such as payroll services, and lost opportunities. But we need to continue forward and continue to ensure that the business of the Municipality is conducted, so I will now return to our regular agenda.

Happy Black History Month

There is a series of events hosted by the Alaska Black Caucus this month – community conversations, celebratory events and a business networking event. One of the events is a skate at Cuddy Park with Olympic speed skating champion, Shani Davis. More information is available at www.TheAlaskaBlackCaucus.com. The Black Business Expo was held this weekend – I was happy to attend. Congratulations to the organizers for a successful event!

Chair Report - 1/24/2023

Welcome and thank you for being here tonight – in person or online.

Pedestrian Fatalities

In the past few days, we have had two pedestrian fatalities on our city roads. These incidents are heartbreaking and I extend my deepest condolences to the families, loved ones and friends of the victims. Our city has a major problem with pedestrian safety and we must take action to prevent future incidents and fatalities. The Assembly has recently increased our focus in this area, including creating a Safe Routes to Schools working group with the school district and members of the administration to improve

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pedestrian safety around schools, prioritizing pedestrian safety in the transportation plans that come through the Assembly, and adding pedestrian safety and trail connectivity to our 2023 work plan. I ask others in leadership positions in transportation fields to join us in prioritizing pedestrian safety in the upcoming year.

Safeguarding Municipal Resources

As is evidenced by the Assembly's recent special meetings, we are taking the allegations of financial and employment mismanagement at the municipality very seriously and are doing everything within our power to safeguard municipal people and resources. To my fellow Assembly Members, I appreciate your commitment to put in the time required to exercise additional oversight and controls in the next two months while we get to the bottom of these allegations and develop long-term solutions to keep the municipality fiscally sound.

Thank You to Long-Serving Municipal Employees

As the Assembly continues to work to protect the municipality's interests, I want to thank several long-serving civil servants whose commitment to operational focus has helped ensure that critical municipal resources continue to be provided. Last week's special meeting was very collaborative and productive, and I especially want to thank Kent Kohlhase, Courtney Petersen and Blair Christensen, and also Adam Trombley and Lance Wilber, for your willingness to put in extra time and help us craft the emergency ordinances to be effective without putting undue burden on the public servants who are working hard to keep our city running. Your experience and commitment to this community is helping to hold our city together right now during this tumultuous period.

Subpoena of Joe Gerace Investigation

At last night's meeting, the Assembly authorized a subpoena of the records related to Mayor Bronson's hiring of former Health Department Director Joe Gerace. The administration had asserted that it has conducted an internal investigation into how Mr. Gerace was identified, chosen, and nominated for this position, but after repeated requests for the information, very limited requested information has been provided to the Assembly, and Assembly leadership was recently informed that the reports would only be shared under the order of a subpoena. As such, the mayor has determined that this information can't be shared with the public. It is unfortunate that we couldn't investigate and resolve this issue in broad daylight, because this issue is very serious, and the people of Anchorage have a right to know what is going on. It's the intent of Assembly leadership that we convene in Executive Session tonight to view the report. I

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expect that will be between 8 and 8:30 pm tonight.

Invitation to the Mayor to Speak

Mr. Mayor, you already used your allotted time for your mayor's report, but since this issue is so serious, I wanted to extend to you an opportunity for a moment of privilege to respond to our community regarding the growing concerns of financial and employment mismanagement, as well as the results of the Gerace investigation. If you would like to speak to that now, the floor is yours. This is a standing invitation for a moment of personal privilege, should you change your mind.

Chair Report - 1/10/2023

Happy New Year! I hope 2023 is off to a good start for all of you.

MLK Jr. Day

This coming Monday is Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and there is a resolution on tonight's agenda to designate January 16 as a Day of Service. Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church will honor the legacy of Dr. King by serving others with "A Day On, Not a Day Off." Shiloh is sponsoring an annual paper products (paper towels, toilet paper) and coffee drive for Beans Café, Brother Francis Shelter and the Anchorage Rescue Mission. Please bring items to the church gym at 855 E. 20th Ave. on Monday from noon to 2 pm.

Housing Resolution

At the December meeting, the Assembly passed a resolution, AR 2022-416, reiterating the Assembly's commitment to alleviating Anchorage's housing shortage and affordability crisis. This resolution is the product of a retreat this fall where the Assembly renewed our level of focus on this issue, and its passage allows us as a body to prioritize this work in the upcoming year. There are already a number of projects completed or underway to cut red tape and facilitate increased housing development, including the elimination of parking minimums, changes to streamline the permitting process, a revision of the requirements for accessory dwelling units, and funding the conversion of hotels to housing using federal relief funds.

These projects are just the beginning and the Assembly plans to do much more in 2023 to address the housing crisis through supporting development of housing across the Municipality in varied densities, types, and price points; by identifying opportunities for additional housing development incentives; streamlining regulations; and fostering an

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environment of collaboration and cooperation between the public and private sectors, and by working with the Administration.

If you care about this issue, I encourage you to visit the Assembly's Focus on Housing, which can be accessed through our [website](#) where you can find the resolution, Assembly housing priorities, and background on recent projects.

Golden Lion

Many of us were pleased to see that the Mayor has decided to use the Golden Lion for low-income housing. It has taken a long time to get to this point and while there are clearly still more details to work out, this is a promising step forward.

Holtan Hills Land Disposal

Last Friday, the Assembly held a worksession in Girdwood on the new version of the Holtan Hills Land Disposal put forward by Member Zaletel, labeled AO 2022-103(S-1). That item is before us tonight as Item 11.H. A thank you to the members of the Assembly, members of the administration and the public for driving out to Girdwood and participating in the worksession.

Policy Change

Thanks to the mayor for reopening communications between directors and Assembly members. Communicating with department heads is a valuable way to get and share information. We only know what the administration shares with us and restoring this channel enables us to better serve the community.

Snowplowing

An ongoing "thank you" to the municipal operators who have been working nonstop to clear the roads and sidewalks. It looks like significant progress was made in the lead up to the reopening of schools, and we are very grateful. There is still more work to do. We had a productive worksession on Thursday and Health Policy Committee meeting on Wednesday – thank you to the administration for that conversation. I want to reiterate that the Assembly stands by ready to help. We have shown that we want to help; when we approved the budget, it included a proactive amendment from Ms. Quinn-Davidson and Mr. Dunbar that increased the funding for snow removal. Having the roads and sidewalks cleared is critical to the economic and human wellbeing of our city. Please let us know how we can help.

Chair LaFrance Report Archive, 9/13-12/20/2022

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Chair Report - 12/20/2022

Welcome and thank you for being here tonight – in person or online. I hope you are all staying warm and enjoying the holiday season.

Yesterday, we learned that Ms. Demboski is no longer employed by the Municipality. While Assembly members didn't always agree with Ms. Demboski, we can probably all agree that she has always been a champion of public safety and a stickler for the rules. Thank you to Ms. Demboski for her service to our community. I will note that I have been made aware of pending media reports with additional information about the former municipal manager's departure; Assembly leadership's focus remains on facts.

Snowplowing

An ongoing "thank you" to the municipal operators who have been working nonstop to clear the roads and sidewalks. There is still much work to do. Mr. Mayor – the Assembly stands by ready to help. We have shown that we want to help; when we approved the budget, it included a proactive amendment from Ms. Quinn-Davidson and Mr. Dunbar that increased the funding for snow removal. However, our ability to help is limited if we're not informed of the issues facing the municipality, or if the administration doesn't bring forward proposals. We learned last week that operators are available, but the municipality's wages are too low to be competitive. Let us know how we can help you address the problem of attracting and retaining workers, especially operators.

Election Integrity

I want to draw attention to Item 10.B.9 before us on the agenda tonight, a resolution detailing the Municipal Elections Team's thorough response to the Mayor's intensive records request and request for a forensic audit of the 2022 regular election. The Elections Team responded to the records request promptly and posted the requested documents on the Elections website for public review, with additional items being posted throughout the summer and fall. Our Elections team has a thorough system of checks and balances to test election accuracy, including a pre-election Logic and Accuracy Testing audit that was completed in March 2022 and a post-election Risk Limiting audit that was completed in May 2022, both of which are recommended best practices for elections.

Anchorage has one of the strongest vote at home systems in the country and was recognized by the Sightline Institute for its handling of elections during the pandemic. Our elections are incredibly accessible, transparent and accurate, and our elections team works throughout the year with the community and election observers to address concerns and make continuous improvements to the system.

Homelessness

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Item 10.B.7 is a resolution before Assembly to increase the capacity of the Sullivan Arena. Before we get there, I want to acknowledge that our community is in a very difficult situation right now – there are many vulnerable people in our community who need shelter, especially in these bitter cold temperatures. We also continue to hear from many residents in the area that the shelter continues to cause problems for the neighborhood. Our community is committed to helping our neighbors, and the Assembly is eager to work on this issue, but we can't take action if we don't have accurate and timely information to make decisions. This item came to the Assembly at the last meeting without any advanced notice or explanation from the mayor; it was not moved by the mayor and no action was taken at that time.

I urge the Mayor to bring solutions to the Assembly, such as opening the Golden Lion for housing or bringing forth an updated navigation center proposal. After the navigation center was sidelined due to an illegal purchasing contract and ballooning construction estimates, we haven't heard any news on this project. While the navigation center wouldn't have been online in time to deal with our current situation, it is still an idea that many on the Assembly would likely consider pursuing.

For those of you in the public who want to do something to help, we learned today that Beans Café will begin delivery of meals to the people who are staying in the warming area, but they need additional funds to make this happen. If you would like to donate, you can visit donate.beanscafe.org/.

S1 Version of the Holtan Hills Land Disposal

Later tonight, there will be a new version of the Holtan Hills Land Disposal put forward by Member Zaletel, which will be labeled AO 2022-103(S-1). The document is available on the Assembly's Housing page, via [a link on our homepage](#). This item is scheduled to be back before the Assembly at the meeting of January 10 and there will be a worksession in Girdwood on Friday, January 6 from 5-7 pm. Ms. Zaletel is introducing the S-1 version tonight to give the community adequate time over the next month to review the changes.

Chair Report - 12/6/2022

Polynesian Association Gala

This weekend I was pleased to attend the very first Pacific Island Community Gala, hosted by the Polynesian Association of Alaska. There was lots of wonderful food and cultural entertainment. Students were awarded scholarships and individuals and groups were acknowledged for their community service and business contributions. Congratulations to all the awardees and to the organizers of this successful and fun

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event. I want to acknowledge the contributions of Pacific Islanders in our community. I look forward to next year's event!

Alaska Municipal League

Welcome to the delegates who have travelled from all over Alaska to attend the 2022 Annual Local Government Conference, held by the Alaska Municipal League this week at the Dena'ina Center. We have a resolution later on the agenda acknowledging this important event, which not only results in an economic boost to Anchorage but offers an opportunity to learn more about issues facing local governments in Alaska. I hope that Assembly members will take advantage of this opportunity.

Municipal Budget

With tonight's final vote on the Mayor's budget vetoes, we will complete the 2023 Municipal Budget tonight. Thank you to the Budget and Finance co-chairs, Ms. Quinn-Davidson and Mr. Dunbar for their tremendous work and especially for coordinating the omnibus amendment that was before the Assembly at our last meeting. The Assembly and Administration engaged in a very open, collaborative process to deliver a balanced budget to the people of Anchorage that we can all be proud of. We are very fortunate that the Municipality is in sound financial condition and has the resources to maintain the services and programs that our community has come to expect. To learn more about the budget, go to www.muni.org/assembly.

Title 28 Elections Updates

Later tonight the Assembly will take up item 13A, AO 2022-98 changes to Title 28 elections. Annually, the elections team together with Assembly counsel reviews Title 28 and suggests updates. The Elections team started this process in August 2022 after the regular and special elections. The proposed amendments were presented and discussed at the Ethics and Election Committee meeting on Sept 28 and the Election Commission meeting on October 7. AO 2022-98 and AR 2022-328 containing the proposed amendments were introduced to the Assembly on October 25. The ordinance and resolution were posted on the Elections website on November 10 where they have remained since. The Elections team notified all registered observers where they could find the ordinance and resolution and all of the related Assembly worksessions, meetings and opportunities for public input and comments. The Elections team then presented the proposed amendments at an Assembly worksession on November 18. Because of the importance of elections, the Assembly held a public hearing on the proposed amendments on November 22 and continued that public hearing to tonight, December 6, so there's still an opportunity to testify on this item.

Housing Crisis

The Holtan Hills project in Girdwood has brought the attainable housing crisis to the forefront and I wanted to reiterate the Assembly's commitment to developing more

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housing in the municipality, especially housing that is affordable to community members from a broad range of economic backgrounds. Specifically, at our annual retreat in September, the Assembly devoted a whole day to listening to housing experts and formulating solutions. Some of the solutions are already working through the Assembly process and you will be seeing these issues a lot on future worksession and meeting agendas. Later this month, Assembly leadership plans to introduce a resolution to affirm the Assembly's commitment to housing, which we will discuss with members at this week's Rules committee.

The Importance of Respectful Dialogue

Lastly, I want to affirm the importance of civil dialogue, especially when we're dealing with topics that generate controversy. A lot of the issues that come before the Assembly deeply affect our daily lives and it's very easy to get caught up in the heat of the moment and say hurtful or accusatory things. But we must all remember that we are part of the same community and the person on the opposite side of an issue today might be the ally on another issue tomorrow. I encourage everyone participating in the Assembly and local government process to focus on the issues and be respectful of each other. You never know who's going to drive by when you're stuck on the side of the road in a snowstorm when you need help from a neighbor.

Chair Report - 11/22/2022

It's been an exciting few weeks for UAA sports. The women's volleyball team won their conference championship and moved on to play in the NCAA championships, and the women's basketball team won the Great Alaska Shootout, the first to be held since 2017. I congratulate both those teams for a job well done and I also want to extend an invitation to all female athletes and anyone who has benefitted from women's increased participation in sports to the Assembly meeting on December 6 where we will recognize the 50th Anniversary of Title 9.

Budget

The 2023 municipal budget is on the agenda tonight for Assembly approval. The municipal budget is a reflection of the values, vision and priorities of our community, so it's important that we develop a budget that our community can be proud of. At our recent budget worksession, Assembly Members brought forward modest and thoughtful amendment proposals to improve snow plowing, increase public safety resources and improve the quality of life in Anchorage. Those proposals have been crafted into an Omnibus amendment package and I look forward to reviewing that proposal later tonight.

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With that, I want to acknowledge the hard work of the Budget and Finance Co-Chairs, Ms. Quinn-Davidson and Mr. Dunbar, and the Assembly's budget analyst Desirea Camacho. They have worked tirelessly for months to review the submitted budget and gather the members' amendments to help ensure a transparent and smooth process to create a budget that meets the expectations of our community.

To learn more about the budget process, [click here](#).

Thanksgiving and Native American and Alaska Native Heritage Day

We have two holidays coming up this week. I would like to wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving this Thursday and I hope you get quality time with your loved ones. Also, Friday is Native American and Alaska Native Heritage Day where we honor and recognize Indigenous peoples as the first people of this nation and celebrate both their cultural heritage and integral importance to our past, our present, and our future.

Shooting at Colorado LGBTQ Establishment

And finally, on a more somber note... There was another mass shooting in America this week. This time it happened at Club Q, an LGBTQ establishment in Colorado Springs on the Transgender Day of Remembrance. The Colorado Springs Police Department identified the five victims as:

- Raymond Green Vance (he/him)
- Kelly Loving (she/her)
- Daniel Aston (he/him)
- Derrick Rump (he/him)
- Ashley Paugh (she/ her)

Officials have named the "heroes" who halted the attack as Richard Fierro and Thomas James. More details will be forthcoming soon. "One of the drag performers was walking by and Fierro told her kick him," he said. "And she took her high heel and stuffed it in his face."

According to a New York Times report written by Dave Phillips, "It was Mr. Fierro's first time at a drag show, and he was digging it. He had spent 15 years in the Army, and now relished his role as a civilian and a father, watching one of his daughter's old high-school friends perform. "These kids want to live that way, want to have a good time, have at it," he said as he described the night. "I'm happy about it because that is what I fought for, so they can do whatever the hell they want."

The long-suppressed instincts of a platoon leader surged back to life. He raced across the room, grabbed the gunman by a handle on the back of his body armor, pulled him to

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the floor and jumped on top of him. Officers rushing into the chaotic scene had spotted a blood-spattered man with a handgun, not knowing if he was a threat. They put him in handcuffs and locked him in the back of a police car for what seemed like more than an hour. He said he screamed and pleaded to be let go so that he could see his family.

Eventually, he was freed. He went to the hospital with his wife and daughter, who had only minor injuries. His friends were there, and are still there, in much more serious condition. They were all alive. But his daughter's boyfriend was nowhere to be found. In the chaos they had lost him. They drove back to the club, searching for him, they circled familiar streets, hoping they would find him walking home. But there was nothing. The family got a call late Sunday from his mother. He had died in the shooting. When Mr. Fierro heard, he said, he held his daughter and cried.

Chair Report - 11/9/2022

Guest report from Vice Chair Christopher Constant. Chair LaFrance was excused for this meeting and Vice Chair Constant chaired the meeting and gave the chair report.

In Memorium

I offer condolences to the family and friends of Bill Sheffield, who passed away on November 4. Mr. Sheffield, a prominent figure in Alaska politics and business, was governor from 1982-86. We honor his service to Alaska and extend heartfelt sympathy to his loved ones.

Elections

As a nation, once again we celebrated a time-honored tradition of going to the polls. Congratulations to Alaskan voters, candidates, volunteers and the State Division of elections for holding a successful election. Voting is one of our most basic fundamental rights in a democracy and it is a true act of civic engagement to participate in the election process. We as Alaskans can be proud that we have safe and secure elections and smooth transitions of power. I thank the staff and volunteers at the Division of Elections for working so hard in the last weeks to administer our elections so that all Alaskans have an opportunity to express their will through their vote.

Budget

Tonight is the final public hearing for the 2023 municipal budget and I thank those of you who are here tonight to testify. The municipal budget affects everyone – from the number of books on the shelves at libraries, playgrounds in our parks, and immunizations provided at health clinics, to the quality of the roads we drive on and the response times of emergency services, there are few things in our daily lives that aren't

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impacted by the municipal budget. There will be a worksession tomorrow at 11:30 at City Hall, Suite 155 to discuss potential budget amendments, and the Assembly will take up deliberations and likely vote on the budget at the November 22 Assembly meeting. You can learn more about the budget or get contact information to email the Assembly with your budget ideas at muni.org/assembly.

Veterans Day

Finally, I want to acknowledge all of the Veterans in our community and thank them for their service. Member Allard and Mayor Bronson, I thank you for your service. Veterans and their families are asked to make great sacrifices for our county and this day is an opportunity for us to thank them for their service and sacrifices. Tonight, we will have a resolution in recognition of our Veterans and every May we do a similar reorganization for Hmong Veterans Day.

Chair Report - 10/25/2022

In Memoria

I offer condolences to the family and friends of Ben Stevens, who passed away on October 13. Mr. Stevens, a prominent figure in Alaska politics, was a former president of the Alaska State Senate who later served in the governor's office. We honor his service to Alaska and extend heartfelt sympathy to his loved ones.

I also offer condolences to the family and friends of Burt Cottle, who passed away last Wednesday. As a former mayor of Wasilla and former police chief and mayor of Valdez, Mr. Cottle was a dedicated public servant and a tremendous advocate for local government. Some of us got to know Burt through the Alaska Municipal League, which was memorable in a very good way. Mr. Cottle, we will miss you.

Alaska Federation of Natives

Congratulations to the Alaska Federation of Natives for what appears to have been a very successful annual convention. It was wonderful to have so many visitors in town last week and I hope everyone was able to attend the craft fair, a session or a performance. The convention is also a big boost to our local economy. Thank you to AFN for choosing Anchorage.

Delegation from Chitose, Japan

It was an honor last week to welcome delegates from Chitose, our Sister City in Japan. Vice Chair Constant, who is part of our delegation, along with Mr. Dunbar (who was

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unable to attend the events due to National Guard service), will be talking more about those events in his report later.

Homelessness

There is an item on the agenda tonight, item 11.E. – AM 496-2022, that pertains to the Navigation Center/Adult Shelter project on Tudor and Elmore. Per Title 7 (7.15.080) of Anchorage Municipal code, this \$4.9M contract amendment for construction requires Assembly approval before it can be awarded. Last month the Administration informed the Assembly that it gave the contractor the greenlight to start construction, even though Assembly approval had not been given, or even requested, which is in violation of Municipal code. At that point the Administration halted the project. However, at the last meeting the Administration erroneously stated that the Assembly had pulled back the funding. This is not true. Let me clarify that the Assembly has not pulled back funding from the navigation center/adult shelter project.

The \$9M is still appropriated. But just because funds are appropriated, i.e., money is set aside for a specific use, that does not mean that the funds can be immediately spent, as the Municipality has local laws that govern how purchases and contracts must be executed.

There is an AIM to be LOTT for the consent agenda that clarifies the Assembly's actions concerning the navigation center/adult shelter project. It also shows how the Administration's claim that if it weren't for the Assembly, the Mayor would have opened his navigation center/adult shelter by now is false. The reason why the mayor's navigation center has not been built yet is because the Administration has yet to come up with a thorough plan to see the project through to completion. As of today, the Assembly is still waiting to see a comprehensive project budget that includes design and construction costs, FFE, permits, and contingencies. We're still waiting for a detailed operating plan and budget, and we've yet to see a total project cost estimate that gives us confidence.

I encourage you all to go to the Assembly's [web page](#) for more information about the Municipality's response to homelessness. The Assembly has set up a "Navigation Center Update" page where we've put all the information we've been able to gather about the project. Thank you to the Assembly's legislative staff, especially Clare Ross, for making this helpful information available.

Congratulations to APD K9s

And lastly, we congratulate APD Officers Lars Tulip and Brandon Otts along with K9 Rylin and K9 Midas for taking first place this weekend among approximately 20 entries for the "Top Patrol Agency" in the Nation at the Desert Dog Police K9 Trial in Scottsdale, Arizona. This is the largest competition specifically designed for Police

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Service Dogs in the country, and this is the first year APD was invited to compete. Anchorage Police Department, with the financial support of Dollars for Dogs, were able to send two K9 teams to Arizona to participate in the K9 trails and we are very proud of their hard work.

Chair Report - 10/11/2022

Indigenous Peoples' Day

Yesterday was Indigenous Peoples' Day, where we celebrate and honor Native American people and commemorate their contributions. I was honored to attend the Placemaking Ceremony at Potter Marsh, which celebrated the history of the area as a place where the Denai'ina people gathered driftwood before the marsh was created in 1917 with the construction of the railroad. The Denai'ina name for the area of Potter Marsh is Hkaditali and it is now commemorated with a place marker which includes information about the region's indigenous history. It features artwork by Athabascan & Paiute artist Melissa Shaginoff. Her metal sculpture encircling the post is inspired by the dentalium bead pattern and the Dena'ina fire bag. Fire bags were used by the Dena'ina to store and transport fire-making materials like tinder and embers; the bag represents living with the land. Our Land Acknowledgement that we do at the beginning of each meeting reminds us that the Denai'ina people have been stewards of this incredible land on which we live, for thousands of years. Indigenous Placemaking is a growing global movement. The Hkaditali marker is the third installation of the place name signs in parks and on trails (the first ones were placed at Chanshtnu Muldoon Park and Westchester Lagoon) and there are 29 more to go. Thanks to all in our community who have worked and continue to work to bring the Indigenous Placemaking project to fruition.

Alaska Federation of Natives

At the October 11 meeting there was a resolution welcoming delegates and attendees to the 2022 Alaska Federation of Natives Convention. The Convention is next week, October 20 to 22 at the Denai'ina Center. We look forward to welcoming all attendees to Anchorage. Thank you to the AFN for choosing to hold this preeminent event here in Anchorage.

Homelessness

There are several items on the agenda that pertain to the Municipality's Emergency Shelter Plan, which is focused on temporarily sheltering individuals experiencing homelessness during cold weather months. Our community's collaborative approach seeks to provide a continuum of services from emergency shelter to housing. Navigation centers are critical for getting individuals aligned with help and support that provides a ladder out of homelessness. At this time, I want to address something that keeps coming up in the discussion surrounding the navigation center/adult shelter on

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Tudor and Elmore that is under construction, which has been paused so the administration can complete its project briefing to the Assembly.

It has been suggested that a 1000-person facility would solve our community's homelessness issue, but a facility of that size is not aligned with the policy the Assembly adopted in 2018 to conform with national best practices of dispersing services for houseless people through smaller facilities. It is also much more expensive to operate shelters than it is to stand up affordable housing. While we recognize the need for emergency shelter, it is important that we don't invest all of our resources in this area at the expense of long-term affordable housing solutions, which not only solve homelessness, but save taxpayers money because they can be largely funded through state and federal programs.

I encourage you to go to the Assembly's [web page](#) for more information about the Municipality's response to homelessness. Thank you to the Assembly's legislative staff for making this helpful information available.

Chair Report - 9/27/2022

Western Alaska

Our thoughts go out this week to our neighbors in Western Alaska who have been impacted so greatly by the catastrophic storm. We can help ensure Western Alaska receives the resources they need to rebuild their communities. The Alaska Community Foundation has set up a disaster recovery fund if you would like to donate to support the recovery work at alaskacf.org

Assembly Meeting Technical Issues

The Assembly branch continues to seek ways to improve public participation in meetings by adding new options for viewing, and expanding options for providing testimony, such as written and phone testimony. Two years ago, the Clerk's office added the YouTube live stream of meetings and updated the Onbase meeting system, microphones and sound system.

Despite these great advances, as with all technology, it isn't perfect and last night there was a network connectivity issue that impacted the quality of the YouTube feed. IT is working to address this issue for the future and our team is working to ensure that a clean recording of that meeting is posted soon. Additionally, last week, when the meeting was recessed and Onbase was paused, the YouTube feed did not immediately restart. I want to stress that the meeting recording was intact and the full recording of that meeting has been posted on our YouTube page.

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Emergency Shelter Plan

At last night's special meeting, the Assembly approved funding to support the elements of the plan put forward by the Emergency Shelter Task Force. Assembly Member Rivera will share more details in his committee report, so I want to take this time to acknowledge and thank everyone for the tremendous work that went into producing this plan.

First, I want to thank the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness for organizing the task force, and thank the organizations and individuals who volunteered hundreds of hours in service to ensuring our neighbors experiencing homelessness will be safe and have shelter this winter. I thank the hundreds of community members who provided testimony and attended public meetings on the topic, and I also want to thank Assembly Members for all of your thoughtful questions and debate on the matter. Finally, I want to give thanks to the Mayor and the municipal staff who will carry out the plan.

The process wasn't easy, but we proved that our community can put politics aside and pull together to look out for each other and our neighbors. As one person testified, helping out people who are vulnerable makes our community stronger, not weaker. It is heartwarming to see how many people in our community really care about each other and the health of our community. I hope you will all continue to stay engaged and help out as we put the plan into action.

Risk Limiting Audit

At a work session last Friday, the Assembly received a report on the Risk Limiting Audit performed on the April 5 Regular Election and the June 21 Special Election. The Risk Limiting Audit showed that the scanning, adjudication, and tabulation system performed as expected and the results of the election reflected the will of the voters.

Post-election audits such as this, where the paper ballots are checked against the results produced by the vote tallying equipment to ensure accuracy, are recommended by election security experts as one method of protecting the integrity of elections. The audits use statistically developed audit techniques that allow selection of a number of ballots to be audited that provide statistical confidence that the tabulation system performed as expected. The audits were publicly noticed and candidates were invited to attend.

This is just another example of the strength of our local election system, and we can all be proud in knowing that our local elections are accessible, transparent and fair.

Library Card Sign-Up Month

Finally, I want to encourage everyone here to sign up for a library card before you leave tonight if you don't already have one. With your card, you can get a book delivered to

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you from any library in Alaska, and you can also get online magazines, movie streaming and e-books through the Library website. And for those parents struggling to help your kids with homework, check out the Library's school resources, which includes live online tutoring sessions on just about every school topic.

Chair Report - 9/13/2022

911 Anniversary

I want to acknowledge that this past Sunday was the twenty-first anniversary of the 911 terrorist attacks. While time has softened the pain for many of us, it is still very raw for the thousands of people who lost loved ones in that horrific event. I want to acknowledge those we lost that day, and their families and loved ones who will never forget them. I also want to acknowledge the heroic first responders and civilians who put their own lives on the line to help their fellow neighbors. Many of those heroes lost their lives in the days and years that followed, and to them and their families, we owe a huge debt of gratitude.

Congresswoman Peltola

A more joyous occasion happened this week and that was the swearing in of Mary Peltola, the first Alaska Native representative in Congress and the first woman to represent Alaska in Congress. My colleague Vice Chair Constant will make some remarks on that shortly, but I wanted to offer personal my congratulations to Representative Peltola.

Housing Worksession at Retreat

Last Friday, the Assembly held our annual retreat and this year, we spent the day focused on looking at affordable housing solutions. I thank the subject matter experts and municipal staff who joined us to help give the Assembly a lay of the land and identify potential solutions to increase safe and affordable housing in our community. I look forward to future discussions and legislation on this topic, and my hope is that this is one of many gatherings of the Assembly, municipal staff and industry to make our community more vibrant and economically sustainable.

Confirmation

Recently there have been questions about the Assembly's role in executive confirmations, so I wanted to take a minute to remind members of the scope of the Assembly's confirmation powers, which are described in Section 5.02 of the Anchorage Municipal Charter. Part "a" of Section 5.02 reads that "The mayor shall appoint all heads of municipal departments, subject to confirmation by the assembly, on the basis of professional qualifications."

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Over time, the Assembly has established several processes to ensure that its members can effectively exercise their confirmation responsibilities. In 1991, AMC 3.30.173 was enacted to require individuals seeking an executive appointment to submit “a municipal employment application form,” which must include “a resume describing relevant education, training and experience.” And in 2019 the Assembly enacted AMC 2.30.095 to require a confirmation hearing for certain mayoral appointees.

The Municipal Charter vests in the Assembly broad discretion to confirm, or refuse to confirm, an executive appointee, which is consistent with generally accepted municipal norms. The leading treatise on municipal law, McQuillin’s Law of Municipal Corporations, states only that an Assembly must in the confirmation process act in good faith and that “No reason need be given to the appointing officer for the refusal to confirm.”

Longstanding practices on state and municipal levels show that confirmation can be withheld by a council for any number of reasons, such as concerns about judgment, temperament, suitability, or simply whether the public would be well served by any appointment.

I have asked Assembly Counsel to prepare a memo on the scope of the Assembly’s confirmation powers, which members will be receiving tonight. I ask that members read this document and use it as a reference for the mayoral appointments that are before us tonight and all future appointments that come before us. Below is a summary statement of that memo:

Our review of the Anchorage Municipal Charter, transcripts of the proceedings of the Commission that produced the Charter, background principals of municipal law, and comparisons to similar state and federal provisions, all support the conclusion that the that the Assembly has broad discretion to confirm, or to refuse to confirm, mayoral appointees. The Anchorage Municipal Charter does not include language limiting the Assembly’s confirmation power. The Anchorage Charter Commission likewise did not discuss any such limits, but rather noted that the confirmation requirement ensures a measure of legislative “control,” and is consistent with the public’s then-surveyed desire for “maximum legislative safeguards.” The leading treatise on municipal law states provides that the background principle of law is only that Assembly members must exercise their confirmation prerogative in “good faith,” but need not provide reasons for refusing to confirm an appointee. State and federal law are similar; the Alaska State legislature and U.S. Senate have virtually unconstrained authority to reject executive appointments. Moreover, while the Assembly likely cannot impose substantive constraints on the mayor’s power to appoint, it has broad latitude to legislate in service of ensuring that its members can effectively exercise their confirmation votes.

Chair LaFrance Report Archive, 9/13-12/20/2022

Suzanne LaFrance served on the Anchorage Assembly, representing District 6, South Anchorage, Girdwood and Turnagain Arm from 2017-2023. She served as Assembly Chair from July 2021 - April 2023. Read her archival chair reports below.