

Chair Constant Report Archive: April 25- Dec 19, 2023

December 19, 2023

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

Good evening everybody and welcome. This is the last regular Assembly meeting of 2023, so I would like to wish everyone happy holidays and a happy new year. I hope everyone has a restful and joyous break over the next few weeks.

It's a really packed agenda tonight and there are lots of people here for different agenda items, so we'll do our best to keep on track and move efficiently through all of the items we have to get done tonight.

On that note, I want to point out that the Assembly's Code of Conduct is posted on the front doors and throughout the room. This is a business meeting and we are here to do the work of the city. I ask for all of your help in creating a climate of respect in the Chambers. We surely don't agree on all of the issues, but in the end, we are all neighbors and working to make our community a better place.

Year in Review

Last week, the Assembly conducted our annual review and began setting our workplan for the upcoming year. As we reflect on the past year, I want to thank all of the Members for your incredibly hard work. It is clear that each and every one of you care deeply about your community and are committed to making it a better place.

But we can't do this work alone. I also want to extend thanks to the staff in the administration, our community partners, and the public for supporting the work of the Assembly and helping us craft legislation, fund important city services, and hold our local government to account.

Finally, I want to thank the families of Assembly Members and the Mayor's team. You didn't sign up for public service, and yet you make great sacrifices of time and effort to support your loved ones in their work to represent our community.

Election Code Update and Election Observer Handbook Update

An important item of note tonight is the annual update to our election code in Title 28 and the election observer's handbook. This is something that happens every year and is an important step in the process to make Anchorage the best Vote at Home jurisdiction in the United States. We strive to review each election, take feedback from the public, and hear from experts so we can strengthen our elections more each year. This year it took on an especially important function because we had to run through a process to follow through on the Ombudsman's report of tampering in the 2023 election. This step concludes that process in preparation for the 2024 election

Eklutna River

A few weeks ago, we held a joint worksession with the Native Village of Eklutna, the first ever in the history of our government-to-government relations. I thank the Native Village of Eklutna and Eklutna, Inc. for their informative and compelling presentations on why full restoration of the Eklutna River is such an important goal. The proposal that is currently before us from the owner's group leaves just a mile stretch between the lake and river unconnected. That's not river restoration. We can't just stop short of the last mile. Our meeting with the owner's group was productive and I am hopeful that we can get to a place of agreement in the near future and bridge that gap.

December 5, 2023

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

Good evening everybody and welcome. I'm going to give my report and provide some time for a member of the delegation here from Houston, Texas to briefly speak to the community through the Chair's report.

Budget Vetoes

Later tonight, we'll take up budget vetoes on the agenda. There's been lots of back and forth about why and what, and I won't dig into the details right now, but suffice to say that will probably happen towards the middle of our meeting, depending on how efficiently we make our way through the consent agenda. It will either be just before or just after the dinner break.

Snow Removal

I'm glad to report that snow removal has become much more effective in the last week or two. The roads are getting cleared, there's still some ice that remains. The teams have been out full time and working really hard. I know that the conditions of our roads and snow removal continues to be of concern for a lot of people, I want to let folks know tomorrow, December 6th, from 12:40 p.m. to 2:10 pm in Room 155 at City Hall or streaming online, the Assembly's Enterprise and Utilities Committee will be holding a special meeting to debrief on the current status of snow removal. Mr. Mayor, I repeat my earlier offer that we stand by to help fund services as needed. I know there's an item on the agenda later tonight we'll be having a discussion about.

Eklutna River Restoration

Another big meeting happening this week is a joint work session between the Assembly and the Native Village of Eklutna Tribal Council this Thursday from 2 to 4 pm at City Hall. For many years, the Native Village of Eklutna and its partners have been working to restore the river.

We have an incredible opportunity to bring back a river fully to life that will be a true gem of our community. Not only is full restoration of the river the right thing to do to respect the vision of the people who've stewarded this land long before the municipality, and the dams that we put up, existed but it's also a huge economic potential with recreation and tourism opportunities in the area. Just imagine what it will be like when we've returned the fish to that stream and we have one of the most robust fisheries in the upper Cook Inlet right in our backyard.

Unfortunately, the owners group that controls the project doesn't quite share that vision and is pushing forward with a plan that restores about 11 of 12 miles of the river, but they don't go the last mile. I'm just hopeful that this work session will bring the parties closer together and make clear to the owners group how beneficial full restoration will be for our community. We're committed to the last mile.

HUD Funding for Housing and Homelessness

I had the fortune last week to be traveling to Washington DC to have conversation with our Congressional delegation about ongoing concerns about what I'm calling a funding crisis of homelessness services in our community. I had the unique opportunity to meet jointly with all of the staff of the whole delegation and we're getting on a single page

together, collectively, about the direction we're going to push. HUD has announced to us, after our resolution, after our letter, and Senator Sullivan has been working really hard to communicate the importance of this question to HUD leadership, that they have committed to publishing a new policy. It will require a public notice period nationally, so once we see the policy, and if we agree, we'll be working a statewide campaign to get Alaskans to communicate to HUD about why it's important that the services in Alaska be funded equitably with the rest of the country.

Visit from Houston Coalition for the Homeless

That said, this week our community is very fortunate to have a visit from the Houston Coalition for Homelessness. If you've been paying attention at all to the conversation in Anchorage, you've heard Houston, Texas has held up as a leading light in the country for developing a model that is proven to work, that gets people off the streets, based on permanent supportive housing with supports.

As you may have heard in recent years, Houston is a leader in solutions and, in fact, in the last two decades, they've lowered their homeless population by 64 percent, including a 17 percent reduction in 2022 alone. It has outperformed its neighbors in Texas and most of the country. They've done this through the work of the Coalition for Homeless coordinating 100 service providers to pull all in the same direction.

The exciting news is that Anchorage is following the same blueprint and has already laid much of the groundwork to see similar success. I look forward to learning more from Houston and I'm grateful for their visit. So now I would like to invite Mr. Marc Eichenbaum who is a special assistant to the Mayor of Houston to give us just a few minutes conversation with the Assembly and the broader community. So, welcome Mr. Eichenbaum.

*[Mr. Eichenbaum, City of Houston, Mayor's Office for Homelessness
Initiatives: www.houstontx.gov/homeless/]*

This week, our community is very lucky to have a visit from the Houston Coalition for the Homeless. As you may have heard, in recent years, Houston, Texas has become a leader in homelessness solutions. In just two decades, Houston lowered its homeless population by sixty-four percent, including a seventeen percent reduction in 2022. It has outperformed its neighbors in Texas and most of the country. They've done this through

the work of the Houston Coalition for the Homeless coordinating one hundred service providers to all pull in the same direction.

If you'd like to learn more, the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness is hosting a community conversation with the Houston visitors tomorrow from 6-7:30pm at the Marston Theatre next door. Space is limited, so you'll need to RSVP through the Coalition's website.

November 21, 2023

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

Good evening everybody and welcome.

Snow Removal

First, I want to address the issue that's on everybody's mind, the topic of conversation in every coffee shop, and every part of this town. Speaking on behalf of Vice Chair Zaletel and myself, and I imagine the entire Assembly, we share concerns over the effectiveness of how the plows out went over the last couple of weeks, and that the core public services were difficult to deliver, including public transit, and our schools, which were closed. The people of Anchorage deserve better from us as a government.

Snow removal has been a major concern for the Assembly for the past few years. We've made budget amendments to give the Administration more funding to work with, we've held worksessions to get to the bottom of staffing and logistics issues, and we offer support in any way needed. And to that end, we're going to continue to do so.

Snow removal and road safety will continue to be top-of-mind as the Assembly considers the 2024 budget and considers what is needed to bolster snow removal in the future. Mayor Bronson, I hope you will support these efforts.

I want to stress that this is not, in any way, a reflection on the great municipal staff who have been putting in 18- and 20-hour days to get through all the neighborhoods as many times as needed. And I can tell you, firsthand, that when I receive a call from constituents, and they have concerns about a specific property, especially when people

are struggling with mobility issues, that our Municipal workers get out there within a day. We're trying to support you and get you the resources you need to do your jobs.

Warning on Roof Snow Loads

Next, I would say that, on that topic, the Building Official yesterday issued a warning about roof snow loads. Last year we had a series of roof collapses because of heavy snow loads. I want to make sure anybody who has one of these flat roof truss structures on one of their buildings, whether it's residential or commercial, make sure you're out there taking the snow off of it because the heavy wet snow that we've had is dangerous. This warning applies mostly to commercial buildings constructed prior to 1990, carports, and roofs subject to ice downing. But I encourage everybody to review the guidance. You'll find it on www.muni.org the [Development Services](#) website, to make sure that you're able to take care of the safety of the facilities, and the buildings that you live and work in.

ASD Closures

ASD closures were a real challenge this week. I want to stand in solidarity with the school district, their decision to keep the schools closed when they couldn't get students safely to school. I had the misfortune to witness a couple of school buses stuck, high-bermed on snow, and that is not a good condition. We have to do better. It's difficult on our kids and our communities. It's difficult on our parents. It's bad for the economy. We've heard too many stories of pedestrians who were forced to walk in the middle of streets and cars getting damaged from driving on our roads. Forcing kids into dangerous situations. It's easy to second guess the school district's decisions, but they made a decision that prioritized safety and I want them to know, I hear you and I support you.

Dwindling State Funding

My final words on the topic of snow removal, it's important that we get what we pay for. For years, the state budget has not kept pace with our needs as a community, and we're seeing clear results in the underspending that's coming into our community. In addition to not keeping up with competitive wages, the state has let their equipment go into decline and they simply are not equipped to meet the very basic needs, public safety responsibilities, to keep our roads clear and safe.

This further shifts the burden to the municipality and property taxpayers. I hope that what we've seen in the past few weeks empowers our state legislators to take action

when they meet in a few months to ensure that the state budget is sufficient to provide the resources necessary to ensure that the state roads and the municipality of Anchorage are cleared by the state.

The Municipality of Anchorage took resources off its neighborhood streets to clear the state's roads. While it's a good demonstration of working collaboratively with the state, the state is the deep pockets and, at this point, we need the state to do their job so that we can do ours.

Budget

Moving on to the Budget, tonight is the final public hearing and the night we take action on the 2024 municipal budget. I thank those of you who are here to testify – we'll hold that public hearing around 7pm and will likely vote on the budget at the conclusion of that hearing. It's been said many times, but the budget is a reflection of our city's values. If you want to see your roads plowed effectively and on time, then a balanced and realistic budget should be of concern to you. To follow along with the budget process and learn more, go to www.muni.org/assembly and click on the Budget and Taxes button at the top of the page. We'll be posting the documents that we review tonight on that page.

Conclusion

Finally, I would take a moment of privilege to speak to the people of the city of Wrangell, who've lost members of their community in a landslide. Alaska is, they say, the biggest small town in America. It's a big state, but we're all connected. Our thoughts are with you this week.

And also, happy Thanksgiving to everybody, however you celebrate or mark it.

November 7, 2023

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

Good evening everybody and welcome.

Housing Action Week

Last week was Housing Action Week, a week-long initiative to get our community talking about housing, because our housing shortage crisis is an everyone problem. The

cynics in the community say “oh, one more convening to talk about housing, where's the action?” Well, I think that this was an action-oriented event. It was a week-long initiative to get our community talking about housing because the housing shortage crisis is really an everyone problem.

After a full week of programs by community organizations, including the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, ACLU of Alaska, Alaska State Home Builders Association and NeighborWorks Alaska, the Assembly hosted the Community Housing Action Summit on Friday.

We welcomed neighbors, industry experts, municipal staff and special guest Charles Marohn for presentations on local market data, national best practices, and the Assembly's draft Housing Strategic Plan. The event was livestreamed on YouTube, and event materials, including the Draft Housing Strategic Plan, can be found at: www.AnchorageHousingAction.org.

During ACDA's presentation at the Housing Action Summit, Executive Director Mike Robbins reviewed a new report on incentives for market-rate attainable housing, which reviewed four case studies of western mountain cities that measurably resolved their housing shortage problems. The message is clear: the solution to our housing crisis isn't one big change, but a multitude of small changes in both policies and processes.

That means we're in it for the long haul. We've got lots of work ahead, and we can start by doing small things now. Start by reading the draft housing strategic plan, and provide comments to the Anchorage Assembly via email by Dec. 4.

I want to extend a sincere thank you to Members Felix Rivera and Anna Brawley for hosting the Friday Summit. To everyone who participated in Housing Action Week events, and to community partners who joined in the conversation, thank you. Let's keep talking—visit www.AnchorageHousingAction.org for more.

Funding for Housing

I'm glad to report that I'm going to be in D.C. at the end of the month and have been fortunate enough to schedule a joint meeting with members of our congressional delegation to continue the conversation about HUD funding and how we can address the inequity of funding, because in a lot of ways, the challenges we face are challenges of limited and unfair funding in addressing the issues relating to homelessness. The

local government cannot afford to be the only funder of the solutions we need in this town, because we are a regional and a national center for community in America and we need to have outside support.

Emergency Cold Weather Shelter Plan

I want to respond to a statement made to the media by the mayor recently that demonstrates, I think, one of the core challenges that we faced over the last, some, 20 months. He said, "I don't come up with these plans, I just set the policy." I just set the policy. I want the community to understand that this legislative body, the Assembly is actually the policy making body of the municipality, we set the policy, and the administration's job is to implement the policy. And so, we appear to have been struggling over who it is that sets the policy for the city, and I think at some point we will come together and be able to implement a plan that is effective. When everybody recognizes that, we as a community, have a policy of distributed resources of homeless services across the community in a way that does not create in one part of town a single location, that the neighbors in that part of town have to bear the burden for everyone else from across the city and the state.

The Assembly is happy to continue trying to work with the administration, and another thing that was said in the media was that the Assembly said to wait on implementing the plan. The Assembly never said wait on implementing the plan. What the Assembly said was let's wait to pass judgment on the effectiveness of the plan until it's been implemented so that we can course correct and fulfill the needs that are demonstrated that aren't fulfilled as we implement the plan. So it is, I believe, the hope of the Assembly that the administration, through the Health Department, will continue working hard to get all of those shelter beds full, to help us cross reference that list of individuals who are in need of shelter, and then set up the shelter services that we need to meet the need and continue the most important work, which is moving people from the streets and shelters into housing.

This fall, the Health Department presented a plan for emergency shelter that includes non-congregate shelter and congregate shelter at the 56th Avenue facility. The Assembly has appropriated the funds to make that possible, and if the plan is falling short and needs additional elements, whether that includes warming locations, or additional locations, we need to hear from the administration on their plan to implement the policy of the Assembly in this municipality. We will find the funds to make it possible.

Throughout the process, we've been doing our best to work with the administration, and I want to thank, again, the Health Department for their hard work and standing up the system, because it's barely two to three weeks old and we still have, what, 60 to 90 people in a shelter, the 56th Avenue shelter, that has capacity for up to 150. So, we're not up to speed there yet. But what we heard from the Mayor is that people don't want to be in congregate shelter. And so, we have to carefully consider how we set up shelters so that people will actually use it, because, for the last 25 years, we have seen people would rather camp out than be in a big shelter setting.

With that said, I'm really glad for the work that's happened. We are starting to move people. I look forward to when we get to full at that shelter and start to work on the process of opening, whatever the next steps are, as I have committed, I'll work with this Assembly to find the funds to operate the services that need to be in place to make sure that when people are struggling and suffering outside, they have a place to come in and get warm and be safe and engage on the path to housed.

Budget

Moving on to the Budget, tonight is the second and final public hearing for the 2024 municipal budget and I thank those of you who are here tonight to testify. We'll hold that public hearing around 8pm tonight. There will be a worksession this Thursday, November 9th to discuss potential budget amendments by members, and the Assembly will take up deliberations and likely vote on the budget at the November 21st Assembly meeting. You can learn more about the process at www.muni.org/assembly.

Veteran's Day

This week is Veteran's Day and we have a recognition for that later on the agenda, but in the meantime I want to thank all of the Veterans in our community for your service.

Vic Fischer Memorial

We acknowledge the passing of Vic Fischer at last week's meeting and I wanted to follow up and let people know that his friends and family are holding a memorial on Sunday November 12th at 4pm at the Hotel Captain Cook.

October 24, 2023

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

Good evening everybody and welcome. This weekend wrapped up the Alaska Federations of Natives annual convention and the Elders and Youth conference. It's the largest gathering in the country of Alaska Native and Native American people, and if you didn't have an opportunity to visit, I'm sorry for you because it was truly one of the most amazing events you can get to in Alaska. In addition to bringing a lot of energy and excitement to our downtown, the events also infuse millions of dollars into our Anchorage economy. I want to reiterate my thanks to the Alaska Federation of Natives for providing Anchorage with this amazing opportunity to host again.

In Memoriam

Next, a significant event in Alaska and American history occurred. Before I begin, I want to take a moment to recognize the passing of Vic Fischer this weekend. In addition to being a critical influence on the shape of Alaska politics and governance, he was truly a great man. He was kind and thoughtful and while he always stood up for what he believed in, he never engaged in personal attacks on those who thought differently. For those of you who don't know, he was the last living delegate to the Alaska constitutional convention, which happened in 1955. My condolences to Jane Angvik, who served on this body, and Vic's four children, and all of his friends and family who are mourning his loss.

Emergency Cold Weather Shelter Plan

Over the past week, the Anchorage Health Department and its partners have been working hard to help people living in camps move into safe housing for the winter. Thanks to the hard work of Health Department staff and leadership from Housing & Homelessness Committee Chair Mr. Rivera, our city has a plan for providing emergency cold weather shelter before winter arrives.

I want to underscore how transformational it is for our community that we are finally establishing shelter opportunities that are congregate and non-congregate that are going to prevent warehousing people in mass shelters for the first time in years.

That is why it has been pretty disappointing to listen to the rhetoric coming from the Administration disparaging the plan and trying to move us back to a conversation of warehousing 1,000 people in a tent. Our community is in the effort of embarking on a new type of shelter plan, and this plan has not been fully implemented and yet we're here being driven to make changes to it before it's even had a chance to get stood up. It

feels like there is some gaslighting happening to the community in order to doom these efforts to failure.

We have heard the reports from ADN that there are 960 people signed up on a list who are seeking shelter. We do know that at least 120 of those individuals are currently sheltered, but would prefer to be in a hotel room. So, while we try to figure out what the accurate numbers are, I think there is great wisdom in letting the system be stood up and taking stock of the number of people who are unsheltered and finding a solution to meet their needs so we can fully implement the plan that we've been working on for so long.

We heard the report tonight from the Mayor Bronson's Chief of Staff that the mayor is continuing to argue that a one-thousand-person tent is the way to go. I want to speak a little bit to the history of this conversation. Back in June 2021, the Mayor came forward with a proposal to build a 1,000-person tent in East Anchorage. We went through a facilitation process between Mayor Bronson's team and members of the Assembly and in that process, the cost of the tent escalated to over \$25 million before magically starting to decrease based on calculations made by the Administration.

However, instead of bringing a comprehensive plan to the Assembly that included the budget and all costs, a contract was offered to a third-party contractor that had no ceiling to build as much as needed, at any expense, to achieve the mayor's goal of a thousand-person tent. The group spent hundreds of hours collaborating on that project and the Mayor never once stepped foot into the room to join the work. The final report from that project stated that "the Administration provided written responses to the Assembly's questions, but no formal plan." That's simply the reality. Stating that you want to build a tent is not a plan. The Mayor is supposed to be the expert in what the municipality's response should be to the homelessness services needed for emergency cold weather services and he continues to fail at bringing a feasible plan forward.

I'll end where I began. We should let the services be stood up and then we should find additional shelter as needed according to the plan. I again thank the Administration staff who've been working to create and stand up a plan, because it's not easy and it's pretty thankless, but it is working and you can see that there are fewer people out on the streets right now and we just need to continue that work.

Budget

Tonight is the first public hearing for the 2024 municipal budget and I thank those of you who are here tonight to testify. A second public hearing will be held on November 7th. The municipal budget affects everyone – from the number of books on the shelves at libraries and playgrounds in our parks, 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 impacted by the municipal budget. There will be a worksession on November 9th to discuss potential budget amendments, and the Assembly will take up deliberations and likely vote on the budget at the November 21st Assembly meeting. You can learn more about the process at muni.org/assembly.

Housing Action Week

I want to give a final reminder that next week is Housing Action Week, culminating in the Community Housing Action Summit on Friday, November 3 at the UAA Student Union.

Housing Action Week brings together community organizations, policy makers and most importantly, our neighbors in a wide-reaching conversation about housing policy in Anchorage. I encourage everyone to participate in Housing Action Week. From the Make It Monday luncheon with the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce to Future Cities Family Fun at the Mountain View Library, and Nerd Nite at 49th State Brewing, there's something for everyone! Learn more about Housing Action Week and browse events at AnchorageHousingAction.org

October 10, 2023

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

Good evening everybody and welcome. I'd like to recognize that yesterday was Indigenous People's Day and the first time the Municipality officially closed non-essential services to commemorate the holiday. In recognition and in celebration, I'm proud to present the digital artwork displayed today, commissioned from a local indigenous artist, Qaadax.

Indigenous Peoples' Day



“Dghelishla and Ch’chihi Ken (Mount Susitna)” by Qadaġ

Dghelishla, “little mountain” is the Dena’ina name for “Mt. Susitna” and south of the mountain is called “Ch’chihi Ken,” or “ridge where we cry.”

And next week, we will welcome the Alaska Federation of Natives convention, an event that brings a lot of energy to our city and we are grateful for the opportunity to host it.

Eklutna River Restoration Project

So this is an important time to talk about the Eklutna River. The Anchorage Assembly has been working for many years with the Native Village of Eklutna and other partners on the restoration of the Eklutna River. 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 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.

Meeting on Legislative Priorities

As leadership of the Assembly Legislative Committee, last week, Member Brawley and I met with the Anchorage Caucus of the legislature to update them on the Assembly's work and present our initial ideas for Anchorage's legislative priorities in 2024.

While the Municipality submits a program of priorities to our Anchorage legislators every year, this year, we are taking proactive, collaborative steps to bring these priorities to life. We look forward to working closely with the Anchorage Caucus to make strategic local investments during the 2024 session. I would like to thank Senator Kaufman and Representative Mears, for investing your time and energy in this partnership.

The Budget

Now, the budget. This week, the ADN Editorial Board decided to take me to task for calling the Mayor's budget a fantasy. I will offer just a couple of areas where the budget is still a fantasy:

- The Administration has presented to us a fact that they need, in 2024, to update SAP program to ensure our system continues to work with a \$3 million price tag. They knew this months ago, and yet it's not in the budget. So there's a \$3 million expense coming, but it's not accounted for.
- There was also a \$2.5 million legal settlement for a contract that was illegally authorized by the Administration. It was, on a temporary basis, paid out of construction funds intended to be used for addressing concerns related to homelessness this year. Instead, they were spent on a settlement. That settlement and its appropriation is actually not in the budget for 2024.

Those are just two examples. The Anchorage Daily News cited the fact that the Administration has been successful at overcoming issues related to not enough staff at the Municipality by outsourcing contracts. We learned at the last meeting that they knew the cost of the sleep-off center has tripled, and yet it's not in the budget. So a \$1

million, or so, is now a \$3 million expense, or so, but it's not all accounted for in the budget.

Like fantasy football versus actual NFL football, we have a budget process that is about to begin.

It's fitting to be looking towards 2024, as today's meeting is a major milestone for the 2024 budget cycle; items 10.G.3 through 10.G.6 represent the Mayor's proposed budget for next year.

Before we take action on the budget during our November 21 Regular Meeting, the Assembly will hold three worksessions. Our first is this Friday, October 13 from 11AM – 4PM, followed by another on Friday, October 27 and another on Thursday, November 9. When we are done, our budget will be a reflection of our values, so over the next few weeks, the Assembly will work to engage the public and set a budget for next year that reflects those values. There will be two public hearings on October 24 and November 7, and we welcome public comments submitted in writing online at www.muni.org/assembly.

Thank you to the Co-Chairs of the Budget & Finance Committee, Members Brawley and Zaletel, for lighting our way through this process. In the meantime, there is still much work to be done before the end of the year.

Mayor's Recent Comments on Shelter

You'll note that there have been items laid on the table

Next week, the Emergency Cold Weather Shelter plan for this winter will come into effect, providing housing, non-congregate shelter and services to roughly 500 people experiencing homelessness.

Health Department staff presented on their plan to provide emergency cold weather shelter during the 2023-2024 winter season late last month, with the intent to move clients from the encampment at 3rd & Ingra first, followed by camp abatement at Chanshtnu, Cuddy and Davis Parks.

The Administration has requested a special meeting this Thursday for the Assembly to take up the contracts for our partners joining in this year's plan.

Thanks to the hard work of Health Department staff and leadership from Housing & Homelessness Committee Chair Felix Rivera, our city has a plan for providing emergency cold weather shelter before winter arrives, for the first time in a long time.

The truth is, we are coming together on solutions that work for Anchorage: providing non-congregate shelter with services and supports, sheltering small groups in congregate settings when appropriate, and investing in housing first. That doesn't reflect the impact of rising interest rates in the last few months.

Housing Action Week

Anchorage's housing shortage crisis is an everyone problem. Last year, rents in Alaska jumped by more than 7% on average, the highest increase in more than a decade. The median single family home listing price in Anchorage rose 43% in only three years from \$311,000 in January 2020 to \$446,000 in May 2023, putting home ownership further out of reach.

There is a supply and demand imbalance; and we don't have enough housing options for everyone who wants to live here. Today, Assembly Leadership announced the event calendar for Housing Action Week, culminating in the Community Housing Action Summit on Friday, November 3 at the UAA Student Union.

Housing Action Week brings together community organizations, policy makers and most importantly, our neighbors in a wide-reaching conversation about housing policy in Anchorage. I encourage everyone to participate in Housing Action Week. From the Make It Monday luncheon with the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce to Future Cities Family Fun at the Mountain View Library, there's something for everyone! Learn more about Housing Action Week and browse events at **AnchorageHousingAction.org**.

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.

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 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.