

Chair Constant Report Archive: 2024

December 17, 2024

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

Chair Constant was out of town for the meeting and Vice Chair Zaletel provided the following remarks.

Good evening everyone and welcome to our regular business meeting. Chair Constant is out of town this evening, so I am chairing the meeting tonight and Member Brawley will serve as Vice Chair.

Passing of MOA Employee

As the Mayor mentioned, this week we were saddened to hear of the loss of one of our own – Anchorage Health Department employee Lauren Cameron. She was well respected for her leadership in the Women, Infants, and Children program and will be greatly missed by all who knew her and benefited from her work. My condolences go to her partner, family and colleagues. This is a very difficult time for you and my heart goes out to you.

Project Anchorage

Now, turning to the business of the meeting, tonight we are taking up legislation for the Project Anchorage sales tax. Since this is a complex issue with many moving parts, I want to share some procedural information so members of the audience can better follow along. First, I recommend visiting the Assembly's Project Anchorage webpage at muni.org/ProjectAnchorage for project history and documents.

For background, AO 2024-105, an ordinance proposing a sales tax, was first introduced in October by Members Sulte and Rivera, and a draft substitute, or S-version, of that ordinance was shared by the sponsors at a worksession on December 6. I highly recommend that everyone watch the recordings of the two worksessions held on the Project Anchorage sales tax on December 6, as they provide some important background and discussion points.

Since those worksessions, the sponsors have finalized their S-version and several other members have put forward alternative S-versions, so there is now one original and five S-versions of AO 2024-105 that are on the agenda for tonight. As we move forward, it is conceivable that other S-versions are introduced, and it is very likely that changes will be made to the existing S-versions. To keep up with the changes, we'll give the S-version a new name. So, for instance, if a change is made to the S-1 version, it will then become AO 2024-105 (S-1-A).

We understand that this makes it difficult for the public to follow along, so our Legislative Services staff will keep muni.org/ProjectAnchorage up to date with the different versions

and sponsor statements to track the changes. Additionally, if you have already provided testimony on the original version, you will be allowed to testify again, as long as you keep your comments limited to the changes in the new versions.

I ask the public for your patience and understanding with the complexity of this process. This is a very consequential piece of legislation for our community with long-lasting effects, and Assembly Members are taking very seriously their role to hear public input and incorporate that feedback into the legislation.

Energy Retreat

Moving beyond Project Anchorage, I want to highlight the Assembly's Energy Retreat that was held a few weeks ago. The Assembly heard from an incredible range of experts on energy and infrastructure, including many talented municipal employees. The day was eye-opening and inspiring and certainly gave everyone in the room plenty of ideas for actions we can take to prepare the Municipality for the looming Cook Inlet gas shortage. If you missed the retreat, the video recordings and meeting materials can be found on the [Assembly's website](#) under the news items.

Year in Review

Next, since tonight is the last meeting of the year, I wanted to reflect a bit on the Assembly's work in 2024. We move at such a fast pace, and there's always something new demanding our attention, so we don't always take time to consider our accomplishments and see how our actions at each of the 24 regular meetings of the year add up to something bigger. This year we saw major advances in each of the Assembly's five priority areas:

- In Housing Action, we passed a slate of legislation aimed at cutting red tape to make it easier to build housing, and we also directed funding to reduce hurdles to rehab old buildings and reclaim abandoned buildings for housing.
- In Supporting the Municipal Workforce, we funded and supported the delivery of an annual employee survey (hopefully the first of many to come) and funded 280,000 dollars in new programs that benefit municipal employees and increase retention.
- For the Port Modernization, we determined design concepts for both terminals and developed a funding pathway for Terminal One construction by approving a tariff surcharge increase to supplement the Municipality's 500 million in grant funding.
- In our Fully Functional Municipal Services priority, we enhanced the security and efficiency of the ballot return process with our Title 28 Elections update and we funded the first year of an online bidding system for MOA contractors.
- And finally, in our Public Health, Safety and Quality of Life priority, we saw achievement of a long-time Assembly goal when we made the Mobile Crisis Team permanent in code and got to 24-7 funding for operations. We also made progress on developing options to restore the Eklutna River, including a landmark joint action with Native Village of Eklutna that went straight to the

Governor's Office. Out of everything we've accomplished this year, our work with NVE brings me the most pride.

The Assembly is in the process of developing a full list of our 2024 accomplishments and setting our 2025 priorities. That work will take place at our January Rules Committee and a 2025 workplan should be on the agenda for approval next February.

Thanks

Of course, I would be remiss to celebrate the Assembly's accomplishments without acknowledging all of the people who contribute toward achieving these goals. From the department directors who brief us at committee meetings and worksessions, to the municipal staff who help us research and create the legislation and budgets, to the community partners who bring us new ideas and innovative solutions, and the members of the public who hold us accountable by attending our meetings and sharing unique perspectives in testimony and emails – you are all critical to the Assembly's work.

We also owe a big thanks to the Mayor and her team. It's been great to have you rejoin the municipal team Madame Mayor and I thank you for your vision and leadership in advancing our shared goals to make our community an even better place.

And behind the scenes, I want to thank all of the municipal employees who keep our city running, keep us safe, and improve our quality of life through your service to our community.

Last, but not least, I want to thank the Assembly's staff team – the Municipal Clerk's Office, Assembly Counsel, Legislative Services and the Ombudsman's Office. We can't do what we do up here without you and I know all of the Members are grateful for your help.

I hope everyone enjoys this holiday break between Assembly meetings and I look forward to a productive and collaborative 2025!

December 3, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to our regular business meeting.

Thanksgiving

I hope everyone enjoyed their Thanksgiving holiday, especially our municipal workers. Municipal staff work very hard to make our community a better place and make sure that essential services are delivered each and every day. I hope you each got some nice time with your families and friends and enjoyed a small break. And if you had to work on those days, we're grateful to you for your support of the municipality.

Port Modernization

My colleagues Vice Chair Zaletel and Member Johnson participated in an event a few weeks ago to celebrate the recent milestone of the Port Modernization Program. I'm sure they'll both have details to share, but I want to underscore how important the Port is for our community and how momentous it is that we've reached these milestones.

When the Assembly took up the Port as a priority many years ago, it was very messy. We didn't have a plan, we didn't know how much it would cost, and we couldn't get the different stakeholders into agreement on what was needed. Over the course of four mayoral administrations, the Assembly has been a steady force in ensuring the project continues to move forward upon the lines that we've agreed upon. Fast forward to today and we have plans and designs, we now have a Petroleum and Cement Terminal and a new administration building, we have over 500 million dollars in grants, and we have strong collaboration and agreement among stakeholders, and we're waiting for a 367 million dollar decision in the Court of Appeals. There is still a lot of work to be done, but we can see a path forward now and the future of the Port has never looked brighter.

Energy Retreat

Also, this Thursday the Assembly will be having a retreat to dig deeper into the issues of energy and infrastructure in the region. Every year or so, the Assembly holds a retreat to take time out of our typical fast pace to dive deeper into a particular topic and make room for dialog and collaboration with community partners.

This year, we wanted to make time for an emerging priority that is of extreme interest to our community and sure to be at the forefront of Assembly work in the coming years, and that is Anchorage's energy future. In recent years, we've been hearing more about the Cook Inlet gas shortage and how it will impact the cost and availability of energy in our community. And when energy costs go up, every cost goes up. At the retreat, the Assembly will hear from experts on the current state of the issue, as well as from municipal staff leaders on how the municipality is tackling this issue at home. It will be a great opportunity to learn how we can position the Municipality to take advantage of opportunities and be prepared for the challenges ahead. I have some optimism on the resources and people who are starting to tackle this issue on behalf of the municipality.

November 19, 2024

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

National League of Cities Conference

Last week a few of us attended the National League of Cities Conference in Tampa, Florida. The National League of Cities celebrates its 100th anniversary this year and works in partnership with cities and municipalities across the country to strengthen local leadership, drive innovation, and influence federal policies that impact us locally.

Anchorage has been a member since 1960 and has benefited from the organization's research, technical expertise, advocacy and opportunities to learn from other local governments. In fact, the ARPA funds the Municipality got from the federal government came to local governments because of the input of the National League of Cities.

Budget Season

Tonight, is the final action on the 2025 Municipal Budget with Items 11.C thru 11.I. Crafting a balanced budget that meets the diverse needs of our community is no simple task, especially in this era of decreasing state funds.

Despite receiving less funding from the state than in the past, the Municipality still needs to keep the lights on, the roads maintained, the libraries and public health clinic open, and the parks clean. We need to provide public safety during our times of need, and we also need to keep our economy running through speedy processing of development permits and business licenses.

Knowing how tight our municipal resources are stretched, I want to thank everyone who has worked to develop this budget, especially OMB Director Ona Brause and the Assembly's Finance Committee Chairs Meg Zaletel and Anna Brawley. I also want to thank all of the other staff and members who have worked so tirelessly on the budget, as well as members of the public who have testified and submitted comments. That careful review by staff and the feedback from the public are essential for crafting a responsible budget.

It has been a much more collaborative, transparent process this year and I look forward to our debate and vote on budget items later tonight.

Legislative Program

In light of the decreased state funding that I mentioned earlier, it's good to see the Assembly and Administration work together with the Anchorage delegation of the legislature to put together a strong legislative program for the 2025 session.

The draft program can be found in your meeting documents under item 10.B.5., although it will be postponed to the meeting of December 3rd, so that we have time to make final adjustments at a worksession this Friday. It is very important for Anchorage to present a united front and be strategic in our requests to the state legislature so that we can begin to build back more of that state support that we helped our city develop over our history.

#Thankorage

Finally, as we near the Thanksgiving season, I want to highlight the Assembly's "thankorage" gratitude project on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Threads. It's spelled T-h-a-n-k-o-r-a-g-e.

The social media project features neighbors from across the Municipality recognized by the Assembly through resolutions or awards. I encourage you to follow us on your platform of choice and meet the people who make Anchorage vibrant.

November 6, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to our business meeting.

Budget Season

Tonight, we'll hold our second public hearings on the 2025 Municipal Budget: Items 14.A thru 14.G. Public participation in this process is vital. If you're here to testify on the budget—and I hope you are—please know we'll do our best to open the public hearings around 7:30pm.

After tonight, the next step in the budget process is a worksession this Friday from 10-12pm at City Hall, Suite 155, to review proposed budget revisions and tax levies, and if all goes according to schedule, we'll take up the budget for approval at the November 19th meeting.

More information on the budget is available on the Assembly's Budget and Taxes page at www.muni.org/assembly.

Housing Action

For the past several years, it's been a top Assembly priority to spur new housing development, and we made an even stronger commitment to that priority last year with the passage of our Housing Action Plan. In the year since, the Assembly eliminated single-family-only zoning, removed barriers to small multifamily housing, and established requirements for reporting short-term rental data. We've also done considerable work to engage community members and partners in discussions and work collaboratively to develop new and innovative solutions.

You may have noticed that there are several new housing proposals working their way through the Assembly process this fall and winter. I encourage you to go to the [Assembly's Housing Focus webpage](#) in our Priorities section to learn more about these proposals and get involved.

With the news last week that the average single-family home price in Anchorage jumped to \$524,000 this fall, we cannot afford to take our eyes off this goal. We cannot have a vibrant economy where workers thrive, young people have opportunities to grow, and elders have a comfortable place to age if we do not figure out this housing shortage crisis.

So, I want to applaud all of the Assembly Members, municipal staff, community councils, homebuilders and community partners who are working hard to come together and develop solutions. Keep up the good work.

ARPA Investments

Sometimes we dwell on what's wrong with our city without taking the time to celebrate all of the good things, so I wanted to bring everyone's attention to something positive that we can be proud of.

It's been two years since the Assembly invested 51 million dollars in federal relief funding into our community, and across the city, from Chugiak to Girdwood, we are seeing the positive results of those investments. The COVID relief money helped us get through the pandemic and it also gave us once-in-a-lifetime projects that will improve our quality of life for generations to come. We often talk about the Project 80s investments, but I think the ARPA projects will have an even greater impact on our community.

It's been exciting to see a lot of the projects completed this summer and fall.

The Chugach Mountain Bikers will soon complete the Coastal Trail Northern Extension in Chugiak, Providence opened (cut-une cunk-ah) Q'et'en Qenq'a for ages 55 and older experiencing homelessness with 45 permanent supportive housing units and 6 recuperative care units, and Cook Inlet Housing Authority opened the second phase of Ch'bala Corners II with affordable housing.

Just this week, the Municipality tore down an abandoned building in Mountain View to enable construction to begin on the new baseball facility in Lions Park, and the Alaska Black Caucus will hold a ribbon cutting for the new Equity Center. Construction on the Little Bears Daycare Center in Girdwood will begin next spring.

All of these projects received major investments from ARPA funds and probably would not have been possible otherwise. You can learn more at www.muni.org/recovery.

October 22, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to our business meeting.

AFN

I also want to note we had AFN in town this week. It's very exciting to see people come from all over Alaska, from other parts of the country and some from around the world to be part of what is perhaps the most robust native gathering in the world.

The largest representative gathering of native peoples in the United States, it's an honor for Anchorage to welcome the Convention and bear witness to the inspiring work of the Federation to amplify Alaska Native voices in rooms where decisions are made.

General Election

I'd also note that the November 5 General Election is underway nationally and in the State of Alaska. Early voting is open, and the wave of voters turning out to our regional Elections Office and City Hall to cast their ballots has the civic heart of Downtown buzzing.

As one of two early voting locations, the polling location on the first floor of City Hall is open Monday through Friday starting this week through Monday, November 4. This is very important—the City Hall polling location will not be open on Election Day.

Make plans for how to cast your vote, whether it's at City Hall or 2525 Gambell Street—our regional Election Center.

Similarly, this body will not convene on Election Day during our regular Tuesday meeting time. Our next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 6—a rare Wednesday meeting—here in the Assembly Chambers.

You can learn more about the November 5 General Election and find polling locations at elections.alaska.gov. Get out and vote!

Budget Season

Election season rides alongside the municipal budget season, which means this is a busy time of year and, at the end of it all, our values are reflected in all levels of government.

Tonight, we'll hold our first public hearings on the 2025 Municipal Budget: Items 14.A thru 14.G. Public participation in this process is vital. If you're here to testify on the budget—and I hope you are—please know we'll do our best to open the public hearings around 8PM.

For those of you catching up with the process, it began two weeks ago when the Administration submitted the Mayor's proposed 2025 General Government operating and capital budgets and we held a very long and productive worksession to understand their vision.

We have another worksession coming up this Friday at 11am at City Hall, Suite 155, followed by the second public hearings at our November 6 meeting.

The schedule of worksessions and public hearings, along with more resources, are available on the Assembly's Budget and Taxes page at www.muni.org/assembly.

Youth Member

Finally, I'd like to welcome Mika Bell, who is serving during tonight's meeting as Youth Representative. Mika, welcome back. We welcome your questions and your contributions to the meeting—thank you for being here.

As a reminder, this academic year, three bright young people are serving as the Assembly Youth Member on rotation. The other two youth representatives are Kynnedi Grady and Bruno Bookman. You can learn more about the youth representatives on our website: www.muni.org/assembly.

October 8, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to our business meeting.

Eklutna River Restoration

Last week, the Dunleavy Administration released their decision on the Final Fish and Wildlife Plan for the Eklutna River restoration and I am cautiously optimistic about the results, though there are lots of details that have to be sorted through. Unfortunately, the decision accepts the minority owners' Fish and Wildlife Plan that puts forward a portal valve option that leaves the last mile unwatered and leaves fifteen miles above the lake as unhealthy habitat, and really fails to meet the terms of the 1991 Agreement.

The good news in all of this is that the decision grants creates the requirement for further study of the pumped storage hydro concept and a path to achieving it, which has the prospect of allowing for fish passage for the whole length of the river, and also fifteen miles above the lake, while also protecting our drinking water and potentially increasing energy production and storage in the region. In the decision, the Dunleavy Administration requires the Minority Owners to enter good faith negotiations with the Municipality to move forward on the study of pumped storage hydro and other alternatives, and I sincerely hope that the Minority Owners will work collaboratively with the Municipality in pursuing this interesting option.

Non-Congregate Shelter

I would like to note that will likely have a special meeting next Tuesday during the lunch hour to address concerns relating to non-congregate shelter. We won't be seeing a proposal tonight because there are a number of questions about the potential winning bidder on the proposal.

Demboski Settlement

Also tonight, there was a motion to reconsider made on the question of the settlement with Amy Demboski and her legal claims, and because that motion was made in a timely manner, we will be taking up that question at the end of the consent agenda – the

question being the right to reconsider the previous vote. If the motion passes, we will enter into executive session tonight over the dinner break to have a more full discussion on the one we previously held.

Fire Prevention Month

Also, this is Fire Prevention Week across the country, so I want to shout out to our fire safety professionals who are out there making a difference, and to everyone in their personal lives who are working to make things safer – changing the batteries on their smoke alarms and making sure there is a perimeter around their house in case a fire comes. I'm looking forward to see the work of the fire prevention team at the Fire Department as they explore wildfire hazards with a state grant, and also urban fire challenges, especially as they relate to deteriorating properties.

Budget Season

Next, we are in the budget season and the Mayor and OMB Director released their draft budget last week, so the Assembly will be busy this month diving into the details of every department and every utility and enterprise. Between now and late November, there are several opportunities for the public to learn more and get engaged, starting with the first worksession on the budget – this Friday at 11am at City Hall, Suite 155. The schedule of worksessions and public hearings, along with more resources, are available on the [Assembly's Budget and Taxes page](#).

City Nerd Nite

The next City Nerd Nite is on Healthy Soils. Whether you're into turning garbage into gardens, boosting urban farms, or keeping our food system rooted in sustainability, we hope to see Thursday, October 17 at King St. Brewing Company. You can learn more at www.muni.org/assembly.

Youth Member

Finally, I'd like to welcome Kynnedi Grady, who is joining us tonight for their first meeting as the Youth Representative. Ms. Grady, since this is your first meeting, feel free to ask questions along the way if you need to. This academic year, three bright young people are serving as the Assembly Youth Member on rotation. The other two youth representatives are Mika Bell and Bruno Bookman.

September 24, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to our regular business meeting.

Budget Season

We continue to move through the municipal budget process and there have been some good conversations with the Administration and departments on the Municipality's

funding needs for the upcoming year. The Mayor and OMB Director will release their draft budget next Wednesday, October 2 and I'm sure I can speak for all Assembly Members when I say that we're looking forward to diving into the details.

I say that a bit tongue in cheek, because I know that a giant budget binder can seem boring to some people, but I really encourage the community to get involved in the budget process, because this is where the public can really have its voice heard. As I've mentioned many times before, the budget is a reflection of our community's values and if you want to see better snow plowing, more services or less services, this is the time to speak up. There are many opportunities for the public to learn more and get engaged and you can get up to speed by checking out the Assembly's Budget and Taxes resources at www.muni.org/assembly.

Public Safety

I want to thank the Mayor for her recent announcement on her public safety program. It's obviously top of mind for our constituents, so I'm glad to see this new round of effort being put toward the problem. It was especially good to see a new lead Municipal Prosecutor and a new Wildland Fire Coordinator announced, as those have been two positions the Assembly has been watching closely and asking to be filled. Of course, it is also great to see efforts put towards outreach and support for people experiencing homelessness and a renewed commitment to improved snow removal.

Homelessness Plan

At the Housing and Homelessness Committee, we heard from the Mayor's Special Assistant on Homelessness and Health, Farina Brown, on the Municipality's plan to address homelessness. I'm sure more will be said during committee updates, but I just want to point out what an improvement it is for the Municipality to have a plan and goals to address homelessness that is rooted in data and collaboration. Although there has been a lot of great work in this area in recent years, the Municipality's lack of a plan for its share of the work has been a major holdup for making better progress. I am hopeful that with the Municipality as a full player and partner, with an organized and methodical approach for dealing with homelessness, we will finally see the progress our community has been begging for over the past three years.

City Nerd Nite

The next City Nerd Nite has been announced on the topic of Healthy Soils. Whether you're into turning garbage into gardens, boosting urban farms, or keeping our food system rooted in sustainability, we hope to see on Thursday, October 17 at King St. Brewing Company. You can learn more at muni.org/assembly

Joint School Board Meeting

This Friday is our next quarterly joint meeting with the Anchorage School Board at the ASD Education Center. I'll remind the body that Vice Chair Zaletel and I will be out for this meeting, so Member Brawley will serve as Chair and Member Martinez will serve as Vice Chair for that meeting.

Youth Member

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge that Youth Member Bruno Bookman is with us tonight. This academic year, three bright young people are serving as the Assembly Youth Member on one-month rotations. Next month, Mika Bell will join us and in November, we will welcome Kynnedi Grady.

September 10, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to our business meeting.

Eklutna River Restoration

I will start with some good news. Last week, the Assembly approved its first joint resolution with the Native Village of Eklutna. We've had government to government relations with the Native Village of Eklutna for over three years, but this was our first official action together and it was very meaningful. We unanimously passed a [joint resolution](#) in support of exploration of pumped storage hydro (PSH) as an alternative for restoring and rewatering the entire Eklutna River to achieve the mitigation goal of the 1991 agreement. It was also very meaningful that Mayor LaFrance was the first Mayor to participate in our joint meetings with the Municipality and the Native Village of Eklutna, and it sent a strong message that the Municipality is united in our commitment to our partners in Eklutna.

Additionally, last week the Assembly approved the Administration's brief to the Governor on the Municipality's position on the Proposed Final Fish and Wildlife Plan for the Eklutna River. I want to thank Deputy Municipal Attorney Joe Busa for his excellent work on that brief, which was presented to the Governor's team yesterday. Good feedback is coming out that our message was well received and that it was a thoughtful discussion. We're hopeful for some positive next steps to result from that meeting.

Budget Season

We kicked off budget season last week with a review of the preliminary budget outlook, otherwise known as the 120-day memo, with OMB Director Brause and Mayor LaFrance. It was great to start off with such a collaborative approach between the Administration and Assembly.

From road equipment upgrades to increased public safety resources, the Municipality has a lot of needs and finite resources to meet those needs. We can be more effective and provide better service to our community when we have an open, collaborative process on the budget with the Assembly, the Administration and our community. I encourage community members to engage in the budget conversation now and make your voice heard on your priorities. You can learn more on the Assembly's Budget and Taxes section at www.muni.org/assembly.

Employee Survey

Also, to the employees of the Municipality, the 2024 Municipal employee survey closed and we had great participation. We had 1104 responses from current employees, 91 responses from former employees and 54 responses from past applicants who declined an MOA offer. This gives our third-party consultant Alera Group a lot of data to work with for their analysis and report on the survey. Alera will present an initial report to the Municipality on budget recommendations in mid-October and a final report on analysis of survey responses due in November. Both reports will be shared with municipal employees—with a sincere “thank you” to all who took time to respond.

Youth Member

Finally, tonight is the first meeting with one of our new cohort of youth representatives. I'd like to welcome Bruno Bookman who is serving as our youth representative at tonight's meeting, as well as Kynnedi Grady and Mika Bell, the other two youth representatives who will be joining us at future meetings.

August 27, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to our business meeting.

Chitose Delegation Visit

I will start by recognizing that the Sister Cities Commission is hosting a delegation from Anchorage's oldest sister city relationship, the city of Chitose, Japan. They have been our sister city since 1969.

Located on the northernmost island in Japan, Hokkaido, Chitose is found in the Midwestern region of the island. Marked by mountains and rivers, the city's geography feels familiar to Anchorage, although Chitose is about one-third the size of Anchorage, population-wise. They even have a nice urban salmon stream right in their city.

This year marks 55 years of bridge building, and it's a meaningful occasion our community is honored to commemorate. We also have an event tomorrow – the Chitose Park Dedication Ceremony from 9-10am tomorrow, Wednesday, August 28 at Sand Lake Elementary School. Students from the school were instrumental in making this happen and it is very exciting that we can do the dedication while the Chitose delegation is here. I hope we have a strong show of support from our community as we welcome and honor our Sister City.

Budget Season

We will soon enter the budget season where the Administration and Assembly work together to craft the 2025 municipal budget, which includes the operating budget, the budgets for utilities and enterprises, and the capital projects we will request from the state legislature and include on bonds in the April election.

I'm looking forward to a collaborative process with our partners in the Administration, specifically the Office of Management and Budget. The budget is a reflection of our community's values – from the frequency of snow plowing, to emergency services response times, to the services provided by our Health Department, Parks and Libraries – where we decide to put our money speaks to who we are as a community.

Our first review of the budget comes with the Administration's preliminary plan that will be put forward in the 120-day memo. The Assembly will hold a worksession on the memo on Friday, September 6th at 2:10pm. I encourage community members to attend this and all of the sessions on the budget and to make your voice heard on your priorities as we move through the process. You can learn more on the Assembly's Budget and Taxes section at www.muni.org/assembly.

Nerd Nite

Also, this week, we have City Nerd Nite will be this Thursday, August 29th at 6pm at King Street Brewing. The topic is Water and covers talks like Water in a Winter City, Challenges of Water Infrastructure and Snow Melt. You can learn more at the Assembly's website, www.muni.org/Assembly.

Employee Survey

Finally, I want to remind our hardworking municipal employees that the 2024 Municipal employee survey closes in a few days – on Friday, August 30. The Assembly recognizes that recruiting and retaining a strong workforce is a critical need for the Municipality, so we made this one of our top priorities for 2024. This survey is one step in the Assembly's work to support the incoming Administration and municipal employees toward the goal of making the Municipality one of the best places in Anchorage to work.

August 13, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to our business meeting.

Back to School

The Anchorage School District resumes classes this week, so please exercise extra caution when you are driving and watch out for students on the sidewalks and busses on the roads. Let's work together to keep our kids safe as we get used to new traffic patterns.

As most of you know, the School District is ushering in some big changes this year with staggered first days of school, new start times and the Academies model. I wish the students, families and school district the best of luck with these changes and I hope everyone has a great school year!

Employee Survey

To our hardworking municipal employees, I want to let you know that the 2024 MOA employee survey went live yesterday. The Assembly recognizes that recruiting and retaining a strong workforce is a critical need for the Municipality, so we made this one of our top priorities for 2024.

I thank Members Zaletel and Martinez for spearheading this project on the Assembly side and I also thank the staff from the Administration who have worked so hard to get this out. This survey is one step in the Assembly's work to support the incoming Administration and municipal employees toward the goal of making the Municipality one of the best places in Anchorage to work.

Chitose Delegation Visit

Later this month, the Sister Cities Commission will welcome a delegation from Anchorage's oldest sister city relationship, the city of Chitose, Japan.

Located on the northernmost island in Japan, Hokkaido, Chitose is found in the Midwestern region of the island. Marked by mountains and rivers, the city's geography feels familiar to Anchorage, although Chitose is about one-third the size of Anchorage, population-wise.

Chitose, Japan was Anchorage's first formalized sister city relationship, beginning in 1968. Anchorage School District's Japanese Immersion Program began in 1989 and helped students become functionally proficient in speaking, reading and writing both English and Japanese. With the support of Sand Lake Elementary School's Japanese Immersion Program and Chitose Elementary School, the two schools began a student exchange program in 1994 that continues to this day. That's why I'm proud to bring forward an ordinance on the agenda tonight to name Sand Lake Park in honor of our first sister city.

This year marks 55 years of bridge building, and it's a meaningful occasion our community is honored to commemorate. With appreciation to the Sister Cities Commission, I look forward to welcoming the delegation in celebration of the bridge we've built and will maintain for years to come.

Youth Representative

A few weeks ago, the Assembly had the opportunity to interview candidates for the Youth Representative position on the Assembly. We had 15 candidates overall, a big jump from last year. Candidates represented schools across the school district, as well as private and home schools. It was a very tough process to narrow it down from such a strong pool of candidates, but we interviewed three really strong candidates and had a great conversation with them. I'm pleased to announce that this year's Youth Representative will rotate between all three finalists. I've asked them all to join us today and am going to welcome them up front to introduce them.

- Mika Bell will be a 12th grader at Service High
- Bruno Bookman will be an 11th grader at West High
- Kynnedi Grady will be a 12th grader at Bartlett High

The team will receive an orientation in the coming weeks and once they are seated on the Assembly, they will join us for regular and special meetings and may also join committees and participate in work sessions and informal meetings. They will receive the same materials presented to Assembly members for regular and special meetings and give a "yes" or "no" preferential vote on each item up for a vote before the Assembly (with the exception of matters related to alcohol and marijuana).

Welcome to the Assembly! We look forward to serving with you.

Food for Thought and Nerd Nite

Finally, a few event reminders. We have a Food for Thought session next Friday, August 16th at City Hall. This month's topic is "Bounty in our Backyard! Celebrating food security and local urban agriculture." Food for Thought is a series of worksessions over the Friday lunch hour for the Assembly to welcome community partners to share good things happening in our community.

Also, the next City Nerd Nite will be on the topic of Water and will be held on August 29th at King Street Brewing. You can learn more about both of these events at the Assembly's website, www.muni.org/Assembly.

July 30, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome to our business meeting.

Crime Suppression Efforts

I'll start the report by thanking the federal, state and local law enforcement who conducted a major crime suppression effort across the municipality last week. There were 90 arrests, 19 felony warrants served, and 21 misdemeanor warrants served; 16 charged with felony crimes, and 47 charged with misdemeanors through the effort; 13 firearms were seized, some of which were stolen, as well as some pretty scary drugs. Many of these numbers may go up as additional search warrants are served this week. I'm really grateful to our local law enforcement, as well as our state and federal law enforcement for this interdiction and effort.

Finance Reporting

Next, I would like to say thank you SO much to Municipal Chief Fiscal Officer Alden Thern for delivering the financial audit for 2022. I want to thank the municipal staff and contractors who worked so diligently to get this project completed just in the very nick of time. For many of us, the term audit makes our eyes glaze over, but I want to stress how important this process is.

Millions of dollars in state and federal funding, and the Municipality's bond ratings were hanging in the balance. The completion of the audit allowed the Municipality to go to the bond market to sell \$147 million in bonds at a competitive 3.7 percent interest rate (a rate many people would love to get for their homes these days) and secure funding to carry out voter-approved projects to complete critical upgrades to our roads, parks and public facilities.

There were two bond rating reports that were issued. We heard a lot about the one in which we had a one step reduction in our bond rating, but there was another and it actually left our bond rating untouched and removed Anchorage from their watch list for further negative actions, which means there are third party analysts who are seeing that Anchorage is stabilizing and positioning itself financially going forward.

One thing I'd like to point out is that the S&P rating did state that the Municipality needs to get back to work on its Climate Action Plan if we are going to be ahead of the curve on negative actions related to climate impacts. That's not a progressive directive, that is the financial markets talking.

I'll end this part of the report by saying once again thank you to Alden Thern for sticking with us and getting us through this. On to 2023!

Transition Report

Other big news in recent weeks has been the Transition Report from former Mayor Bronson. The report shared some unsettling news about high staff vacancies and outdated equipment. Some of these problems were known to the Assembly and we have been working on solutions, but others had not previously been disclosed to us. Seeing many of these issues coming, the Assembly made 'supporting our Municipal workforce' and 'ensuring delivery of quality Municipal services' two of our top priorities in this year's workplan. We stand ready to help the new Administration to get our Municipality back on track so that people can once again come to expect and receive

high quality services from their local government. This Friday we'll be having a worksession where we'll be briefed from the new Administration on the outgoing Administration's transition report. I strongly suggest you tune in.

New Municipal Staff

Next, I'd like to thank the LaFrance Administration for bringing on new staff, many of whom are returning from past work with the municipality, as we see with Ms. Becky Windt Pearson, our Acting Municipal Manager who is standing for confirmation this evening. Many of us have worked with Ms. Windt Pearson in the past and have found her to be a strong advocate for the municipality's interests.

Additionally, we learned yesterday that Kim Waller will become our new Chief Equity Officer. She brings a wealth of experience in this field, most recently serving as the Senior Director of Diversity & Inclusion with The Foraker Group. She will have a lot of work in this new role, helping us get back to the work of digging into our equity practices and making sure this municipality is fair for everybody. I look forward to forging a new relationship between the Assembly and that office.

Youth Representative

Also, it is once again time to select the Assembly's Youth Representative. The selection responsibility falls to the Chair, but in following the process set out by my predecessor Mayor LaFrance, we will have a worksession this Friday so that the full Assembly can hear from five of the prospective candidates. We had 19 applicants this year, which was really amazing. A wealth of options and a terrible process to narrow. We had a lot of really talented young people apply and it was a very tough process to select the five to interview. I look forward to meeting them and hearing their ideas. The worksession will be this Friday from 11:50 to 12:50pm at City Hall in Suite 155.

Assembly Committee Restructuring

Finally, as I mentioned at the last meeting, we have restructured the Assembly Committees to help the Assembly operate more efficiently and help municipal departments and the community better engage with our work. The new committee list and committee memberships are listed on the Assembly's committee page at muni.org/assembly.

July 16, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome.

Welcome New Mayor and Staff

First, since this is the first Assembly meeting after the mayoral transition, I would like to welcome Mayor LaFrance and her staff to the dais. While there will be many late nights, tough decisions, and tensions in this room, I look forward to working collaboratively with all of you to solve our cities problems, to celebrate our successes, and find innovative ways to reach our shared goal of making Anchorage an even better place to live.

On the Assembly, we have a saying about “leaving it on the dais.” Sometimes things get heated up here and tense discussions cause frustration. However, once the meeting ends, we do our best to put all of that in the past, shake hands, ask about plans for the weekend, and leave knowing that we are all working our hardest to represent our constituents and do the best job for our city. I hope we can foster that relationship with you as well. We might disagree on some things, but there is always something we agree on that we can work on tomorrow.

I wish you the best of luck in your new roles and look forward to getting down to business.

Thank You to Kent Kohlhase

Mr. Kohlhase, recognizing that tonight is your last meeting as our Municipal Manager, I can't thank you enough for the service you have provided to our community. You took the helm during a very difficult and dark time for our community and you served with professionalism, honesty, integrity and a good sense of humor. You responded to calls and emails promptly, listened to the concerns of Assembly Members, helped us respond to our constituents' questions, and helped us develop solutions on our shared legislation. Sometimes it was heated, but we always managed to make it through to the next day to keep doing the work for the people, and that's a credit to your integrity. It's been a real pleasure working with you and I hope that we continue to get to work with you in some manner.

Assembly Committee Restructuring

This week we issued a new structuring of the Assembly Committees. Our hope is that this new structure helps the Assembly operate more efficiently and helps municipal departments and the community better engage with our work. Exact details will be shared when we launch a new committee webpage, which is coming very soon, but some of the big changes are as follows:

- We will have fewer committees will be “Committees-of-the-Whole” so that Members can serve on fewer committees and give more of their time to the ones they serve on
- The Health and Public Safety Committees will combine to become the Public Health and Safety Committee
- Infrastructure will be added to the Enterprise and Utilities Oversight Committee, and it will continue to be a committee of the whole

- The Ethics and Elections Committee will continue to oversee those functions, but will also add other municipal functions and become the Quality Municipal Services Committee

Additionally, we've done our best to match each municipal department with an Assembly Committee to ensure that departments have a clearly defined route to access the Assembly to bring ideas and concerns, and provide input on the issues affecting those departments. I will send a letter to the departments in the next few weeks outlining these changes and inviting them to participate in their corresponding committees.

Committee chairs, I encourage you to think creatively about how you want to interact with the departments, as well as the Boards and Commissions that fall under your committee's scope.

June 25, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome.

Mayoral Transition

To begin, I would like to address the Mayoral Transition. Mayor Bronson, tonight is your last meeting with us and I would like to thank you for everything you and your team have done to help prepare the incoming administration and ensure a smooth transition of power. You and I have certainly had our differences, but in the end, I think we agreed more than we disagreed, and I know that you love this city and care about its future and I want to wish you the best in your future endeavors.

For those of you who would like to attend the Inauguration of Mayor LaFrance, the ceremonial swearing-in and oath of office will occur next Monday, July 31 in Town Square at Noon. The Alaska Center for the Performing Arts will be a back-up location in case of rain.

Pride Parade

Speaking of upcoming events, the annual Pride Parade is taking place this Saturday, June 29 at 11:30am on the Park Strip. The Parade organizers invite us to join them "for a vibrant celebration of love, acceptance, and unity within the LGBTQ+ community. This parade is not just a display of solidarity; it's a testament to our resilience and diversity, reminding us of the progress we've made and the work that still lies ahead. As we gather together, let's reflect on our achievements, stand strong against any attempts to roll back our rights, and continue our journey towards a more inclusive and equitable society."

Boards and Commissions

As you may have noticed, the Assembly has been postponing Boards and Commission appointments over the past few months to allow the incoming Administration to have input and correct a few issues with boards and commissions. Tonight, there is an introduction of an ordinance to reinstate the Americans with Disabilities Act Advisory Committee with a public hearing on July 16. We will take this up as well as other Boards and Commissions issues at a worksession on July 12 from 1-2:30pm at City Hall, Suite 155.

June 11, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome.

80th Anniversary of D-DAY

Last week, the world commemorated the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings along the Normandy coast during World War II. The historic D-day invasion was a turning point in World War II that eventually resulted in the liberation of Western Europe from the grip of Nazi Germany.

Unfortunately, today the term “Nazi” is often used casually as an insult to political rivals or people we don’t like, which minimizes the level of evil embodied in that movement. The Nazis used their laws and their military power to murder millions of innocent Jewish people, gay people, people with disabilities, and political opponents, and it took nearly the whole world coming together to stop it. Therefore, it’s important that we continue to recognize and revisit this history so that this terrible era is not watered down or forgotten over time.

As we reflect on the horrors of the past, it seems a fitting that tonight, we also recognize Juneteenth, Pride Month and World Refugee Day to honor and celebrate people who have suffered at the hands of wars, violence and discrimination.

Juneteenth Celebration

The annual Juneteenth Celebration, commemorating the end of slavery in the United States, will take place this weekend on the Park Strip and will be an opportunity to reflect and learn, and celebrate this moment in our history. On Monday, the Chamber of Commerce will host a special Juneteenth Make it Monday event, and then Wednesday, June 19th is the official holiday and all Municipal offices will be closed. We welcome our state colleagues this year in marking their first observance of the day as a state holiday. Once again, Anchorage is leading the way.

Pride Month

June is also Pride Month, and while it's a joyful time, it's also an important time to recognize the discrimination and hate toward LGBTQ+ individuals in the community, and transgender people in particular at this point in time. Unfortunately, our young people are often the target of this hatred. 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. And be sure to attend the Annual Pride Parade on June 29th!

World Refugee Day

Also, on July 27 there will be an event at Grow North Farm to celebrate World Refugee Day. In 2023, Alaska welcomed more refugees than ever before, helping 452 individuals from such countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Ukraine and many more re-start their lives, many of whom have made Anchorage their home. I think this speaks well to our community. We are a welcoming place and we open our arms to people from around the world in their times of need.

My hope is that we can embody the spirit of openness and acceptance that takes place in our community every June and carry that into every month throughout the year.

Food for Thought

Next up, the Assembly is hosting a Food for Thought session this Friday, at 11:30am in Suite 155 at City Hall. I call it's "What's Good Anchorage?" Once a month, the Assembly invites community partners to the table for lunchtime sessions dedicated to amplifying the good work happening throughout the Municipality. This month we'll hear from organizations working to make Anchorage a more equitable and inclusive place.

Port of Alaska Modernization

I'd like to also echo the Mayor in celebrating the modernization of the Port. As you have probably heard by now, the Port of Alaska has begun the next stage of the modernization project – construction on the North Extension Stabilization. I want to thank Member Zaletel, Mayor Bronson, Mia Costello and Port staff for your work to overcome the last-minute hurdles and make sure this project stays on track and our grant funding remains secure. It is exciting to see the construction activity down at the Port.

Mayoral Transition

Finally, we are in the midst of a Mayoral Transition. At a special Assembly meeting on May 31st, the Assembly certified the Mayoral Runoff Election, and so tonight I would like to say congratulations and welcome to Mayor-Elect Suzanne LaFrance. We believe in the smooth transition of power in government and look forward to working with the new Mayor on the Assembly's priorities. For those of you who would like to give feedback to the Mayor-elect or apply for a job with the administration, I encourage you to visit the transition website at teamanchorage.com.

May 21, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome. As we prepare to enter into the Memorial Day weekend, I want give thanks and remember those who have died while in military service. And earlier this month, we recognized Peace Officers Memorial Day. I hope that while everyone enjoys their barbeques and hikes this weekend that you also take a moment to reflect on the sacrifices made by those who have given their lives in service to our country, and the family and friends they leave behind.

Elections

As you know, last week marked the end of the 2024 Municipal Election cycle. As the Elections Team works to process the final ballots and prepare the Mayoral Runoff Election for certification, I want to give kudos to the Elections Team for a an excellent job. It's a lot of work to pull off one election, let alone two within a few months, and they did so with professionalism, grace and precision.

I want to remind voters who received, or may receive, a cure letter in the mail, to cure their ballot verification discrepancies no later than May 29, at 4pm. If a ballot return envelope is missing a signature or if the signature can't be verified, within three business days election officials send a cure letter to the voter explaining the lack of a valid signature. Voters may cure their ballots by mailing back their cure letter, curing in person at the Election Canter, or by texting "Anchorage" to 28683 using TXT2Cure, a pro-voter initiative introduced during the 2024 Regular Municipal Election.

Next Wednesday, May 29, the Election Commission will meet and hold the Public Session of Canvass to adjudicate challenged ballots. Once that is complete, the certification of the Runoff Election will take place on Friday, May 31 and that will be the official conclusion of the 2024 elections.

Port of Alaska

Last Friday, the Enterprise and Utilities Oversight Committee held a very productive special meeting to review the next steps for the Don Young Port of Alaska Modernization Program. At this point, we appear to be on track for construction of Terminal One and we are now beginning the planning for Terminal Two.

It is really gratifying that after all of these years of problems with the Port Modernization, we are on the other side of those problems and have a path forward to success. I want to commend everyone who has been involved in this project, including Assembly Members, Port staff, multiple mayoral administrations, state legislators, multiple federal agencies, several consulting teams and the Port user groups. This community has come together and really worked hard to get this once-in-a-generation project on track.

We still have hard decisions ahead and it won't always be easy, but I'm confident we will continue to build on our track record of collaboration and transparency to see this project through to completion.

Assembly Branch Staff

On tonight's agenda, you'll see that the Assembly continues to prioritize building its own strong workforce to support the work of the Legislative Branch with the executive appointments of William Northrop, Election Administrator and Matthew Farina, Assembly Program and Budget Analyst. I'd like to welcome William and Matthew to our team and thank all of the Assembly staff for their work to keep the Assembly working effectively and efficiently.

Food for Thought

Finally, I'd like to announce the next Food for Thought session on Friday, June 14, where we'll hear from nonprofits working collaboratively to strengthen and increase access to services to underserved communities.

Food for Thought, or "what's good Anchorage?" is dedicated to amplifying the good work happening throughout the Municipality. The sessions offer Assembly members and the public a window into Anchorage's bright future and conversations to build positive, collaborative relationships. If you missed the previous sessions on Anchorage's Music Economy and efforts to house our most vulnerable neighbors in Anchorage, you can find the recordings on the Assembly's YouTube channel.

Southcentral Foundation Crisis Center

I also want to announce an exciting groundbreaking taking place this May 28th at 3pm for Southcentral Foundation's crisis stabilization center. This is much needed resource for our community and I encouraged you to learn more about the project.

May 7, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome.



Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month

First, May is Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month

AAPI represents those with roots and ancestry in the Pacific Islands, East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia, which contains at least 60 different ethnic groups with distinct cultures, histories, languages, and traditions. Roughly 47,000 people who trace their roots to Asia and the Pacific Islands have made Anchorage their home.

Alongside a resolution in recognition of the many contributions and achievements of Anchorage's Asian American and Pacific Islander residents, past, present, and future, the Assembly is proud to present digital artwork by local artist Rejoy Armamento, that you can find in the upcoming Assembly newsletter and a display in the Library lobby.

Quarter One Budget Revision

Next, I would like to give a huge thanks to Budget and Finance Committee Co-Chairs Meg Zaletel and Anna Brawley for leading us so thoughtfully through the first quarter budget revision, as well as the Legislative and Administration staff who helped them along the way.

It's unfortunate that the process around this budget has stirred up controversy, because it distracts from the fact that a lot of people worked very hard to develop a responsible budget operating in some difficult circumstances, without the completed 2022 Audit. They say that you can see a community's values in its budget and the recent budget revisions were very much in line with the Assembly's annual workplan and priorities. The budget revision was passed unanimously by the Assembly last week and clearly demonstrates that the Municipality values public safety, strengthening our municipal workforce, delivering quality municipal services, and improving quality of life in our community.

I hope that after tonight, we can move on from the politics surrounding this process and continue the work of keeping our city running.

Eklutna River Restoration

Last week the Project Owners Group submitted a Proposed Final Fish and Wildlife Program to the Governor over the objections and concerns of community members, the Native Village of Eklutna and the Anchorage Assembly. Although this process has been touted as open and transparent, it has been anything but. Instead, closed-door deals, carefully orchestrated public meetings and last-minute ballooning costs are what define the proposed plan.

For those of you wondering, what's next, now that the plan has been submitted to the Governor, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service have 60 days to submit comments on the Proposed Final Fish and Wildlife Program. Once those comments are submitted, the Project Owners have 30 days to submit responses. After that, the Proposed Final Fish and Wildlife Program and accompanying

comments will be sent to the Alaska Energy Authority to compile a report and submit to Governor. The Governor has to October 2, 2024 to make a decision.

While the process is now in the hands of the Governor, in solidarity with our neighbors at the Native Village of Eklutna, we pledge to continue our pursuit to reclaim the Municipality's vote and develop a transparent solution that reflects the voices, needs and values of the residents of Anchorage.

MOA Elections

Now, to my final announcement about municipal elections for this election season. You should have all received your ballot in the mail for the Mayoral runoff election. Ballots must be returned by May 14, and as always, you'll have three options to return your ballot: by mail, into a dropbox, or to an Anchorage Vote Center. You can visit www.muni.org/elections to find more information and request a new ballot if you haven't received one.

April 23, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome.

Eklutna River Restoration

Last Friday, the Assembly held a worksession where we heard from the Native Village of Eklutna on their new alternative for the Draft Fish and Wildlife Program. The Native Village of Eklutna's alternative plan is a really elegant and intelligent solution and compromise that addresses the concerns of the electric utilities, protects our drinking water and maintains the energy source, while also developing a path forward to eventual restoration of the Eklutna River for all five species of salmon, as contemplated in the 1991 Agreement.

I know that for many following this issue, the legal matters have become overly complex, so I want to bring this back to the essence of the situation:

- For nearly a century, migration of Eklutna River salmon has been blocked by hydroelectric dams and impacted by water diversions that have badly degraded the condition of the river and uprooted the cultural traditions of the Dena'ina people of this area.
- We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to right this wrong and do something that benefits our entire community by restoring the Eklutna River.

- Two private electric companies are rushing to push their solution that has very little public support, that jeopardizes Anchorage's water rights for years to come, and puts Municipal taxpayers on the hook for an expensive solution that stops a mile short of full river restoration, and has no way for public officials to provide input on the solution.
- And instead of acting transparently and representing the people of Anchorage, Mayor Bronson is working with the electric companies behind closed doors on a deal that is not in the best interests of the people of the Municipality.
- I know it seems like the Assembly is getting into the weeds with legal maneuvers, but we are jumping through all of these hoops because it is SO important.
- In addition to advocating for the restoration of the Eklutna River, our community's water rights and property tax bills for years to come are on the line, and that is why we are fighting so hard to pause this project until we can all work together on a compromise that is transparent and beneficial for our community and our economy.

Anchorage Priorities in Juneau

Next, as the final days of the legislative session wind down, Assembly Members are busy working with the Administration behind the scenes to advocate for Anchorage's legislative requests. Specifically, the ask for \$4 million to fund operations of the 56th Avenue Shelter over the summer so we can avoid turning hundreds of people onto the streets after municipal funding runs out at the end of May.

We are also advocating for SB77, a bill that will give the Municipality more tools to incentive housing development and deal with blighted properties, and we are also advocating for full funding for the Community Assistance Program, one of the few remaining ways that the State funds local governments.

The Municipality received funding through the Senate's capital budget for some very important road, water, and park projects, so I am hopeful those remain in the budget and we can see ground breakings on those projects in the next year.

I encourage everyone to contact your state legislators to let them know the issues that are important to you for them to address with their remaining days in the 2024 legislative session.

MOA Elections

Next, municipal elections. With tonight's election certification, we will soon be in a runoff election for voters to elect our Mayor. Here are some items of note for the runoff election:

- Sign up for BallotTrax to get text or email updates on the status of your ballot: anchoragevotes.com. I love this feature—I get an update when my ballot is on its way to me, when it's been received at the MOA Election Center and when my signature has been verified, so I know my vote counts.

- Visit www.muni.org/elections to learn more about the MOA Election Center and find the resources you need, like links to register, track your ballot, tour the election center and more!
- Return your runoff ballot by May 14. As always, you'll have three options to return your ballot: by mail, into a dropbox, or to an Anchorage Vote Center.

Voting local hits close to home. This is where we can really make a difference for our businesses, our families, our neighborhoods, and our roads that we all rely upon.

Food for Thought

Finally, the Assembly has been engaging in a monthly session that we call Food for Thought, or what I like to call, What's Good Anchorage.

So often we focus on the issues that are challenging our community, but we don't spend enough time talking about the good things that are happening. And so, to that end, and on a positive note, we had a really good Food for Thought session last Friday on Housing Success Stories.

Our community focuses on the people we see living on the streets and in parks (and rightly so), but what we don't see are all of the people who are moving off the streets, or who never end up there in the first place because of important safety nets that our community has launched in the last few years to house our most vulnerable neighbors. Whether it's with the United Way, the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness, a small project at a community church, or the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, people are working from the local to the state, and even the federal government to make sure we make a difference in our housing struggles.

We have some people and organizations doing incredible work and it's important to step back and celebrate that work. If you missed the session, you can find the recording on the Assembly's YouTube channel. I highly encourage you to watch this very uplifting session.

April 9, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome.

Congratulations to Chief Kerle

Chief Kerle, I'd like to thank you personally for your life of service to this Municipality. While I'm not so pleased about the abrupt departure, I know that Anchorage is a better community because of your service. We've seen a lot of very challenging times together, and you've seen many more than I've been around. And so, with that, I have much gratitude for your service.

And I do welcome the new appointee for Chief of Police, Captain Bianca Cross. As many know, Chief of Police is a tough job and it takes incredible fortitude to step into the role. I'm looking forward to reviewing the qualifications and experience of Ms. Cross and having some robust conversations about her positions and perspectives on the helm of our police force moving forward. It's a \$130M organization, it takes a lot of experience to lead, and I look forward to learning more about that experience.

Youth Representatives

Tonight is the last meeting for our youth representative, Jesse Tyrell and our alternate representative Jake Matthews. They have both served honorably over the past year and I thank them for their service. The job of youth representative is a lot of responsibility and requires long hours, including late into the night on school nights. Both Jesse and Jake put in a lot of hard work and did a great job representing the youth of Anchorage in our policy discussions at Assembly meetings, and they helped members and our community know more about issues and events of importance to our young people. We will all miss working with you but hope to see you in the future and we wish you the best in your future endeavors.

Recruitment is open for a youth representative for the 2024-25 school year and the position now includes a small stipend. You can visit the Youth Rep page on the Assembly website or go directly to ancgov.info/youthvoice for more information or to apply. The deadline for applications is April 30th.

Assembly Annual Progress Report

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to share the Assembly's Annual Progress Report at the Anchorage Chamber Make it Monday forum. The Assembly, with thanks to the Administration and our partners, saw progress in all of our 2023 priorities, including advancement of the Port of Alaska modernization, passage of several initiatives to spur housing development, expansion of the Fire Department Mobile Crisis Team and Police Department Mobile Intervention Team, passage of the "Open Checkbook" to create an online dashboard of municipal spending, and nearly one hundred percent recovery from FEMA of the funds we spent on the pandemic.

Our priorities in 2024 include continuing our work on Housing Action and the Port Modernization, as well as strengthening the municipal workforce, ensuring delivery of quality municipal services, and advancing public health, safety, and quality of life for all residents in our community.

You can learn more about the Assembly's 2024 priorities at muni.org/assembly.

State Legislative Request for Shelter

Over the past few months, the Mayor and Assembly have been working very hard to secure a targeted funding request to the State Legislature for \$4M to keep our shelter operating year-round. Our ask is that the State recognizes that homelessness is a statewide issue whose costs are disproportionately felt by Anchorage taxpayers and

residents. Without state funding, the Municipality would be forced to close the 56th Avenue shelter on May 31st because we do not have the resources to operate this facility year-round without making other cuts.

I want to thank Representative Josephson for bringing forward an amendment in the Finance Committee to add this funding to the budget, and to Representatives Coulombe, Galvin, Hannan, Ortiz and Edgmon for voting in favor of the amendment. We are thankful to the House Finance Committee for supporting this important ask that the State share the cost of a statewide problem. We are hopeful it will remain in the budget, but we know it has a long way to go – passage by the House, passage by the Senate, inclusion in the final FY25 budget, and then surviving any potential veto action by the Governor.

Also, a huge thanks to Assembly Member Anna Brawley, Chair of the Legislative Committee, who has been spearheading our efforts in Juneau.

MOA Elections

Finally, I want to highlight the exemplary work of the MOA Elections Team.

Our nonpartisan election officials are committed to making Anchorage the best place to vote-at-home, and they are doing a really good job. More than 70,000 residents returned their mailed ballot package by Election Day last week, making up over 95% of the ballots received at the MOA Election Center. Those remaining few came from the three Anchorage Vote Centers that open for the week before Election Day.

It takes a lot of hard work by a dedicated team of professionals to pull off secure, accessible elections—and they're about to do it all over again. Our Municipal Charter requires that our mayor be elected by at least 45% of the vote, plus one. If the election is certified by the Assembly on April 23rd, and I expect that it will, the elections team will kick off a runoff election for voters to elect our Mayor. Here's what to expect in a runoff election:

- Register to vote or update your registration by April 14. Even if you weren't registered for the Regular Election, you can register for the runoff.
- Sign up for BallotTrax to get text or email updates on the status of your ballot: anchoragevotes.com. I love this feature—I get an update when my ballot is on its way to me, when it's been received at the MOA Election Center and when my signature has been verified, so I know my vote counts.
- Visit www.muni.org/elections to learn more about the MOA Election Center and find the resources you need, like links to register, track your ballot, tour the election center and more!
- Return your runoff ballot by May 14. As always, you'll have three options to return your ballot: by mail, into a dropbox, or to an Anchorage Vote Center.

Voting local hits close to home. This is where we can really make a difference. Your local businesses, your families, your neighborhoods, your roads all rely on your voice in this election.

March 19, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome. Happy spring equinox! I hope everyone is enjoying and making good use of the growing daylight.

Washington D.C. Visit

Last week, Member Brawley and I visited Washington, D.C. to attend the National League of Cities annual conference and meet with our Congressional Delegation to discuss Anchorage priorities, namely the HUD funding formula for providing homelessness resources. Member Brawley and I were joined by the Congressional Delegation in a meeting with HUD leadership to continue to press our case that Anchorage and Alaska are getting left behind by HUD. We are continuing to make progress on this and keep the pressure on HUD to respond to our needs. I thank Senators Sullivan and Murkowski, and Representative Peltola for their leadership on this issue.

Alcohol Tax Strategic Plan

Now that we are several years into the new alcohol tax, the Assembly is conducting a strategic plan to help us better identify how to prioritize and fund work through the tax. A team has been going to community meetings and other gatherings to collect input from community members and they have a booth in the lobby tonight. I encourage you to visit the booth to learn more about the work and provide your input.

Food for Thought and We'll Be Back Soon

On Friday, we welcomed community partners – the Anchorage Folk Festival and Sundown Music Festival – for the first in our lunchtime worksession series “Food for Thought,” focused on the good things happening in our community, so that we in more creative conversations about our role as a legislative body and as a municipality in fostering what makes Anchorage vibrant.

Following the beat of that drum, I'm proud to announce that tonight, folks tuning into our meeting online and on TV will enjoy the launch of “We'll Be Back Soon,” a program featuring local music on our meeting broadcast when we break for intermission. The program is amplifying the work of 12 local musicians through 20 songs that reflect the broad range of tone, tenor and voice in our city. From laughter and love to heartbreak and grief, our community has been through a lot in the last few years. Music is a way to share in those feelings and find common ground. I hope you enjoy this new program.

Elections

And now, my final reminder about the upcoming election as today is the last meeting before the election. All ballots have now been mailed, so if you haven't received your ballot yet, you can call 907-243-VOTE or 8683 to request a new ballot. The last day to vote is Tuesday, April 2 at 8pm at any of the multiple drop boxes, accessible voting centers or through the mail, as long as it is stamped before 8pm. The mayor, several school board seats, service area board of supervisor seats and the open District 2 Chugiak-Eagle River Assembly seat will be on the ballot, as well as a proposed Charter amendment and several bond propositions.

I encourage you to sign up for Ballot Tracks, which is an amazing tool where you can sign up for text notifications of when your ballot leaves the mail house, when it is delivered to your home and when it arrives back at the Election Center. You can sign up at AnchorageVotes.com.

March 5, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome.

First, I want to say Godspeed to the Municipal Attorney who is flying to Washington, D.C. now to stand in for our illustrious former attorney Bob Owens in front of the Court of Claims in the Appeals Court on the question of the appeal by the federal government on the \$365M judgment from the Court of Claims on behalf of the Municipality. For those of you following the Port story, a very significant event happens this Friday in Washington D.C. and that is that the Appellate Court hears the appeal by the federal government against our victory in the Port settlement, which we hope they will sustain.

Food for Thought

I'm pleased to announce that the Assembly is launching "Food for Thought," a series of worksessions over the Friday lunch hour to take a step back from the timely business at hand and welcome community partners to our table to discuss the good things happening in our community. Often our focus is on things that are going wrong, and things that aren't working right, so I want to take some time to appreciate the many things that are going right.

The first session will be on March 15 at 11:30am and will focus on Anchorage's music economy. We'll hear from community partners organizing festivals and our opportunity to amplify local music.

Future sessions will include innovative new programs to house people who've long struggled with homelessness, and a presentation from a delegation who recently visited Oulu, Finland to learn about snow removal and non-motorized transportation ideas.

State Legislature

Next, onto Juneau and the State Legislature. Tonight, you'll see a number of resolutions of support on the agenda for bills in the state legislature. Issues like housing affordability, child care, and supporting families so that parents can remain in the workforce are critical to the future of Anchorage, and issues that the Municipality has done our best to address.

However, some issues are too big for local solutions and we need the state to step up and do their part to ensure the vitality of our economy, schools, workplaces and local communities. I want to thank our colleagues in Juneau, especially the Anchorage Delegation, for listening to the Municipality's concerns and working to find statewide solutions to some of our toughest problems.

Elections

Finally, my ongoing reminder about the upcoming election. Ballots will be mailed to voters on March 12, and the last day of voting is Tuesday, April 2 at 8pm at any of the multiple drop boxes, accessible voting centers or through the mail, as long as it is stamped before 8pm. The mayor, several school board seats, service area board of supervisor seats and the open District 2 Chugiak-Eagle River Assembly seat will be on the ballot, as well as a proposed Charter amendment and several bond propositions.

I encourage you to sign up for Ballot Tracks, which is an amazing tool where you can sign up for text notifications of when your ballot leaves the mail house, when it is delivered to your home and when it arrives back at the Election Center. You can sign up at AnchorageVotes.com.

February 27, 2024

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

Good evening everyone and welcome.

Anchorage Priorities for the State Legislature

Last week, we had a delegation of Assembly Members and staff fly down to Juneau to take Anchorage's 2024 Legislative Program to the Legislature. I want to thank Members Brawley, Rivera, Johnson and Sulte, and staff member Brandi Heasley, for adding to your usual duties to represent the case for Anchorage to the state legislature.

The delegation pushed for the Municipality's top three priorities, which are the Port Modernization, increasing housing supply and addressing homelessness, and supporting mental and behavioral health needs. You can learn more about the top priorities, as well as other municipal and district priorities on the Assembly's website

from the “State Support” button at www.muni.org/assembly. I look forward to hearing more as the legislative session continues.

Eklutna River Restoration

The Eklutna Dam project has been in the news a lot lately, so I won't belabor the point, but I wanted to reiterate the Assembly's call to slow the process for at least two years to have a more transparent deliberation on the matter. There are serious unaddressed concerns about public use of funds, budget assumptions, effects on water supply, the engagement of important stakeholder like the Native Village of Eklutna, as well as the actual effectiveness of the plan in meeting the terms of the 1991 agreement.

As the Assembly said in a resolution we passed on February 2, the issues at play are too significant to our community to rush to judgment or exclude key stakeholders. The residents of the Municipality deserve a measured and comprehensive approach guided by respectful coordination to reach a solution that enjoys the broadest consensus possible among the affected parties.

Elections

Finally, I want to issue my regular reminder that the Municipality will hold a vote at home election this March and April. The last day to register or update your registration is this Sunday, March 3rd. On February 26th, Municipal Elections mailed out 909 ballot packages to military & overseas voters and on March 12, 2024, Municipal Elections will send out 206,727 ballot packages to all Anchorage Voters, including voters who are here in Anchorage and voters who are out-of-state for the election. The last day of voting is Tuesday, April 2. The mayor, several school board seats, service area board of supervisor seats and the open District 2 Chugiak-Eagle River Assembly seat will be on the ballot, as well as a proposed Charter amendment and several bond propositions.

Anchorage also utilizes an innovative tool called Ballot Tracks, which is an amazing tool where you can sign up for text notifications of when your ballot leaves the mail house, when it is delivered to your home and when it arrives back at the Election Center. You can sign up at AnchorageVotes.com.

February 13, 2024

Assembly Member Felix Rivera Chaired the 2/13 meeting and offered the following remarks:

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

Good evening everybody and welcome.

Before we begin this evening, I want to take a moment to recognize the passing of a dear friend to the Municipality, Bob Owens. Mr. Owens has been with the Municipal

Attorney's Office for over eighteen years and played a critical role in many important municipal issues over those years. He always offered wise and thoughtful legal advice and was a true public servant to the people of Anchorage.

His passing has been quite a shock. I want to offer my condolences to his wife Suzanne, his family and friends, and the staff in the Municipal Attorney's Office who have lost a valuable colleague. We will do a longer recognition in the future when his family can be here, but for tonight, we've placed flowers on the dais in his memory.

Elections

Next, I want to issue a reminder that the Municipality will hold a vote at home election this March and April. The last day to register is March 3, ballot packages will be mailed to qualified voters on March 12 and the last day of voting is Tuesday, April 2. The mayor, several school board seats, service area board of supervisor seats and the open District 2 Chugiak-Eagle River Assembly seat will be on the ballot, as well as a proposed Charter amendment and several bond propositions.

Online Checkbook

An exciting new development this week was the launch of the Online Checkbook, an online record of municipal transactions. The Online Checkbook will update monthly, posting recent transactions, unaudited revenue and procured contracts with historic information dated back to 2018. This is a major milestone in the Assembly's effort to make our local government more transparent and accessible to the public.

I congratulate my colleague Chair Constant for seeing one of his top goal's to fruition and also thank Members Cross and Volland for your sponsorship of the legislation that created it. Finally, I want to recognize and thank the team at IT and Finance, especially Sandra Fern, Brendan Babb and Heather Holland, and the Assembly implementation team, Chair Constant, Member Brawley and former Budget Analyst Desirea Camacho, for their incredible hard work to pull this off in under a year.

Tonight's Meeting

To my fellow members, with several members absent from the meeting tonight, I ask that if there are any controversial or lengthy items on the agenda, we consider postponing to March so we can hold a worksession on the topic and have all of the members present to participate in debate and voting. Two items tonight fit this theme, items 14.B. AO 2024-14 (regarding right turns on red) and 14.F. AO 2023-94 (regarding Title 17 code on Animals) will be pushed to meetings in March, so if you are here for those items, the public hearings will not be heard tonight. At the request of the Mayor, I want to give the Clerk directions to add him as a sponsor to items 10.A.1. and 10.A.4, two honorary resolutions on the agenda tonight.

January 23, 2024

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

Good evening everybody and welcome.

Elections

As you've hopefully heard by now, the Municipality of Anchorage will hold a vote at home election this March and April. I want to remind everyone of some important dates – candidate filings for Mayor, Assembly, School Board and Service Area Board of Supervisors close this Friday, January 26 at 5 pm. Candidates can register at the Clerk's Office between 9am- 3pm or at the Election Center between 8am and 5pm. The last day to register is March 3, ballot packages will be mailed to qualified voters on March 12 and the last day of voting is Tuesday, April 2.

The mayor, several school board seats, service area board of supervisor seats and the open District 2 Chugiak-Eagle River Assembly seat will be on the ballot, as well as a proposed Charter amendment and several bond propositions. The Assembly approved several items last week to put on the ballot and will review the remaining few items this evening.

As I've said before, local elections have a direct impact on our daily lives, including the efficiency of our snow plowing, the health of our parks, and the strength of our public safety, so I encourage everyone to follow the issues closely and vote by 8pm April 2nd.

Anchorage Requests to Legislature

The legislature convened in Juneau last week and with that, the Municipality submitted a legislative program with our 2024 requests to the Legislature. Late last year, the Anchorage Assembly worked alongside the Administration to develop shared legislative priorities, including focused capital asks, statutory recommendations and district-specific priorities.

The Municipality's top three priorities this session are the Port of Alaska Modernization Program, increasing housing supply and addressing homelessness, and supporting mental and behavioral health needs. You can learn more about the top priorities, as well as other municipal and district priorities on the [Assembly's website](#).

Property Valuation Notices

Next, it's that time of year when residents receive green valuation slips in the mail, detailing the Municipality's assessment of residents' property values. Property valuation is a public process, and property owners should be aware of their options to participate.

If a property owner believes that their property valuation was calculated in error, we invite their engagement in the appeal process. The deadline to appeal is February 12. If a property owner qualifies for an exemption that is not reflected in the property valuation, the property owner has until March 15 to file for the exemption.

You can learn more and check your property valuations online at www.property.muni.org.

January 9, 2024

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

Good evening everybody and welcome. This is the first regular Assembly meeting of 2024. I hope everyone enjoyed the break and I'm glad you can be here tonight. We're starting the new year off with a bang and have a really packed agenda tonight. 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.

Year in Review

I hope you saw last week's Assembly newsletter that contained a recap of our 2023 accomplishments. The Assembly, with thanks to the Administration and all of our partners saw progress in all of our 2023 priorities, including advancement of the Port of Alaska modernization, passage of several initiatives to spur housing development, expansion of the Fire Department Mobile Crisis Team and Police Department Mobile Intervention Team, passage of the "Open Checkbook" to create an online dashboard of municipal spending, and nearly one hundred percent recovery from FEMA of the funds we spent on the pandemic.

At our Rules Committee meeting this week, the Assembly will develop our work plan for 2024 and we'll release that to the public by next month so you can follow along with our work over the next year.

Elections

Next, with the beginning of a new year comes the beginning of a new election cycle. The Municipality of Anchorage will hold a vote at home election this March and April and the Mayor, several school board seats, and the open District 2 Chugiak-Eagle River Assembly seat will be on the ballot, as well as a proposed Charter amendment and several bond propositions.

Candidate filing opens this Friday, January 12 at 8:00 a.m. and closes on Friday, January 26 at 5:00 p.m. The Assembly will be approving the bond propositions over the next two meetings and the last day of voting is Tuesday, April 2. Local elections have a direct impact on our daily lives, including the efficiency of our snow plowing, the health of our parks, and the strength of our public safety, so I encourage everyone to follow the issues closely and vote by this April 2nd.

