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**MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE**  
**OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN**  
**2015 ANNUAL REPORT**

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Municipality of Anchorage, Office of the Ombudsman

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August 23, 2016

To the Anchorage Municipal Assembly, the Anchorage School District Board of Education, the Mayor and Administration, and the people of Anchorage:

We are pleased to present the Anchorage Municipal Ombudsman's 2015 Annual Report. This report explains how the Ombudsman's Office fulfills its role as an independent, impartial office that provides information about Municipal government, while investigating concerns involving Municipal government and employees, including the Anchorage School District.

The Ombudsman's Office acts as an informational resource for the public and also recognizes outstanding performance by Municipal and School District employees and workgroups, through our Above and Beyond Award.

Behind the cases and statistics are real people; individuals who need help navigating and understanding Municipal government, as well as the dedicated Municipal and School District employees who serve the people of Anchorage, and visitors to our community. It is our pleasure to serve, inform and empower the public.

Sincerely,



Darrel W. Hess  
Municipal Ombudsman



Elizabeth A. Eisses  
Deputy Ombudsman



May Ramirez-Xiong  
Associate Ombudsman

## PURPOSE

The Office of the Municipal Ombudsman is mandated by the Anchorage Home Rule Charter. The Charter's Bill of Rights guarantees the people of Anchorage "The right to the assistance of a municipal ombudsman in dealing with grievances and abuses." The Office of the Ombudsman is governed by Anchorage Municipal Code, Chapter 2.60 which established the Office as "...an independent, impartial municipal office, readily available to the public, responsible to the assembly, empowered to investigate the acts of administrative agencies and to recommend appropriate changes toward the goals of safeguarding the rights of persons and of promoting higher standards of competency, efficiency and equity in the provision of municipal services." (AMC 2.60.010)

The goal of the Ombudsman's Office is to serve the people of Anchorage, by providing information or referrals, or investigating complaints and concerns regarding Municipal and School District departments, agencies and employees. The Ombudsman's Office has limited jurisdiction over Anchorage charter schools. If issues and concerns are not jurisdictional to the Ombudsman's Office, we do our best to direct persons to the appropriate person or organization.

## HOW TO FILE A COMPLAINT

When people have questions or concerns regarding Municipal government or the Anchorage School District, the Ombudsman's Office is here to assist you. You may contact our office in-person, by phone, email, or postal service. You can find a Complaint form online on the Ombudsman webpage at [www.muni.org/ombudsman](http://www.muni.org/ombudsman). Complaints can also be filed online through the Municipality's CityView Portal, at [www.muni.org/cityviewportal](http://www.muni.org/cityviewportal). One-time registration is required to use the portal. Although details of Ombudsman complaints are confidential, contact information entered on the portal is accessible by other Municipal departments.

Our staff will assess whether or not your issue is jurisdictional to our office. If an issue is not jurisdictional to our office, we will do our best to provide a referral to another agency or entity that may be able to address the issue. In 2015, the Ombudsman's Office provided information and referrals to over 1,100 individuals. The Ombudsman's Office is located at 632 West 6th Avenue, on the first floor of Anchorage City Hall, in Suite 160.

Office of the Municipal Ombudsman  
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## STATISTICS

The Ombudsman’s Office uses an application called “CityView” to maintain information and process statistics. The number of Inquiries listed in Table 1 and Graph 1 indicate the total number of public interactions with the Ombudsman’s Office in 2015, either by telephone, email, postal mail, fax, online portal, or in-person. Contacts were interactions with persons who may have only needed information, or who may have wanted to express their opinions or concerns regarding local government. These interactions normally require no further action by the Ombudsman’s Office. Referrals reflect inquiries that were referred to state or federal agencies, community agencies, or to Municipal or School District employees, or departments. Cases refer to inquiries that required some level of investigation by the Ombudsman’s Office.

**Table 1 2015 Processing Statistics**

2015 Processing Statistics	Opened in 2015	Processed or Closed	Pending
Referrals	765	765	0
Contacts	391	391	0
Cases	236	239	9
<b>Total Inquiries</b>	<b>1392</b>	<b>1395</b>	<b>9</b>

**Graph 1 2015 Processing Statistics**

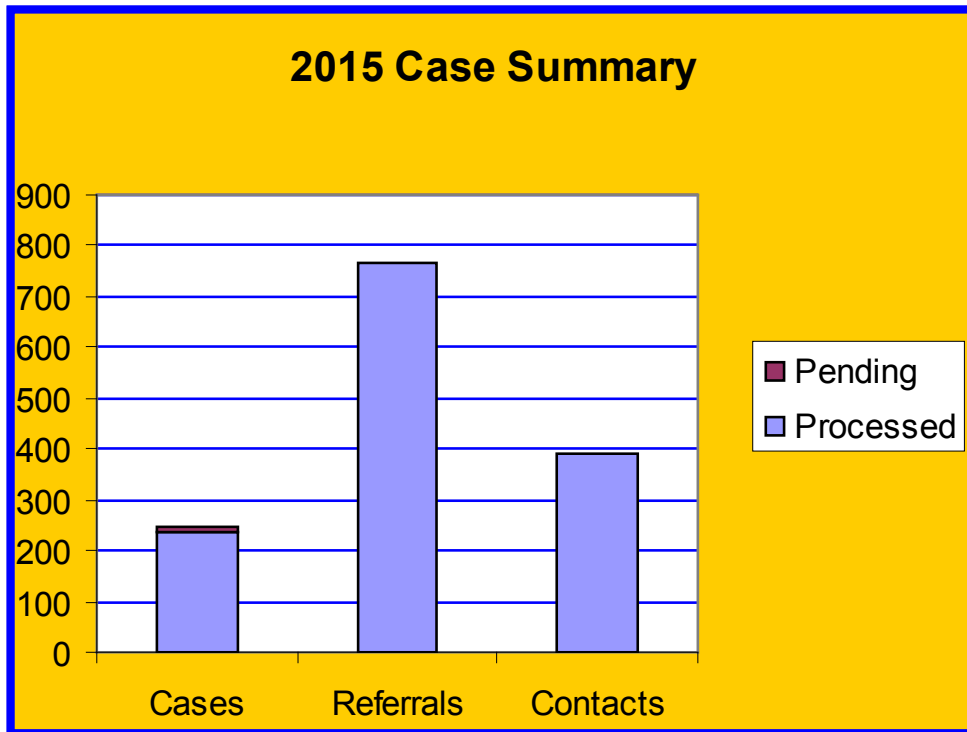
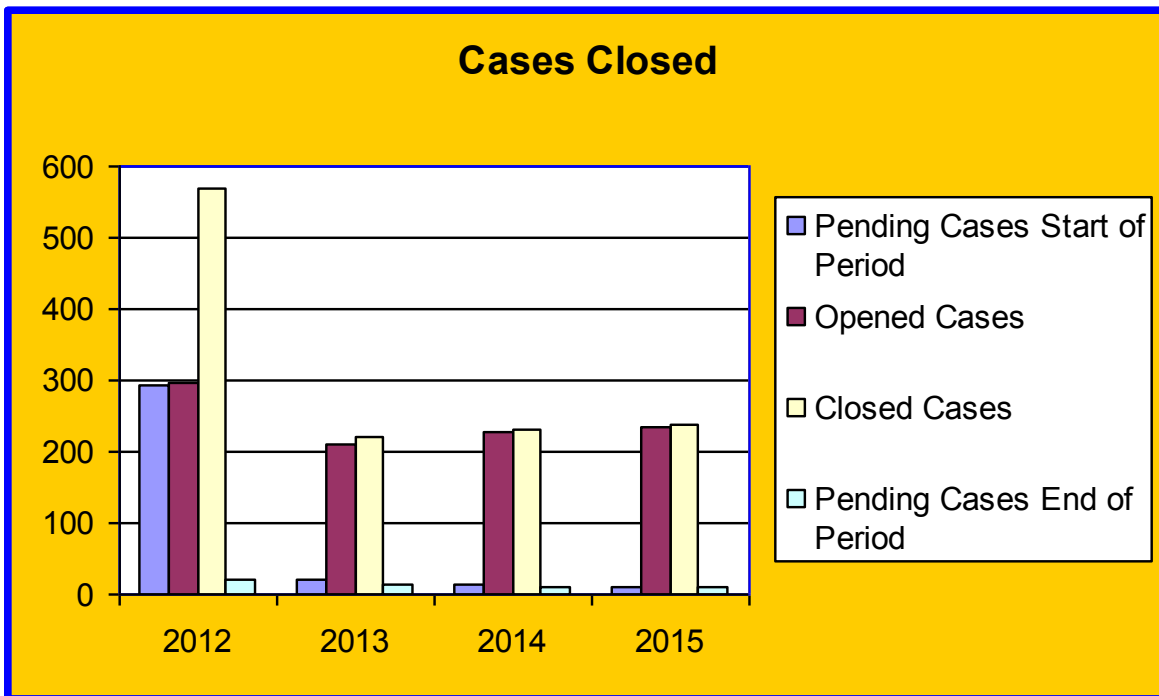


Table 2 and Graph 2 reflect the work of the Ombudsman’s Office over the past four years. The large numbers of open cases reflected in the 2012 statistics have all been closed.

**Table 2. Case Closures and Pending Inventory from 2012-2015**

Case Inventory	2012	2013	2014	2015
Pending Cases Start of Period	293	22	15	12
Opened Cases	297	212	229	236
Closed Cases	568	219	232	239
Pending Cases End of Period	22	15	12	9

**Graph 2. Case Closures and Pending Inventory from 2012-2015**



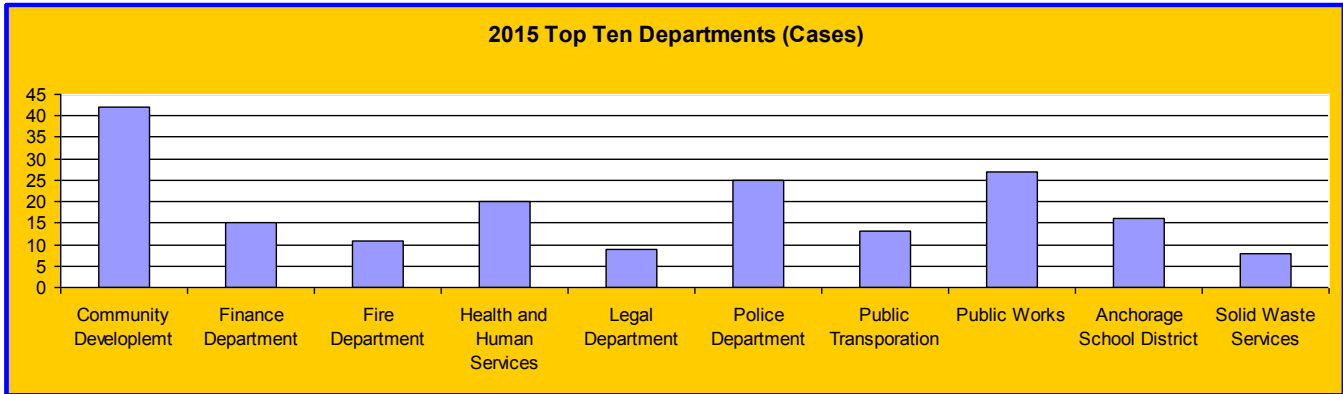
Historically, the larger Municipal Departments and those with the greatest public contact generate the largest number of cases in the Ombudsman’s Office. In 2015 Community Development (21%), the Police Department (14%), Public Works (13%), (Finance (11%) and Health & Human Services (9%), ranked 1-5. (See Table 3 and Graph 3)

**Table 3. 2013-15 Cases by Department**

Department	2013	Percent	2014	Percent	2015	Percent
Anchorage Community Development Authority	11	5.24%	4	1.75%	7	2.97%
Assembly	0	0%	0	0%	4	1.69%
Community Development	46	21.9%	49	21.4%	42	17.8%
Development Services	0	0%	0	0%	1	0.42%
Employee Relations	2	0.95%	3	1.31%	5	2.12%
Equal Rights Commission	0	0%	0	0%	3	1.27%
Finance Department	18	8.57%	25	10.92%	15	6.36%
Fire Department	0	0%	1	0.44%	11	4.66%
Health & Human Services	11	5.24%	21	9.17%	20	8.47%
Legal Department	6	2.86%	3	1.31%	9	3.81%
Library	2	0.95%	0	0%	3	1.27%
Mayor's Office	3	1.43%	1	0.44%	0	0%
Merrill Field	0	0%	1	0.44%	0	0%
Municipal Clerk	0	0%	0	0%	3	1.27%
Municipal Light & Power	1	0.48%	4	1.75%	0	0%
Municipal Manager	1	0.48%	1	0.44%	0	0%
Museum	0	0%	0	0%	1	0.42%
Not Department Specific	4	1.9%	10	4.37%	4	1.69%
Office of Equal Opportunity	0	0%	1	0.44%	1	0.42%
Office of Management & Budget	0	0%	0	0%	3	1.27%
Parks & Recreation	8	3.81%	6	2.62%	4	1.69%
Police Department	27	12.86%	33	14.41%	25	10.59%
Port of Anchorage	0	0%	1	0.44%	0	0%
Public Transportation	4	1.9%	6	2.62%	13	5.51%
Public Works	28	13.33%	30	13.1%	27	11.44%
Purchasing Department	2	0.95%	0	0%	2	0.85%
Real Estate Department	1	0.48%	2	0.87%	2	0.85%
Risk Management	4	1.9%	1	0.44%	1	0.42%
School District	11	5.24%	11	4.8%	16	6.78%
Solid Waste Services	9	4.29%	7	3.06%	8	3.39%
Transportation Inspection	4	1.9%	3	1.31%	4	1.69%
Water & Wastewater Utility	7	3.33%	5	2.18%	2	0.85%
<b>All Departments</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Graph 3. 2015 Cases by Department (most frequent)**



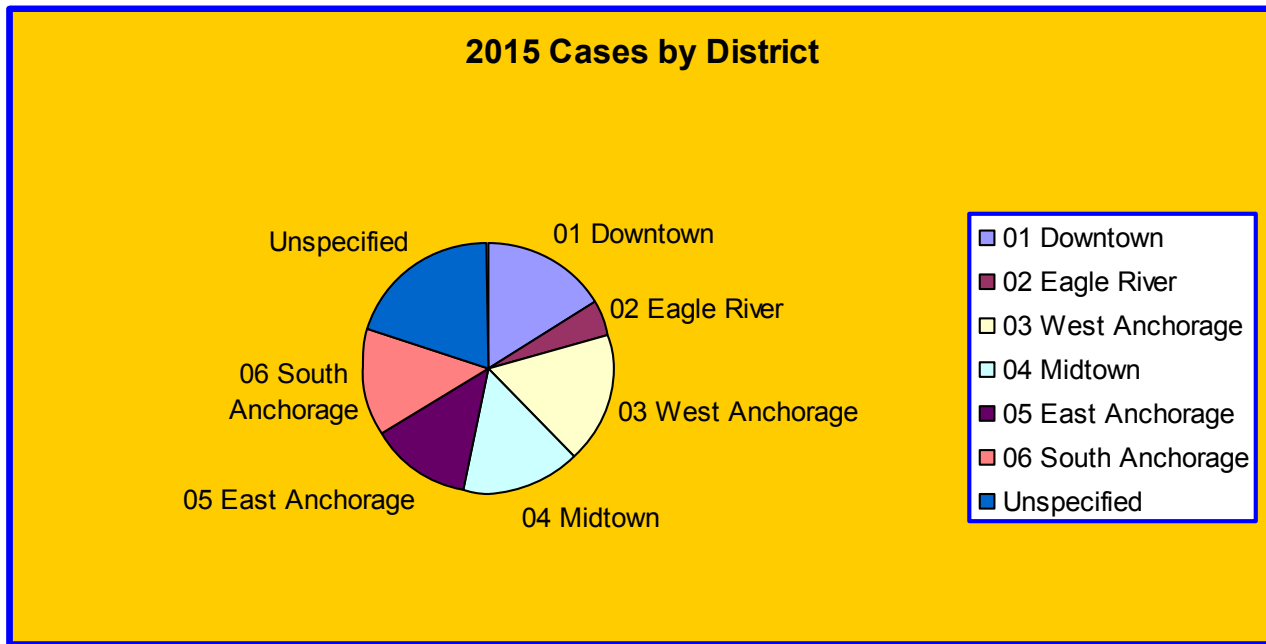
New for 2015: Fire Department and Legal Department  
 Out for 2015: ML& P and AWWU

The Ombudsman’s Office also tracks Cases by Assembly District. These numbers are reflected in Table 4 and Graph 4.

**Table 4. Cases by Assembly District 2013-2015**

District No./Name	Cases 2013	Percent	Cases 2014	Percent	Cases 2015	Percent
00 Not District Specific	3	1.43	1	0.44	1	0.42
01 Downtown	43	20.48	27	11.79	39	16.53
02 Eagle River/Chugiak	21	10	21	9.17	10	4.24
03 West Anchorage	32	15.24	41	17.9	40	16.95
04 Midtown	36	17.14	44	19.21	37	15.68
05 East Anchorage	28	13.33	26	11.35	30	12.71
06 South Anchorage	28	13.33	29	12.66	32	13.56
77 Out of Anchorage	1	0.48	5	2.18	7	2.97
99 District Unknown	18	8.57	35	15.28	40	16.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>100</b>

**Graph 4. Cases by Assembly District 2015**



### 2015 FINAL INVESTIGATIVE REPORT SUMMARIES

In 2015 the Ombudsman’s Staff issued several Final Investigative Reports as authorized by the Municipal Code. Below are summaries of two of those reports:

#### **Final Investigative Report Concerning Ombudsman Complaint OM20150142**

An individual contacted the Municipal Ombudsman’s Office alleging that two vehicle sales lots near Spenard Road and 36th Avenue, in the B-3 zoning district, were not in compliance with the landscaping and parking requirements of (old) Title 21. The Complainant had filed a complaint with the Municipality’s Land Use Enforcement Division (LUE) in August 2013. LUE disagreed with the complainant’s assertion that the landscaping and parking requirements of (old) Title 21 applied to the two vehicle sales lots in question. LUE believed that these requirements were only triggered when permits were issued to construct permanent structures. The two vehicle sales lots in question did not contain any permanent structures. Consequently, LUE did not take enforcement action. The Complainant disagreed with LUE’s position; he believed that his complaint had not been adequately addressed. In February 2015 the Complainant contacted the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman reviewed the analyses and arguments put forward by the Complainant, LUE, and Planning, and the relevant sections of Municipal Code. Given the complexities of the issue, and the potential financial considerations for dozens of vehicle sales lots (and other businesses) that this issue

could impact, the Ombudsman submitted a request for legal services to the Municipal Attorney's Office. Assistant Municipal Attorney Quincy Arms opined that the vehicle sales lots in question must meet the landscaping and parking requirements of (old) Title 21. Vehicle sales lots (and other permitted uses) in the B3 zoning district, that do not contain permanent structures, are subject to the landscaping, parking, and other standards and requirements of (old) Title 21. Any "use of land" that conflicts with the code is a violation under (old) Title 21. The specific requirements of uses in the B-3 zoning district are found in Chapter 21.40 (Zoning Districts) and Chapter 21.45 (Supplementary District Regulations). The Municipality of Anchorage must enforce these standards and requirements when responding to complaints that have been filed by constituents.

Because Anchorage Municipal Code (old) Title 21 requires that the applicable parking and landscaping standards and requirements be met for all permitted uses in the B-3 zoning district, and because the Municipality of Anchorage Development Services Department, Land Use Enforcement Division, in this case did not enforce those standards, the Ombudsman found this complaint to be JUSTIFIED. Land Use Enforcement noted that they will enforce the requirements of code, based on the opinions of the Ombudsman and Municipal Attorney's Office when responding to complaints.

### **Final Investigative Report Concerning Ombudsman Complaint OM20151244**

An individual contacted the Ombudsman's Office alleging that a draft resolution of the Municipal Planning and Zoning commission (Commission) posted on muni.org with the November 2, 2015 Commission meeting agenda would not open, and was marked "confidential". The constituent believed that the draft resolution was a public document, and that it was contrary to Municipal Code to withhold the document from the public. She further alleged that Resolution 2015-041, adopted by the Commission on November 2, 2015, was not signed and made available to the public until November 10, 2015. She believed that the twenty day clock to file an appeal of the Commission's decision with the Board of Adjustment started when the resolution was adopted, not signed, because verbiage on the Commission's agenda stated that "Appeals must be filed with the Clerk's Office within twenty (20) days after approval by the Planning and Zoning Commission of the resolution which is the Commission's final decision". In this instance, the constituent alleged that the resolution was not made available to the public until after eight days of the twenty day appeal timeframe had elapsed.

During his review of this complaint the Ombudsman reviewed AMC Chapter 1.25-PUBLIC MEETINGS, AMC Title 4-BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS, AMC 3.90-ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS, and the relevant chapters of Title 21 (AMC 21.10.005-Old Code and AMC 21.02.050-New Code) pertaining to the Commission. The Ombudsman determined that under AMC 3.90, draft resolutions of the Commission would generally be public documents, and would not generally fall under any of the exceptions found in AMC 3.90.040.

The Ombudsman determined that the twenty day timeframe to appeal decisions of the Commission to the Board of Adjustment commences with the date of service of decisions of the Commission (AMC 21.14.040), and that the verbiage on the Commission's agenda did not accurately reflect the requirements of Municipal Code.

Because draft resolutions of the Planning and Zoning Commission were not being made available to the public, and because Anchorage Municipal Code, Chapter 3.90 defines public documents to include those in draft form (subject to certain limitations found in code and case law), and because Commission draft resolutions are not exempt from public information requests under AMC 3.90.040, and because the Planning and Zoning Commission was not meeting in a regulatory or adjudicatory capacity, the Ombudsman found the complaint that withholding draft Commission resolutions from the public was contrary to Municipal Code to be JUSTIFIED.

Because the twenty day timeframe to appeal decisions of the Commission to the Board of Adjustment starts with the “Date of Service” of a summary of action or approved resolution to the applicant, and because “Date of Service” is defined as “The date that the secretary mails or otherwise distributes the summary of action or approved resolution to the applicant” (AMC 21.14.040), and because a copy of approved Commission Resolution 2015-041 was provided to the complainant the same day that it was distributed to the applicant, the Ombudsman found that the allegation that the Commission’s final decision (resolution) was provided to the complainant eight days into the timeframe to file an appeal to be UNSUPPORTED.

### 2015 INFORMAL RESOLUTION SUMMARIES

The majority of Ombudsman investigations are resolved informally, and final investigative reports are not required. Frequently the Ombudsman’s Office achieves good results, including changes to Municipal Code, policies and procedures, through informal case resolutions, working with Municipal employees and departments, as well as complainants. Below are summaries of some of those cases:

#### **Ombudsman Complaint OM20150077**

A Municipal employee contacted the Ombudsman’s Office to express her concerns that the Municipality of Anchorage did not have an anti-bullying policy. The Deputy Ombudsman researched work place bullying, and anti-bullying policies implemented by the Anchorage School District and other local governments across the Nation. The Deputy Ombudsman’s research showed that nationwide as many as 13% of workers experience psychological aggression (bullying) on a weekly basis, and that the targets of workplace bullying experience significant physical and mental health problems, including musculoskeletal problems, work withdrawal, sleep disturbance, digestive disturbance, depression, family tension, post-traumatic stress disorder, and financial problems due to work absences. The impacts of bullied employees could generate substantial costs to the Municipality, due to diminished work quality, and lost work time for the targeted employees. Employees are more likely to leave a job where they are bullied; hiring and training new employees generates significant expense for the Municipality. The Deputy Ombudsman’s research showed that individuals are less likely to engage in antisocial behavior when it is understood that the organization which employs them does not tolerate bullying behavior and that their actions are likely to be punished. Bullying is never acceptable. The Deputy Ombudsman drafted a memo to the Mayor recommending that the Municipality adopt an anti-bullying policy. Within two weeks the Mayor’s Office provided the Ombudsman’s Office with a draft anti-bullying policy for review and comment, before it was implemented.

### **Ombudsman Complaint OM20151035**

An individual who was assessed a penalty for late payment of her Municipal property taxes contacted the Ombudsman's Office alleging that her payment, although mailed after the August 15th payment deadline, was not late, because it was postmarked (August 24th) within the seven day grace period, because the 15th fell on a weekend. She believed that her \$302.00 late penalty payment should be refunded. The Associate Ombudsman determined that Treasury's website stated that if the tax due date falls on a weekend, the due date is the next business day. However, in speaking with a Treasury supervisor, the Associate Ombudsman determined that this was incorrect; the due date does not change, but payments received the first business day following the weekend are not considered late. The seven day payment grace period commences on the 15th, even when the 15th falls on a weekend. Treasury noted that in this instance, the seven day grace period started on the 15th, even though the 15th fell on a weekend. Because the information posted on Treasury's website did not accurately reflect the requirements of Municipal Code, the Associate Ombudsman recommended that the complainant's late penalty payment be refunded and the wording on the website be revised. The Municipal Treasurer concurred with the Associate Ombudsman's recommendations. The complainant's late penalty payment was refunded, and the verbiage on the website was revised.

### **Ombudsman Complaint OM20151112**

An individual contacted the Ombudsman's Office, alleging that there was never any hot water in the women's restroom at the Downtown Transit Center. The Ombudsman, Deputy Ombudsman, and Associate Ombudsman made a site visit, and determined that there was not any hot water in the restrooms at the Transit Center. Given the large number of persons who use the restrooms at the Downtown Transit Center, the lack of hot water in the restroom could potentially pose a significant public health risk. The Deputy Ombudsman contacted the Anchorage Community Development Authority regarding the lack of hot water in the restrooms at the Downtown Transit Center. The ACDA was responsive to the information provided by the Deputy Ombudsman's; they had their maintenance staff adjust the ratio of hot to cold water in the restrooms, which corrected the problem. A site visit by the Ombudsman's Office confirmed that the problem had been fixed.

### **Ombudsman Complaint OM20151222**

An individual contacted the Ombudsman's Office alleging that a piece of metal "sticking out of the curb on 4th Avenue by the Hotel Captain Cook" had caused his vehicle tires to go flat, and damaged the tires requiring him to replace them. The constituent stated that he had contacted multiple Municipal agencies, and had "been given the run around". The Associate Ombudsman determined that the steel liner that had been placed on the curb where it protrudes into intersection had been damaged (most likely by snowplows), and that there were sharp pieces of metal that could easily cause damage to vehicle tires. The Associate Ombudsman emailed photographs of the damaged metal curb liners to Municipal Street Maintenance. Street Maintenance was responsive to the information provided by the Associate Ombudsman, and promptly repaired the damaged sections of the metal curb liners. The constituent was referred to the Municipal Risk Management Department to file a claim for his damaged tires.

### **Ombudsman Complaint OM20151244**

An individual contacted the Ombudsman's Office regarding his Municipal personal property tax bill. The individual owned a mobile home that had been located in an Anchorage trailer court for the first half of 2015. He moved the trailer to Wasilla in July 2015. He believed that he should not have had to pay personal property taxes to the Municipality of Anchorage for the entire 2015 tax year. The Ombudsman's review of the applicable Municipal Codes and State Statutes showed that there is no provision in either for prorating personal or real property taxes; the owner of record as of January 1 is responsible for payment of the taxes for the entire tax year. Normally if property is sold during the year, tax payments are dealt with as part of the sale, and arrangements are made between the seller and buyer. Removing personal property from the MOA during the current tax year does not relieve the owner of record as of January 1st of the responsibility to pay the tax obligation. The constituent was informed of the requirements of code, and advised to file an appeal with the Municipality's Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer.

### **Ombudsman Complaint OM20151335**

An individual contacted the Ombudsman's Office to express his concerns that it had been announced that the restrooms at the Downtown Transit Center were going to be closed at 5 pm daily, hours before the Transit Center closed. He believed that public buildings are required to have restrooms available when the buildings are open to the public. The Ombudsman reviewed the applicable Municipal Code and spoke with the Development Services Department's Manager of Engineering Services, and determined that the restrooms must be available whenever the building is open to the public. The International Building Code (adopted by reference as the Municipality's Building Code) requires that restrooms be available to the public when buildings are open to the public. Structures and tenant spaces intended for human occupancy must be provided public toilet facilities in accordance with the 2009 IBC section 2902.3. This section also dictates the minimum required number of water closets, etc. The IBC is adopted by reference under AMC Title 23. The Ombudsman informed the Anchorage Community Development Authority of his determination. The Ombudsman noted that while the code mandates that the restrooms be available to the public, it does not mandate that they must be unsecured. The Ombudsman recommended to the ACDA that they lock the restrooms after 5 pm and post signs informing the public how they could gain access. The ACDA implemented the Ombudsman's recommendations.

## **2015 PUBLIC OUTREACH**

In 2015 the Ombudsman's Office worked to improve the office's interface with the public, including;

- Initiating development of a City View Public Portal that will allow citizens to file complaints online. The portal will be optimized for smart phones and tablets.
- Continuing to update and make effective use of the Ombudsman's page at [www.muni.org/ombuds](http://www.muni.org/ombuds).
- Using the Anchorage Ombudsman Facebook page to engage with the public.
- Distributing Anchorage Ombudsman t-shirts, wristbands, lapel pins and ink pens at public outreach events.
- Conducting public outreach:

- Catholic Social Services Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services Partners Meetings
- NAACP Anchorage Installation of Officers
- Southcentral Foundation 18th Annual Gathering
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Community-Wide Celebration
- Day of Remembrance: Alaska Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League
- Bridge Builder's Meet the World in Anchorage
- NAACP Black History Month Celebration & Voter Registration Drive
- Hmong American Veterans Memorial Day Celebration
- Japanese Summer Festival
- YWCA Women of Achievement Reception and Induction Ceremony
- Leadership Anchorage
- Fairview Block Party
- Diversity Community Health Awareness Day
- UAA Disability Awareness Fair
- Transgender Day of Remembrance
- Hmong Center of Alaska, Inc. Traditional New Year Celebration
- Hate Crimes & Hate Incidents Forum
- YWCA Alaska's Stand Against Racism
- YWCA Alaska Young People of Achievement Awards
- Identity, Inc. Board
- Asia-Pacific Heritage Month Celebration
- We Came to Stay: Anchorage Untold Stories
- #WeAreAnchorage Restoring Honor Rally
- 2015 Equality March & 2015 Pride Festival
- CSS/RAIS World Refugee Day Celebration
- Homeless Youth Forum
- Bean's Café 21st Annual Empty Bowl Project
- Senator Ellis/Representative Tarr Constituent Meeting
- Senator Ellis/Representative Gara Constituent Meeting
- Choose Respect March and Rally
- Polynesian Cultural Flag Day 2015
- Project Homeless Connect
- Chinese New Year's Celebration: Year of the Ram
- NAACP Anchorage 64th Annual CT Lewis Freedom Fund Dinner
- Alaska Native Heritage Day Celebration

## ABOVE AND BEYOND AWARD

The Ombudsman’s Office recognizes outstanding performance by Municipal and School District employees and workgroups through our Above and Beyond Award, which acknowledges above and beyond service to the citizens of Anchorage. To nominate a Municipal or School District employee or workgroup to receive the Above and Beyond Award, call the Ombudsman’s Office at 907-343-4461, or email to OMBUD@muni.org.

In 2015 the Municipal Ombudsman’s Office recognized Kelly Lewis, from the Property Appraisal Division of the Finance Department, Danny Tix, from the IT Department, and Josie Judd, from the Purchasing Department, for their outstanding commitment to the Municipality and their “Above and Beyond” service.



Darrel Hess, Kelly Lewis and Bryant Robbins



Betsy Eisses, Danny Tix, Darrel Hess and Myron Heil



Betsy Eisses, Darrel Hess, Josie Judd and Heather MacAlpine



## THE OMBUDSMAN OFFICE

- › Acts as a resource for citizens, by answering questions and providing information regarding Municipal government.
- › Recommends to the Assembly, the School Board and the Mayor, changes in policies and procedures and Anchorage Municipal Code, to make the Municipality and School District more responsive to the needs of individuals and the community.
- › Responds in an independent, impartial and confidential manner, while safeguarding the rights of persons and promoting higher standards of competency, efficiency and equity.
- › Investigates complaints against agencies, departments and employees of the Municipality and the School District, as authorized by Anchorage Municipal Code, Chapter 2.60.
- › Makes findings and recommendations through formal investigations about the fairness of official actions by the Municipality or the School District.

## BEFORE YOU CONTACT THE OMBUDSMAN

- › Be prepared. Gather any needed information and write down your questions before calling a government office.
- › Don't hesitate to exercise your right to call or write government offices for assistance.
- › Ask for the names of employees you speak with, take notes and save all correspondence.
- › If you are having problems getting answers, or are being treated discourteously, be sure to speak with a supervisor. If a supervisor cannot satisfactorily address your concerns, you can contact the Ombudsman.
- › Courtesy works both ways; be pleasant. Everyone appreciates being treated courteously. Recognizing that, for the average citizen, government is often difficult to navigate, the authors of Anchorage's Home Rule Charter provided for a Municipal Ombudsman to act as an independent, impartial reviewer of citizen complaints.

## FROM DARREL HESS

*It is my honor to serve the people of Anchorage as your Municipal Ombudsman. The Anchorage Ombudsman's office is your independent voice for fairness in local government. Our office strives to assist citizens in navigating the agencies and departments of the Municipality of Anchorage and the Anchorage School District, responding to your concerns and questions.*

*Our goal is to assist, in some fashion, every person who contacts our office. Many of the issues brought to us are non-jurisdictional, but we will attempt to direct you to the correct person, agency, department, business or nonprofit, who can help you.*

*We look forward to informing, assisting and empowering you regarding local government policies, procedures and codes. Our services are free of charge, and available to anyone within the Municipality. It is our privilege to serve you.*

## WHAT IS AN OMBUDSMAN?

Ombudsman is a Swedish term, which means “protector or defender of people’s rights.” The Anchorage Ombudsman is appointed by the Assembly and is an independent, impartial reviewer of complaints and concerns. The Municipal Ombudsman is authorized by the 1975 Anchorage Home Rule Charter, and is governed by Anchorage Municipal Code, Chapter 2.60.

The Ombudsman is nominated by an Assembly selection committee, and if confirmed by the Assembly, serves a two year term. Reappointment is allowed. The Ombudsman investigates complaints of unfair treatment and unreasonable actions by the Municipality of Anchorage and the Anchorage School District, and their employees.

Complaints may result from the action, or lack of action, by a Municipal or School District employee. Often complaints are based on misunderstandings of Municipal or School District policies and procedures, Municipal Codes or individual rights. The Ombudsman can interview Municipal and School District Employees, examine confidential documents, inspect agency and department premises, and issue subpoenas.

The Ombudsman is a neutral fact finder when reviewing and researching complaints and the Ombudsman is not an advocate. If an Ombudsman investigation determines that an agency, department or employee made a mistake, or acted unfairly or arbitrarily, the Ombudsman may recommend corrective action. While the Municipality and School District do not have to follow the Ombudsman’s recommendations, they usually do.

The Ombudsman does not investigate:

- › The Assembly
- › The Mayor
- › The School Board
- › State or Federal Agencies or Employees
- › Disputes between private parties
- › Tenant/Landlord disputes
- › Decisions more than one year old (generally)
- › Matters being adjudicated by the courts

## OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

### **Congratulations to our former Associate Ombudsman, Heather MacAlpine!**

Heather joined the Ombudsman's Office in November of 2012 as our Associate Ombudsman. She brought a bright smile, an everlasting cheerfulness and a commitment of respect to everyone who entered our office. Her legal background was a natural fit to her position and she quickly became an expert in reading code and was determined to make sure all constituents were treated fairly and justly. Our loss in the Ombudsman's office was the Municipality's gain and in July of 2015, Heather became the Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity. Dr. Sharon Chamard stated, "Heather was one of my best research assistants at the UAA Justice Center. Her attention to detail and professionalism were notable. I was delighted when she was hired to work in the Ombudsman's Office. I knew she would excel there in particular because of her legal training and commitment to social justice. Her continued success with her recent appointment as the director of OEO makes me very proud as one as her former professors." While we miss her in the office, we wish her great success as Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity.

### **Our new Associate Ombudsman, May Ramirez-Xiong!**

In August of 2015, May Ramirez-Xiong joined our staff as the Associate Ombudsman. May was promoted to our office via the Employee Relations Department, their loss is our gain! May is a wonderful addition to our staff and we are delighted to have her. She brought not only youth and multiculturalism to our office, but also organization and efficiency. May has merged seamlessly into our office; she is cheerful, welcoming, and treats all of our complainants with dignity and respect. She approaches every task with professionalism and competence and has quickly become a great investigator. May is one of the first employees in the municipality to become a professionally trained Hmong Interpreter! We are so pleased that May elected to join our staff in 2015.



Thanks to Piglet, the Ombudsdog, for her dedicated service.

# MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE



## COMPLAINT FORM

The Ombudsman's Office was established in addition to other remedies or rights of appeal, as an independent, impartial municipal office, readily available to the public, responsible to the Assembly, empowered to investigate the acts of Municipal agencies and Anchorage School District, and to recommend appropriate changes toward the goals of safeguarding the rights of persons and of promoting higher standards of competency, efficiency, and equity in the provision of municipal services.

Please fill out and mail to:

Municipal Ombudsman  
PO Box 196650  
Anchorage, AK 99519-6650

Name		Date
Address		
City	State	Zip
Phone Number	Alt. Phone Number	
Email Address:		
Name of municipal department you are complaining about:		
Have you tried to resolve the complaint with the department? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		
<b>*It is important to try to resolve your issue with the agency's help before involving the ombudsman.*</b>		
Please provide names and contact information for people you have spoken with and what their response was to your complaint.		

## MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT FORM

"The Ombudsman may investigate the administrative acts of agents of the municipality,...The ombudsman shall be barred from inquiry into acts of the mayor, the assembly or school board." **AMC 2.60.110.A. D**

What did the department do that you think is wrong? \_\_\_\_\_

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What do you want from the department? \_\_\_\_\_

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Please provide any other information we may need to help us investigate your complaint. \_\_\_\_\_

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**\*IMPORTANT We will not give out your name without your consent. Do you give permission to use your name when talking to the agency?**     YES     NO    Initial \_\_\_\_\_

Use this space to provide any further information you feel may be useful in our investigation. **Remember: The Municipal Ombudsman only investigates complaints about municipal agencies.** Use extra paper if necessary.

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What do you want the Ombudsman to do for you? \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



**WELCOMING**  
*Anchorage*  
*Stronger Together*

In 2014, Anchorage joined the Welcoming Cities project, a collection of cities from across the United States that recognizes the economic, cultural and social contributions that immigrants and refugees make to our communities. Building on this network, Welcoming Anchorage is a collaboration between the Municipality of Anchorage, local businesses and organizations and the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation that strives to reinforce Anchorage as a place proud of our heritage and poised to position ourselves as a globally competitive, culturally vibrant 21st century community.

The Welcoming Anchorage initiative has five pillars: Employment and Entrepreneurship; Civic Engagement; Connected, Safe and Healthy Communities; Equitable Access; Education.

***Employment and Entrepreneurship:*** Ensuring engagement in all sectors of Anchorage’s economy by tearing down barriers to entry and minimizing “brain waste.” Promoting entrepreneurship opportunities

***Civic Engagement:*** Hosting annual Welcoming Week activities; hosting community wide diversity events, creating community partnerships, designing and hosting civic engagement academies

***Connected, Safe and Healthy Communities:*** Promoting public safety, education about the law, and cultural awareness among service providers

***Equitable Access:*** ensuring access for limited English proficient residents, eliminating barriers to community services

***Education:*** building cradle to career opportunities for newcomers including childhood and adult education and ESL opportunities

#WelcomingAnchorage

On Facebook: [www.facebook.com/WelcomingAnchorage](http://www.facebook.com/WelcomingAnchorage)

On muni.org: [www.muni.org/departments/mayor/welcominganchorage](http://www.muni.org/departments/mayor/welcominganchorage)

Contact Welcoming Anchorage: [WelcomingAnchorage@muni.org](mailto:WelcomingAnchorage@muni.org)



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This annual report was prepared by the following members of the Ombudsman's Staff:

Darrel W. Hess, Municipal Ombudsman

Elizabeth A. Eisses, Deputy Ombudsman

May Ramirez-Xiong, Associate Ombudsman



Betsy, May, Darrel



A special thank you to the Municipal Reprographics Team, Ruth, Bob, Tiny and Brandon, for their professionalism and invaluable assistance.