



## **SPECIAL ASSEMBLY MEETINGS REGARDING ORDINANCES FOR COVID-19 PREPARATIONS AND RESPONSE PRESS RELEASE**

March 11, 2020

Assembly Chair Forrest Dunbar announced today that he is calling Special Meetings of the Anchorage Assembly on March 12<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, both at 5:00 PM, for the introduction and potential passage of measures designed to prepare the the Municipality and the Assembly Department for any future outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). The Special Meeting on March 12<sup>th</sup> will be held at City Hall in Room #155; the Special Meeting of March 20<sup>th</sup> will be held in the Assembly Chambers at Loussac Library.

“First, I’d like to stress that there are not yet any cases of COVID-19 diagnosed in Anchorage, and that for the most up-to-date information residents should visit <https://www.muni.orgz/Departments/health/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>, where the Anchorage Health Department is doing a great job disseminating facts from reliable sources,” stated Chair Dunbar. “But in conversations with the Municipal Clerk and members of the Administration, it is clear that there are legal stumbling blocks to a measured COVID-19 response, which we are seeking to address.”

The Assembly ordinances submitted on March 11<sup>th</sup> are both based in part around the recommended principle of “social distancing:”

- First, a change to municipal code that would allow the Assembly to reach a quorum telephonically, without six Assembly Members physically present. This ability would only be available in times of emergency, such as the emergency declared by the Governor of Alaska on Wednesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>. This change would allow the Assembly to continue to meet its Anchorage Charter-obligated duty to meet at least twice a month to conduct official business. It will also facilitate the continuation of regular Assembly business and the functioning of the Municipality, even in cases where a number of Assembly Members must be quarantined or are otherwise unable to physically attend.
- Second, because health officials have indicated COVID-19 is particularly dangerous to people over age 60, and all but a few of the current Municipal election workers are in this category, many may understandably refuse to work at accessible vote centers or the Election Center if the virus spreads to Anchorage during our election. This proposed ordinance explicitly gives the Municipal Clerk additional powers to close accessible vote centers, if necessary, and provide for alternative means for voters to receive and cast ballots, and ultimately protect the

integrity of the election. Fortunately, Anchorage's existing Vote-By-Mail/Vote-At-Home system is already much better suited to protect public health than a poll-based election.

An ordinance submitted on behalf of the Mayor in response to COVID-19 will also be introduced at the meeting of March 12<sup>th</sup> and set for public hearing on March 20<sup>th</sup>.

In addition to these two Special Assembly Meetings, work sessions to discuss the ordinances are also planned for Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup>. A normal public hearing on these matters, with public testimony, will take place at the meeting of March 20<sup>th</sup>.

"Finally, I'd like to note that I am NOT calling an emergency meeting nor using our emergency ordinance powers to introduce and potentially pass a measure on the same day," stated Chair Dunbar, "While this matter is urgent, I believe we have the time to have a more robust public process and an expedient but thorough deliberation. We are taking these steps before COVID-19 manifests in Anchorage, as a matter of preparation and to prepare a measured response. This pandemic is a threat that I take seriously, and that I know my colleagues and the Administration take seriously, but we are also following the guidance of our Health Department and other health agencies: Prepare, but do not panic."

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