

Chair Constant Report Archive, 4/25-6/20/2023

June 20, 2023

View the recording of the remarks.

Good evening everybody and welcome. Here we are – the summer solstice is upon us, the peak of our summer season. I hope you all had the opportunity, especially this past weekend, to get out and enjoy the amazing sunshine.

Juneteenth Celebration

And in particular, I hope you had the opportunity to take part in the Juneteenth celebrations that occurred in the community. The Park Strip was alive and festive with songs, chants, prayers, dances, vendors, social service providers, food, and most importantly, friends and family connecting on the topic of Juneteenth. It was an opportunity to reflect and learn, and celebrate this moment in our history. Along with a number of Assembly Members, I attended the Chamber of Commerce's special Juneteenth Make it Monday event yesterday and the organizers of all of these events have really gone above and beyond.

Pride Month

Also, as previously stated, this is Pride Month, and this is actually Pride Week in town. And while for a lot of us, it is a joyful time, it's also an important time to recognize that discrimination and hate toward the LGBTQ+ individuals in the community, and transgender people in particular, has increased nationwide and is bubbling up in our community as well. From attempts to remove books from our libraries to efforts to block transgender youth from sports, this movement is especially damaging to our youth. To the young people in our community who are questioning your identity or struggling with these issues, and feel alone, I want you to know that we see you and we value you. You are important members of our community and you have a place here. And to others in our community, I ask you to step up and support Anchorage's LGBTQ+ community during this challenging time and show that Anchorage is and will continue to be an accepting, collaborative and tolerant community.

Clean Slate Strategy Update

I'll briefly talk about the Clean Slate Strategy. Again, Mr. Rivera, I want to thank you for your lions work on this project. There has been a lot of progress made in the past few

weeks on our work on homelessness, including the Housing and Homelessness Committee's release of site selection criteria for a new permanent, year-round low-barrier shelter, which is on the agenda later tonight. There is also a lot of frustration in the community with the issue of homelessness and I get it. It's difficult to see so much suffering in our streets and so much disruption in our neighborhoods, and it makes us all angry, or it should, that this is happening. I want people to understand this is a very complex situation, and while there are so many great ideas out there, unfortunately, funding is limited and that hampers our ability to do the best we could.

The national housing and mental health crises are wreaking havoc in our communities, and there is little state or federal funding to help. Today, I was scheduled to, but it was delayed to Thursday, have a conversation with Senator Sullivan and HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge as we take the message of the inequities of our funding to Washington. We are trying to solve national problems with local funding and we can't do it alone.

With that said, I believe that we can solve this problem and we are on the right track. I want to thank Assembly Members for the hours and hours you have devoted to this issue, especially in the last two months. I also want to thank the Administration for helping us get a better understanding of the costs for shelter – we had a good presentation from the Health Department last week that provided for the first time a pretty measurable approach to how we're going to fund operations. It still needs work of course, but it was the first time we had a document that we can build on. Finally, I want to thank all of the community members who have volunteered, attended community meetings, and emailed ideas. This is a problem that will take all of us coming together to solve and I can see the work is happening. You can learn all about this work by going to our [Homelessness Focus](#) page.

Port of Alaska

Tonight, we have a couple of items relating to the Port of Alaska – probably our biggest existential challenge, right up there with homelessness. I am going to ask Members to consider postponing those items to July. I'm not comfortable that we make such substantial decisions without all of our members here and we are missing two of our members tonight. Everyone is scheduled to be back in July, and so, that's the request I will make tonight when we come to those items.

Clerk Appointment

Next, I am glad to announce that last week that I appointed as Acting Municipal Clerk, our former Municipal Election Administrator Jamie Heinz. We successfully conducted a nation-wide search and I'm pleased to announce that the best candidate is in fact one of our own. Jamie Heinz has over 12 years of clerk and election administration experience

in Alaska, including the Municipality of Anchorage, the City of Kenai, and the Haines Borough. This appointment of course is subject to approval by the Assembly with a confirmation hearing worksession and a special meeting to follow on Friday, June 23.

At this time, I want to thank outgoing Municipal Clerk Barbara Jones for over twenty-four years of service to the Municipality. Barbara was recently recognized by the Assembly on the anniversary of her ten years as Municipal Clerk, so I won't belabor all of her accomplishments here, but her commitment to open, accessible, transparent and responsive local government has been critical for the functioning of this body and for the success of our Vote from Home election system. Barbara, I can't thank you enough for all that you have done, and I wish you the best in your retirement.

Vice Chair

Also tonight, to my left, you will see Member Kevin Cross from Eagle River serving in the role of Vice Chair. I want to welcome him and thank him, as well as Member Volland who served as Vice Chair at the last meeting, for stepping up to help keep the Assembly moving while Member Zaletel is out on leave. We have a very strong and collaborative body and it's great to see everyone working together and sharing in the leadership duties.

June 6, 2023

[View the recording of the remarks.](#)

Welcome and thank you for being here tonight.

Federal Relief Funds

As many of you have seen in the news, two of the groups that received allocations from the Municipality's federal relief funds are under investigation for misuse of those funds. I want to express my disappointment as it appears that those funds were not used as intended to meet critical community needs. I also wanted to urge the media and the community not to let the problems with these two groups, which at this point are just allegations, overshadow the incredibly good work that came out of the federal relief funds and the hundreds of organizations who put that money to work to make our community a better place.

Over one hundred and eighty organizations received federal funds through the Municipality, and those organizations in turn funded grants, assistance and services that

have served, and will continue to serve, thousands of people. Some of the things funded include millions of dollars of rental assistance to keep people in their homes during the pandemic as well as new low-income housing like the Guest House, Covenant House Lofts and Providence's supportive housing project. It also funded job training, the arts, and small business development. I thank all of the organizations who were good stewards of public trust and funds and helped our community get through a very difficult period. If you would like to learn more about projects funded by federal relief funds, go to the Assembly homepage, select the Recent Actions tab and look for the yellow Recovery button. That said, we look forward to the wheels of justice turning, and the Municipality conducting reviews and audits of the funds as they have been used in the community to ensure that they have met the standards that we applied when we made the funds available.

Juneteenth

Tonight we will recognize and celebrate Juneteenth. This is special this year because this will be the first year we celebrate Juneteenth as an official Municipal holiday – next Monday, June 19. I thank members Rivera and Zaletel and former member Quinn-Davidson for your hard work to develop this local acknowledgement for this important date in our nation's history. And I'm grateful to the Mayor for sending out an email that the municipality's offices will be closed on Monday June 19, so if you have important business to conduct, please address it on Friday June 16 or be prepared to wait until Tuesday June 20.

Pride Month

We will also be celebrating this June, Pride for Anchorage and we will have individuals from the community recognized later tonight. This year it is significant because of the very aggressive campaign across the country of legislation that is against LGBTQ people. It is amazing to witness the change in tenor in our country.

D-Day

I would like to recognize that today is the 74th anniversary of D-Day, the day in which 150,000 Allied troops stormed the shores of Normandy, which was probably the second most significant day in our efforts in the war, after Pearl Harbor, in which we changed the tide and were able to stop the threat of Nazis in Germany and really finalize the outcome of that war. I would like to honor those that lost their lives or who served on that day.

Clean Slate Town Halls

Now to the topic of the Clean Slate Town Halls and the funding of what has been called a navigation center. This navigation center, if you listen to the rhetoric is a miracle. It's a

place where everything works for all people. It's a place where people are going to get sober. It's a place where people are going to find housing. It's a place where they're going to be reunited with their families. The one thing that this body has been waiting for is a plan that demonstrates how it is going to operate. Miracles take spreadsheets.

There was at one point a spreadsheet that came forward that demonstrated a portion of the costs, that showed the Navigation Center could hire a registered nurse for \$50,000 a year. The plans that we've seen to date aren't rational, don't make sense can't be demonstrated as factual or deliverable. Those of us who have served long enough on the body long remember the promise of SAP. SAP was a \$9 million dollar investment by the municipality that was going to change life for everyone. SAP is our management software in which people track their time and we are able to manage our contracts. \$105 million dollars later, we finally got to the point where it could work. The promise was \$9 million, the reality was a \$100 million. The plan for the navigation center started at four and then seven and then fourteen and then twenty-four million dollars. Now we have a request before us for \$7 million dollars that we know won't actually get us to the place where we have a tent built at Tudor and Elmore. All of this is in the context of the Assembly to have a series of Town Halls called the Clean Slate effort.

This weekend, the Assembly and the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness held three town halls on the Clean Slate Strategy to develop a community decision on a new permanent year-round low-barrier shelter. The sessions were live streamed and you can view the recordings on the Assembly's YouTube channel. I encourage everyone to watch one of the sessions to learn more about the Assembly's work on homelessness. The reality is, in my opinion, the Assembly should not get in front of that work, but we do have the question before us tonight and it should be an interesting conversation.

All politics aside, I think we can agree that we do need to figure out a solution that moves people out of camps and into shelter and ultimately into housing, because that's the solution.

May 23, 2023

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

Housing Summit

Last Friday, the Assembly joined members of the Administration and our community partners in an all-day housing retreat. Addressing the housing crisis in our community and spurring new housing development ideas is a top priority for the Assembly this year.

We've already passed a number of pieces of legislation to address this problem, including reducing parking minimums, easing the process for building ADUs, passing a resolution with the Assembly's housing priorities, and investing in a year-long community effort to bring focus to Housing Action.

The retreat was the kick-off to that community initiative, which will lead up to a community summit this fall with workgroups and action steps running throughout the year. To keep up with the Assembly's housing action, go to www.muni.org/assembly and subscribe.

Election Contest

A Notice of Election Contest was filed at the Municipal Clerk's Office on Thursday, May 4, 2023, and will be taken up by the Assembly as item 12.A. The Assembly's process for how to address the contest is included as an Assembly Informational Memorandum in the documents on that item. Resolution 2023-181 is before us with the option to either accept the contest for further hearing or decline to further hear the contest.

Settlement of Claims

A big item on tonight's agenda is Item 14.A., the settlement of legal claims against the Municipality. I wanted to provide background to clear up some misunderstandings around the Assembly's role in this process. There has been some criticism lodged at the Assembly for taking up this important community issue "behind closed doors." I want to ensure everyone that while the Assembly did conduct an executive session on the matter on May 5, no decisions were made and our debate and decision on this item will be made in the public eye when this comes up on the agenda tonight.

The Administration requested an executive session to brief the Assembly on the legal and confidential aspects of the matter. It is standard for the Assembly to use an executive session to discuss a specific legal matter, including pending litigation, and this was one of those cases where an executive session was needed.

However, by code, the Assembly is not authorized to take any official action during an executive session, except to give direction to an attorney on a specific legal matter. As a result, once the executive session is complete, the item in question returns to the same

public process as any other piece of legislation. AR 2023-162 will be opened to a public hearing tonight under Item 14.A. and afterwards, the body will take up the matter for questions, debate and voting. All of which will be conducted here in the open so the public can watch that process.

May 9, 2023

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

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

First Meeting for New Members

Once again, I would like to welcome our new Assembly Members. As this is your first full meeting, I want to assure you that I plan to take it slow so you are able to follow along and have plenty of time to ask clarifying and procedural questions. As a reminder, on this body, we use the term “Point of Information” to request the floor to ask for information relevant to the debate. If at any time you need a clarification or information on what to do for a certain procedure, please don’t hesitate to speak up.

Mayor Vetoes

Recently, the Assembly passed the first quarter budget and there were two mayoral vetoes. Fortunately, we have found other paths forward to address these items that allow the Assembly to effectuate its budget goals without needing to override the vetoes. We will address funding for a real estate consultant for the Holtan Hills project with Item 10.E.3. tonight and funding for the short-term rental study will be on the May 23 agenda. An Assembly Information Memorandum (AIM) will be introduced at the June 6 meeting documenting this process for public records.

Mayoral and Assembly Roles in Executive Appointments

Item 10.B.2. on the agenda is AR No. 2023-167, a resolution expressing a lack of confidence in the Deputy Director of the Library Department and recommending her resignation. While we learned earlier today that the Library Deputy Director has resigned, this item will remain on the agenda. In preparation for that item, I wanted to review the standard municipal process for executive appointments.

Under the Anchorage Charter, the Mayor is responsible for appointing executive staff and for certain appointments, including the Library Director, but not the Library Deputy

Director, the Assembly is responsible for confirming those appointments. Once an executive is confirmed by the Assembly, they serve at the pleasure of the Mayor and their oversight moves outside of the Assembly's purview. The Assembly is able to provide input on municipal staffing issues by providing guidance to the Administration through resolutions, such as our recurring 'resolution establishing general labor relations policy guidelines and direction for collective bargaining and contract negotiations,' and now this resolution.

As a reminder, resolutions are not typically set for public hearing unless the body decides to set it as such.

April 25, 2023

After being voted in as the new Assembly Chair, Assembly Member Christopher Constant gave the following acceptance speech:

Dear fellow members of the Anchorage Municipal Assembly, distinguished guests, and residents of Anchorage,

I sit before you today with gratitude as the newly elected chair of the Anchorage Assembly. This election, just certified, comes at a crucial time in our city's history as we emerge from a long, dark period of the pandemic and enter a new day of what I hope will be characterized as "collegial accountability." The Assembly members who have just departed led this Municipality through the greatest challenge it has faced in its near 50-year existence. They served in a profoundly challenging time and they did so honorably. And now it is your turn to take up the mantle they leave for you. I am honored to have been given the opportunity to lead this new Assembly, boldly and bravely into the future, facing our biggest challenges head on and directly.

As we embark on this new chapter together, I want to acknowledge that our biggest challenges remain. The homelessness crisis and housing shortage in our city being the foremost. This crisis is deeply complex and requires a multifaceted approach. Despite all campaign rhetoric, it will be a steep and swift learning curve for you. I am committed to working with each of you, along with community organizations, and other stakeholders to implement the solutions that we know will solve the problem: providing safe and stable housing options for all residents of Anchorage.

We also face a workforce shortage in our government and in our city. In the face of the greatest infrastructure investment in our lifetime, we have been caught short, unable to nimbly respond. We must prioritize attracting and retaining a talented workforce that

will serve our city with excellence. We need innovative approaches to attract talented professionals and provide opportunities for career advancement in the public sector.

We must also soberly work together to address the perennial issue of rebuilding the Port of Alaska. For a generation, Anchorage political leaders been attempting to rebuild our State's most critical infrastructure supplying goods to 80% of Alaskans, and we have made great progress in recent years. We have the opportunity to complete the project and leave a lasting legacy for generations for our state, but we must keep our focus. There are important decisions coming soon and I challenge each of you to embrace your role. We cannot fail this time.

In addition to these pressing issues, we must continue to protect our free and fair elections. Anchorage is a city that values democracy, and it is our responsibility to ensure that every eligible voter has the opportunity to cast their ballot without interference. We must also continue to be good stewards of the peoples' treasure through strategic investments. We owe it to our citizens to make smart and effective decisions that will benefit our community for years to come.

We must not forget that our job isn't just to put out fires, slipping from crisis to crisis. But instead, we must also dedicate ourselves to a vision for our community. A vision of a community with robust housing and economic growth. A place where people desire to stay, desire to return, or decide to move here because they can find opportunity to make a life for themselves and their families. We live in the most beautiful place in America. Each of us has an opportunity to play our part in building this city.

I am thrilled to welcome the five new members to our twelve-member body. Their unique perspectives and fresh ideas will add significant value to our discussions and decision-making processes. I am committed to ensuring that each new member is supported and has access to the resources they need to fulfill their roles effectively.

As we begin this new chapter together, I urge each of us to remain committed to open and respectful communication. We may not always agree, but we must always do our best to listen to one another and find common ground where possible--I promise there is more than you may think. I believe that together, we can achieve great things for Anchorage.

Thank you for entrusting me with the responsibility of leading this assembly. I look forward to working with each of you to address the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Now, onward.