

Chair Constant Report Archive, 7/11 - 9/26/2023

September 26, 2023

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

Good evening everybody and welcome.

Election Complaint Investigation

The Assembly is taking seriously allegations of threats to our election system. Regretfully, at our last meeting we had to authorize the issuance of subpoenas. Those subpoenas have been sent to a number of individuals with a command to attend the Assembly worksession this Friday at 11:15am. Our effort is an inquiry to ensure that when we get to the end of the year and we finalize the annual Title 28 code change, we are able to put in adequate safeguards to secure our elections against similar threats in the future.

Eklutna River Restoration Project

Next, I want to talk about the Eklutna River restoration project. The Anchorage Assembly has been working for many years with the Native Village of Eklutna and other partners on the restoration project, including passing resolutions of support in 2017 and 2022. It's disappointing to learn in the past several weeks that the Project Owners group seems set on a solution that is in opposition to the expressed positions of the Native Village of Eklutna, the Anchorage Assembly, as well as federal Fish and Wildlife and other stakeholders.

Not only is full restoration of the river the right thing to do to respect the vision of the people who have stewarded this land long before the municipality and the dams that we put up existed, but it also has huge economic potential. As we heard at our meeting a few weeks ago with the Native Village of Eklutna, the council and Eklutna, Inc. have exciting plans to use the restoration of the river to develop recreation and tourism opportunities in the area. Just imagine what it will be like when the fish have returned and we have one of the most robust fisheries in the Upper Cook Inlet right in our backyard.

That is why I'll be asking the Assembly to join with me in the coming weeks to weigh in on the draft fish and wildlife program that is set to be released in October 2023, and doing all that we can to support our partners in their years-long, generations-long, quest to restore the Eklutna River. The restoration project stemmed from a historical wrong and this is our opportunity to make a historic right. Anything short of full restoration is a continuation of the nearly century-long cultural and environmental neglect that we have all been working to overcome.

Emergency Cold Weather Sheltering Plan

Next up, we have the topic of the winter shelter. I am pleased to report that we had a very productive and collaborative meeting of the Housing and Homelessness Committee this week with the Administration and Assembly working together. I'll leave it to the committee leadership to report on the specifics, and we'll discuss funding more under item 14.A. on the agenda, but I just want to express my gratitude to everyone who is working hard to develop a series of viable solutions before the snow falls.

In that meeting last week, I walked away for the first time in several years feeling that we are all working together and getting close to develop a practical, humanitarian, and cost-effective solution. It's very encouraging and I look forward to continuing this positive and collaborative work.

On the topic of spending on housing and homelessness, it's been an interesting phenomenon – I've heard this number out in the community – the Assembly has spent \$160 million on shelter and doesn't have a shelter to show for it. It dawned on me that we haven't been able to effectively communicate the investments that the Assembly has made in both housing and shelter over the past three years so that the public can understand the progress and scope of where we are going. So, at this point, I am going to give the rest of my time to Ms. Clare Ross, the Legislative Services Director to give a report with some data we are posting on our website for the public.

[View the presentation.](#) [View the presentation materials.](#)

Thank you Ms. Ross for that report. I want to remind everyone that this information can be found on the Assembly's website in the Homelessness section. The bottom line for everybody – having information is better than not having information, so now you can see what we've appropriated for homelessness response, homeless prevention, housing and other opportunities. It's a very good tool for cutting through the noise and getting through the signal.

August 22, 2023

[View recording of the remarks.](#)

Good evening everybody and welcome.

As you all know now, Anchorage School District is back in session. It's been great to see all of the families celebrating their kids going back to school and the teachers back to the classrooms and also, for some of my friends, watching their newly graduated students leave the state to go off to college, which is a bittersweet moment.

Port of Alaska

Last week, how exciting was it that we had the honor of hosting U.S. Secretary Pete Buttigieg on his visit of the Port of Alaska? The Port staff did quite an amazing job, Mr. Jager in particular, of making our case to the Secretary and I feel confident that he walked away with a strong understanding of just how truly unique our Port is, its needs, who it serves, and why it is so expensive. It was great to team up with the Mayor and the administration to promote this important project.

3rd Avenue Camp

Before we get to work tonight, I want to address the major concerns we have about what is taking place at what is growing down on 3rd Avenue. It is really disheartening to see the human misery and destruction that is occurring down there and I want to thank the APD and service providers who are doing their best to keep people safe and connect them to services, as well as the media, the artists, and the community members who are providing services and support. They are giving voice to the people who are trying to survive out there.

I am hopeful that the Administration directs the necessary funds that we have made available to additional policing to address crime and unsanitary conditions with more toilets and further support services, and that we can get the emergency shelter plan funded so we can move people off the streets in as safe and as healthy a manner as possible. The sooner we can start moving people out of the camp and into safer housing, the better.

Tudor/Elmore Shelter

On that note, tonight, we will be discussing a big item before us, the Tudor/Elmore proposed shelter. It came as quite a shock last week when we learned that the proposal requires taking funding from critical municipal services, what looks like funding that has already been spent, and other questionable fund sources to build his shelter.

Last week, we also learned that the Anchorage Health Department is putting together a cold weather emergency shelter plan that avoids concentrating all services into a single mass shelter, a situation we've seen fail time and time again in our community. Instead, their plan relies on small, scattered sites across the city that can potentially be funded with existing funds.

This is very exciting because the city is finally coming together on a solution that addresses both short and long-term needs. It is proven that housing, not warehousing, is the cheapest and most effective way to help people permanently beat the cycle of homelessness and I want to thank the Health Department for their out-of-the-box thinking, and for developing a realistic plan that we think is realistic for the year ahead.

This proposed approach for the upcoming winter shelter, paired with the work already being conducted under the Anchored Home Plan, such as turning hotels into affordable housing and

opening living facilities for people with complex health needs, is how we are going to solve this problem once and for all.

Until we see more people safely housed, it's hard to celebrate, but we still need to recognize the progress we are making. The money that we have spent in the past few years has kept thousands of people from Eagle River to Girdwood from becoming homeless and has helped hundreds of people get off the streets and into housing. We need to keep following this proven approach and not get distracted by quick fixes that kick the can down the road.

I look forward to all of us coming together over the next month to get this plan funded and started, so we can get people out of the camps and into safe housing for the winter.

HOME Proposal

On that note of housing, developing more housing in Anchorage is one of the Assembly's top priorities. We previously had an agenda item to change the residential zoning throughout the municipality – item 13.A. on the agenda.

As you may have heard in the news, the sponsors of that item are going to ask the body to postpone it indefinitely and Members Zaletel and Volland will introduce a replacement proposal tonight called "Housing Opportunities in the Municipality for Everyone Initiative," the HOME initiative. A copy of their new ordinance proposal will be passed out tonight and you can also find a link to it on the Assembly's home page under the News section. They are asking for a public hearing on it at the September 26 Regular Assembly Meeting. So just to be clear, for those who are here for that item, the sponsors are planning to postpone it indefinitely.

August 8, 2023

[View recording of remarks.](#)

Good evening everybody and welcome.

Port of Alaska

I will start with the Port of Alaska. I want to celebrate the major step forward on the Port of Alaska modernization that we took at the last meeting. Those of us who have been on the Assembly for some years have been working for a long time to get this project back on track and it's rewarding to see all that has been accomplished.

I want to thank particularly the Port staff and the users who have been there every step of the way, as well as the Mayor and new Assembly Members who've joined the team more recently and have had to drink from the firehose to understand the issue. I also want to thank the Alaska

legislature for their strong financial commitment and Senator Lisa Murkowski personally for her stalwart support. This once-in-a-generation project will be a legacy that we leave for the future and we can all be really proud once it's built.

Housing Investments

Next, as you may have seen in the news, we recently gathered to celebrate the new soon-to-open housing facility at the former Barratt Inn. In only a few short years since 2020, the Assembly has invested a lot of funding to provide assistance to keep renters and homeowners housed during the pandemic and to open up new housing facilities for extremely low-income people. Thanks to these investments of federal COVID relief funds and alcohol tax dollars, paired with private and nonprofit support, we've added 330 new units of low-income housing in the past two years and literally kept 60,000 people in their existing homes.

This unique work was recognized with the 2023 HUD Secretary's Award for Public-Philanthropic Partnerships, which recognizes "excellence in partnerships that have both transformed the relationships between the sectors and led to measurable benefits in housing and community development."

So, while our community continues to struggle with the issues on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and the effort to find a vision forward that we can share and all build towards, it's excellent to identify the fact that we have been putting new housing units online for people across the community and we are now working on figuring out solutions for a permanent, year-round low-barrier shelter. This is a reminder that when we work together, we can actually make a big difference.

Response to Mayor's Remarks in the Media

So, next, I want to address the Mayor's recent remarks in the media. Mr. Mayor, we want to thank you for taking the opportunity over the past few weeks to meet with the media, and for the first time since you've been in office, really make an opportunity available to reporters to cover the work of the municipality from your perspective. But there are a few things that have to be clarified.

Emergency Shelter Plan

So, effectively you have said to the media that you are waiting for the Assembly to produce a shelter plan. You were quoted as saying, "that's a question for the Assembly, what are their plans for a shelter in the winter?" The source was an article titled "Two years into his tenure, Anchorage Mayor Bronson reflects on homeless policy, shelter plans and Assembly relationship" in Alaska Public Media. I want to make sure everyone understands that per Anchorage Municipal Code 16.120.010.B, it's not the Assembly's job to come up with a plan, it's the Mayor's. The

Assembly's job is to set the policy and to approve the funding. Without a viable plan or a viable fund source, there's nothing for us to approve.

Port of Alaska

Another statement was made about the Port – you said “I took that project and the engineering and the designing and the building of it and kind of reassigned it to a different group, to an engineering firm actually that's built ports before. That would be Jacobs, and they've got a lot of experience. And that got us back on track, I think.” The source was also the article titled “Two years into his tenure, Anchorage Mayor Bronson reflects on homeless policy, shelter plans and Assembly relationship” in Alaska Public Media. So, Jacobs Engineering has been on board as the Project Manager for the Port of Alaska project well before this Administration was sworn into office in July 2021. In fact, even before they became Jacobs, they were CH2MHill and they were working on this project with us as far back as 2014. And so, it would be great for the record to reflect the fact that while there has been great progress on the Port in recent years, the engineering has been managed by Jacobs prior to the Mayor taking office.

Funding for Hotel Conversions to Housing

Also, there seems to be some rewriting of history going on. Thankfully the public record exists. Here's what the facts have to say. The Mayor sometimes says he supports Housing First, and other times not, but at a press conference for the Barratt Inn opening as extremely low income housing, the Mayor said he has always supported these kinds of efforts. The record of these meetings shows that the Mayor actually vetoed the funding for this project. The Assembly funded the purchase of the hotel to convert to housing with ARPA funds in summer of 2022 and this body had to override the Mayor's veto of the project to keep the investments in Housing First alive. This project was successful despite the efforts of the Administration.

Shelter Size

The Mayor also said it's the law that we have a big shelter. He said: “We've got to build a large shelter, because the law compels us to do that.” That's in an article titled “In interview, Anchorage Mayor Bronson acknowledges some missteps, conveys confidence in reelection” in the Anchorage Daily News. Anchorage Municipal Code 16.120.020.D requires the MOA to provide emergency cold weather shelter. It does not have to be a large shelter, but I recognize that Mayor Bronson wants it to be. In fact, per AR 2018-167, As Amended, a resolution declaring a policy of dispersed placement in the Anchorage Bowl of services and programs for homeless persons, it's the policy of the municipality that small shelters be distributed across town. Concentrating all offsite impacts of shelter on a single neighborhood and group of neighbors has a history of problems. Just look at Centennial Park, Sullivan Arena, and now 3rd and Ingra.

There's a lot. I could continue, but I won't at this time. I just want to say that I am grateful Mr. Mayor that you are now engaging with the media and we are here and ready to work. And when the need arises, I will correct the record as necessary. But it's not the best way. The best way is

what is happening now with the Administration staff who have demonstrated a clear and compelling desire to work with the Assembly. The tide is changing, let's move forward.

Federal Collaboration

I would also like to express that all three members of the Congressional delegation, Senator Murkowski, Senator Sullivan and Representative Peltola, this week sent a joint letter to U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia Fudge. I again want to thank the senators and our congress member for taking a strong stand in helping us right the inequity that is happening with the funding streams that are coming into Alaska. We are so sorely under resourced compared to other jurisdictions with that same problem.

I will also say that we are very much looking forward to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Buttigieg coming to town. This is a conversation that has been happening between the Assembly and the Secretary's Office since 2021 when he was confirmed into the position.

Return to School

The last thing I will speak to is the return of Anchorage School District back to school. Teachers and students across the municipality will be filing in and education will once again be happening in our amazing school district. I want everyone to think about that when they are driving – slow down and make sure our neighborhoods are safe where kids are walking to school. And to all of the teachers and students who are coming back to school, we wish you the very best of years and hope you are able to get the most out of your education and educational experience.

July 25, 2023

[View recording](#) of remarks.

Good evening everybody and welcome. I hope you all got outside and enjoyed the that amazing summer weather over the past week.

Port of Alaska

First, I would like to speak about the Port of Alaska. You will see several items on the agenda tonight concerning the Port. After many years of work, we are nearing a major milestone in the modernization. Over the past few months, the Assembly has been meeting with Port officials and users to identify the best path forward for the design for Phase 2 and the funding structure to pay for it. We had an especially productive worksession last Friday and I believe we are very close to taking the next step in the solution. Whether we get there tonight, or if it takes a few more meetings, I am confident that we are on a good track. I thank everyone involved for the work you have put in to moving us forward on this once-in-a-generation project that will be a legacy that we give to the future of Anchorage and all of Alaska.

Residential Zoning Updates

Another big item on the agenda tonight, that has been the subject of much community conversation, is a discussion about residential zoning updates. This is a proposal to create a process to update Anchorage's residential zoning code. We've had some very informative worksessions on the topic and I look forward to the debate on the matter. Whether you agree with the proposal or not, it has been a valuable exercise to bring this topic up for public discussion. Anchorage is in the midst of a housing crisis and we need to act to ensure that people can afford to live here. Housing costs have soared and if you haven't had to find a new place in the past two years, you will be shocked to see the prices. Anchorage's median home listing price jumped from \$311,000 in January 2020 to \$446,000 in May 2023 – that's almost a 50% increase in three years, and the rental market is following a similar path.

The Assembly is taking this matter very seriously and we are working on a number of initiatives to encourage affordable housing development. We will be hosting a public Housing summit this fall where we will share our work and gather feedback from the community. Details will be announced soon and I look forward to seeing you there.

Scofflaw Law

Another item that has been the subject of much discussion is the Scofflaw Law. The sponsor has informed me that this item will likely be continued to another night, so I want folks to know that when we get to the public hearing, it might be continued.

Golden Lion

Also before us, we have two items relating to the opening of the Golden Lion. This is an open conversation that has been before us for several years and it looks like we are getting close to a decision.

Elections

On a more somber note, the Assembly held a worksession last week to understand the circumstances surrounding an election complaint filed during the 2023 Regular Municipal Election. Nationwide there has been interference, misinformation, and disinformation surrounding elections that threaten the integrity of our elections. Now locally, the circumstances surrounding the complaint have raised concerns of partisan election interference by current and former appointees of the Municipality.

The Office of the Ombudsman is currently investigating the incident, and the Assembly is doing our due diligence as well. I would like to thank the Administration, in particular, Municipal Manager Kent Kohlhase and Chief of Staff Mario Bird for your cooperation and assistance in getting to the bottom of this matter. I know that the public is very concerned about this incident and I am committed to following this issue through so the public can be assured of the integrity of our local election system.

July 11, 2023

[View recording](#) of remarks.

Good evening everybody and welcome. I hope you all enjoyed a brief break from Assembly meetings and had a great 4th of July.

Meeting with Secretary Fudge

After our last regular assembly meeting, I had the opportunity to participate in a call with U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan and U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia Fudge. It was a great opportunity for the Senator and I to make the case to Secretary Fudge that Anchorage is in the midst of a severe homelessness crisis and we need increased federal funding and resources to be able to get out of it. I'm pleased to report that Secretary Fudge heard us loud and clear and committed to doing whatever is within her power to get much needed support to Anchorage. As you may recall from a resolution that was unanimously approved by the Assembly and the Mayor back in May, Anchorage is missing out on considerable federal funding to address homelessness issue due to the outdated HUD Continuum of Care funding formula. Serving very similar numbers of people experiencing homelessness, Anchorage received \$4 million through the formula in 2022, while Fort Worth received \$16 million and Baltimore received \$26 million. If Anchorage were to receive its fair share of federal funding, we could enact real solutions to get people housed and we wouldn't have to fight each other over scraps. I personally want to thank Senator Sullivan for taking this up as a personal cause on this issue, and I look forward to sharing further updates on this topic in the coming weeks.

A Note about the Golden Lion

I would note that the conversation about the Golden Lion is very welcome. This Assembly, at least some members, have been ready for this moment since August 2020. That said, it may take us a little longer to get to where we have the code and law requirements lined up to get to yes. I look forward to the conversation tonight. I know we're close, and that is edifying.

Clean Slate Strategy Update

Also I'd like to address the Clean Slate Strategy conversation we will take up tonight. I'd like to applaud our community and my colleagues, especially Member Rivera, for maintaining a laser focus on local solutions to solve homelessness in Anchorage. Despite our limited funding, we now have a mayor, an Assembly, nonprofits and a majority of the community who want to solve this problem.

Tonight's agenda covers a number of items related to this shared goal:

- First, the Allowed Camps Community Task Force has submitted their final report to the body for acceptance into the record. The report details recommendations by roughly 60

community members that shape a community-driven vision for the implementation of allowed camps as an emergency sheltering solution.

The report is item 10.F.4 on tonight's agenda. I want to remind the public that the Assembly's acceptance of the report should not be confused with an endorsement. Rather, these recommendations will be an important part of the Assembly's future work to provide emergency shelter on the road to housing.

- We will be considering AO 2023-70(S), an ordinance to define allowed camps with required site and operational standards. We held a worksession about this proposal on June 29, and I look forward to tonight's conversation on the item, which is 11.C. on our agenda. There are a number of substitute versions in play.
- And, finally, the Administration has submitted several items to the Assembly related to opening the Golden Lion as low-income supportive housing. It's taken us a long time to get to this point, and—credit where credit is due—I appreciate the Administration working to get these proposals before us tonight.

That said, I want to remind my colleagues that our role is to be responsible stewards of public resources, and the devil is in the details. We need to take the time to understand the Administration's plan so we get this right.

All this to say, thanks in large part to Member Rivera's leadership, Anchorage is making good progress. Members of the public are invited to learn about this work and join in the conversation by visiting the Assembly website at muni.org/assembly and clicking "Homelessness."

Port of Alaska

Looking forward, the modernization of the Port of Alaska is a once-in-a-generation project, and if done properly, will be a legacy that we gift to future generations. We are nearing some major decision points and I urge the community to pay close attention to this issue over the next month. Two ordinances are on the July 25th agenda for public hearing – AO 2023-60 to approve the Basis-of-Design Concept that will govern the Phase 2 concept for the cargo terminals, and AO 2023-34 to adopt Port of Alaska Terminal Tariff No. 10.0, which will help fund the renovations. The Assembly held worksessions on these topics on May 12 and June 9 and will have another round of worksessions on July 21. You can go to muni.org/worksessions to review the meeting documents and I look forward to delving into this topic further on July 25.