

Good Government Core Team Transition Report

On May 14, 2024, the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) voters elected Suzanne LaFrance to be the next mayor. She and her team immediately began outlining her transition priorities and the core values of her administration.

Priorities

Good Government: Staffing up departments, balancing the budget, and delivering better services.

Safe Streets and Trails: Tackling homelessness, staffing up the Anchorage Police Department, and improving public safety for everyone.

Building Our Future: Delivering better economic opportunities, more housing, affordable childcare, and a reliable energy future.

Core Values

Nonpartisan and collaborative

Low-ego problem solvers

Reflective of Anchorage's diversity

Innovative, recognizing that different outcomes require different approaches

As we begin this new chapter in our city's governance, one of the priority focus areas for Mayor LaFrance has been on establishing 'Good Government' - a foundation that will enable us to better serve all residents and tackle the challenges we face.

To accomplish this, first and foremost, the MOA must address the critical issue of staffing shortages across city departments. These vacancies have hindered the MOA's ability to deliver essential services effectively. The impact to our community is widespread – not enough accountants to finish financial audits in a timely manner, or with fewer and fewer police officers on the streets, or in the wintertime when we don't have enough snowplow operators to adequately plow our streets and sidewalks. The city must prioritize recruiting talented individuals to fill key positions, ensuring that our departments are fully equipped to meet the needs of our community. Throughout this transition process, staffing was repeatedly raised as crucial in improving response times, enhancing public safety, and maintaining our infrastructure.

Secondly, 'Balancing the Budget' has been a cornerstone of the transitions 'Good Government' approach. We all recognize the fiscal challenges ahead, including continued reductions in state support and the need for self-sufficiency. The LaFrance administration is committed to conducting a thorough review of city finances, identifying areas for potential savings while preserving critical services. They will work closely with the Assembly to develop a balanced budget that reflects our community's priorities and ensures long-term fiscal stability. Delivering better services to our residents is at the heart of the MOA's mission. Implementing

performance metrics and regular evaluations to measure the effectiveness of city programs and services will be critical to this mission. Finding ways to utilize AI in drafting ordinances and reducing the likelihood of duplication in regulations should be explored as well. By leveraging data-driven decision-making and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, the new administration will aim to enhance the quality and efficiency of services across all departments.

As we navigate this transition and the administration begins the work of rebuilding the MOA workforce and solving some of the most pressing issues our city faces, this core team remains committed to transparency and open communication. We look forward to regular updates to the public on progress and continuing to seek input from community members to ensure that our actions align with the needs and aspirations of our diverse population.

It is crucial for Anchorage to move beyond crisis management to ensure sustainable governance and community resilience. By focusing on proactive planning and routine communication, Anchorage can better prepare for unexpected events, reducing the impact of crises when they occur. Transitioning away from constant crisis management will allow Anchorage to allocate resources more efficiently, fostering long-term development and trust within the community.

Together, we have the opportunity to build a more responsive, efficient, and effective city government. By focusing on staffing, fiscal responsibility, and service delivery, we lay the groundwork for a thriving community that works for everyone. We look forward to working alongside our dedicated city employees, elected officials, and engaged residents as we embark on this journey of positive change and good governance.

Transparency in Local Government

One of the biggest foundational themes this core team kept coming back to during our discussion was openness and transparency in local government as essential pillars of democratic governance. These ideals foster accountability, enhance public trust, and ensure that local authorities operate within the law. Transparency is fundamentally about making government operations accessible and understandable to the public. It allows citizens to be informed about the decisions that affect their lives and provides them with the means to hold their officials accountable.

One of the most significant benefits of transparency is the trust it builds between local governments and their constituents. When residents are provided with clear and accessible information about government operations, including budgets, policies, and decision-making processes, they are more likely to engage positively with their local authorities. This engagement creates a feedback loop where public officials can incorporate community input into their decision-making, leading to more effective governance. When local governments operate in secrecy, there is a greater chance for mismanagement and unethical behavior. By contrast, transparent practices allow for public scrutiny, which can deter potential abuses of power. Unfortunately, this has been a missing piece in our local government over the last several years.

Despite the clear benefits, achieving transparency in local government can be challenging. Many local governments operate under tight budgets and limited resources, making it difficult to implement comprehensive transparency measures or being unable to respond to public record requests quickly and efficiently. The MOA should continue to invest in modern digital tools that facilitate transparency, such as online platforms for sharing meeting minutes, budgets, and other essential documents. Technology can significantly enhance transparency by making it easier for residents to access information and engage with their local governments.

Our belief in the importance of transparency in local government cannot be overstated. It serves as a foundation for accountability and fosters public trust. While challenges exist, the benefits of transparency—such as improved decision-making and enhanced community engagement—far outweigh the obstacles. The LaFrance administration must prioritize transparency not only to fulfill their legal obligations but also to strengthen the democratic fabric of our community. By embracing openness, Mayor LaFrance can create a more informed and engaged community, ultimately leading to better governance and improved quality of life for all residents.

Possible Recommendations for LaFrance Administration to Consider:

1. Redesign MOA website to be more user friendly.
2. Monthly newsletters to the public that describe the work the MOA is doing.
3. Develop an internal communications plan that provide updates to MOA employees.

Staffing Up MOA Departments

Anchorage residents are significantly impacted by the current high job vacancy rates at the MOA. The numerous roles that are unfilled, have led to reduced productivity, increased workload and low morale for current employees, and potential delays in providing essential services to residents. We have seen instances where the strain on current staff has resulted in burnout and further turnover, exacerbating the problem. Additionally, the Municipality has faced challenges in maintaining service quality and meeting project deadlines, which affects its overall efficiency and reputation. To address these issues, the MOA must invest more resources in recruitment efforts. This situation underscores the importance of effective workforce planning and retention strategies to minimize disruptions to city operations and maintain a high level of service for the community.

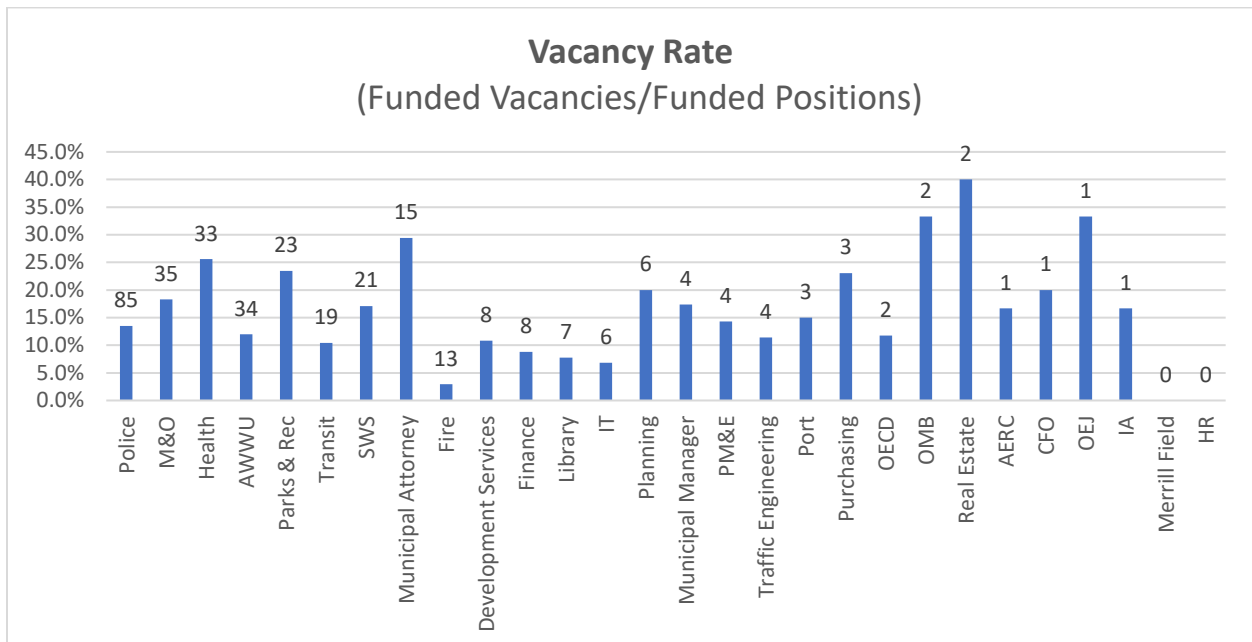
Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion efforts significantly enhance the recruitment of job applicants and skilled workers. These initiatives create a more attractive and welcoming environment for candidates from various backgrounds, leading to a broader and more diverse applicant pool. By adopting inclusive job advertisements, targeting diverse recruitment sources, and creating a supportive workplace culture, entities such as the Municipality can attract a wider range of candidates. Additionally, diverse teams are more agile and innovative, which not only helps in retaining skilled workers but also improves overall performance. Furthermore, inclusive practices such as mentoring, resource groups, and leadership programs ensure that diverse

employees feel supported and valued, which boosts employee satisfaction and retention. Further, using inclusive language in job postings and adjusting job descriptions to focus on skills rather than traditional qualifications can attract a wider range of candidates, including those from underrepresented groups.

Diversity and inclusion in local government processes and decision-making are crucial for creating effective, representative, and responsive governance. When local governments embrace diversity, they bring together a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and ideas, which leads to more comprehensive and innovative solutions to community challenges. This diversity in thought and background ensures that policies and services are designed to meet the needs of all community members, not just a select few. By prioritizing diversity and inclusion, the MOA can build trust and strengthen their relationship with the communities throughout Anchorage. When residents see themselves represented in their local government and feel that their voices are heard in the decision-making process, they are more likely to engage with and support government initiatives. This increased engagement leads to more effective policy implementation and service delivery.

A diverse and inclusive local government workforce is better equipped to understand and address the unique challenges faced by different segments of the community, resulting in more equitable and tailored services. Ultimately, embracing diversity and inclusion in local government processes and decision-making not only fulfills a moral imperative but also leads to more effective governance and improved outcomes for all community members.



Possible Recommendations for LaFrance Administration to Consider:

1. Use inclusive language in job postings and adjust job descriptions to focus on skills rather than traditional qualifications.

2. Regular review and analysis of compensation and benefits to attract and retain workers.
3. Reimagine how Human Resources interacts with employees.
4. Support a return to a defined benefit retirement system to attract and retain our next generation workforce.

Investing in Winter Infrastructure

Anchorage is a winter city. We face unique challenges that necessitate significant investment in snow removal equipment and personnel. This investment is crucial for several reasons, including ensuring safety, maintaining economic stability, and preserving infrastructure. Unfortunately, the MOA has not met the high bar residents expect during the winter months the last several years.

One of the primary reasons for investing in snow removal is to ensure the safety of residents, employees, and visitors. Accumulated snow and ice pose significant hazards, including slips and falls, vehicle accidents, and structural damage. For instance, unplowed roads and sidewalks increase the risk of accidents, which can lead to injuries or even fatalities. Snow and ice can also cause roofs to collapse, especially older structures, leading to severe property damage and even loss of life.

In recent years, inadequate snow removal during winter storms has led to significant disruptions, including the prolonged closure of local schools. When heavy snowfall accumulates and clearing efforts fall short, the consequences can be severe: streets become impassable, sidewalks remain treacherous, and safety concerns mount. As a result, schools that should be open for learning are forced to shut down for days, depriving students of valuable educational opportunities and leaving parents scrambling for childcare solutions. This not only impacts the academic calendar but also places additional stress on working families who rely on schools to provide a safe environment for their children while they attend to their jobs. The failure to effectively manage snow removal highlights the critical need for municipalities to prioritize infrastructure readiness, ensuring that communities can function smoothly even in the harshest winter conditions.

As we have seen, snow accumulation can severely disrupt economic activities. Businesses may experience interruptions due to inaccessible premises, leading to lost revenue. Employees may be unable to commute to work, and customers may avoid venturing out in hazardous conditions. For commercial properties, timely snow removal is essential to remain operational and accessible. Moreover, investing in snow removal services can enhance the image of Anchorage. A well-maintained city demonstrates a commitment to safety and convenience, fostering trust and loyalty among residents.

Providing for regular and efficient snow removal reduces these risks by keeping roads, sidewalks, and other critical areas clear and safe. This proactive approach not only protects individuals but also reduces liability for municipalities and businesses.

Winter weather is becoming even more unpredictable, with bigger or consecutive storms causing significant disruptions. Having dedicated snow removal personnel and equipment ensures that cities and businesses can respond quickly to such emergencies. This readiness is crucial to minimize the impact of severe weather events and maintain normalcy as much as possible. Investing in snow removal equipment and personnel is essential for winter cities to ensure safety, maintain economic stability, and preserve infrastructure. By being proactive and prepared, cities and businesses can mitigate the adverse effects of winter weather and continue to function effectively throughout the season.

Possible Recommendations for LaFrance Administration to Consider:

1. Propose to voters a significant “Winter City Snow Bond” that allows the MOA to purchase the necessary equipment to allow for timely plowing and removal of snow.
2. Add GPS to all snow plowing equipment to allow the public to track where plows are during plow outs.
3. Develop a “Winter City” page on the MOA website to provide up to date information to the public.

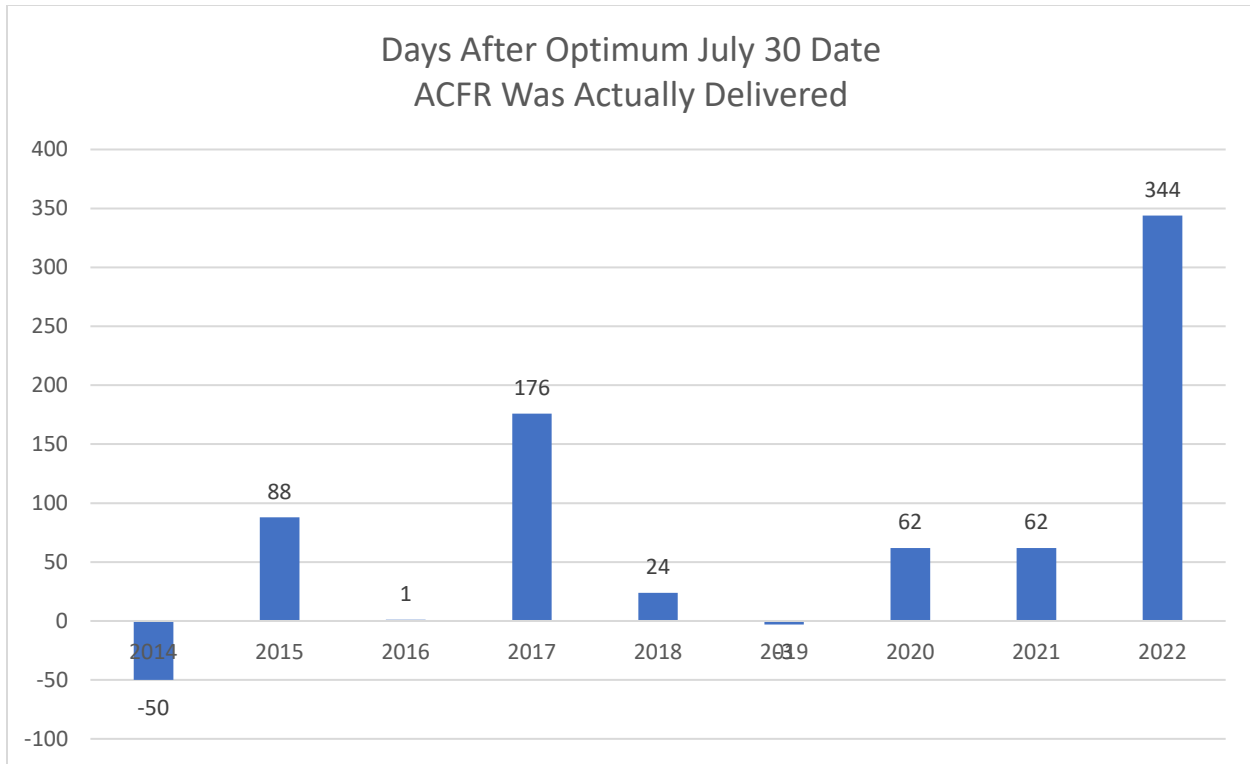
Fiscal Responsibility and a Balanced Budget

Adhering to a balanced budget is essential for the fiscal health and governance of Anchorage. In addition, the Municipality of Anchorage Charter requires a balanced budget to ensure the city does not spend more than its revenues. This fiscal discipline is crucial for maintaining the trust of residents and investors, as it demonstrates responsible management of public funds.

We were glad to see the MOA recently complete its 2022 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR). It was, however, over a year behind schedule making the timely completion of the 2023 ACFR impossible. The inability to complete these reports has the potential to put state and federal funds at risk. At its most basic, the ACFR provides a detailed overview of the city's financial condition, including revenues, expenditures, and changes in fund balances. This comprehensive report allows residents, investors, and policymakers to assess the city's financial health and make informed decisions. The ACFR also serves as a critical tool for identifying areas of improvement and ensuring that public funds are used efficiently and effectively. The LaFrance administration should put all available resources into completing the 2023 ACFR as soon as possible.

The municipal budget directly impacts the quality of life in Anchorage by funding essential services such as fire and rescue response, police, parks, libraries, roads, and health services. This is particularly important for maintaining the infrastructure and public services that residents rely on daily.

Fiscal stability is foundational for the long-term economic health of Anchorage. A stable fiscal environment attracts businesses and investors, fostering economic growth and job creation.



Possible Recommendations for LaFrance Administration to Consider:

1. Prioritize the 2023 ACFR and complete it as soon as possible.
2. Work with the Assembly to pass a balanced budget that allows the MOA to fully fund its reserve accounts (known as the 10 and the 2).
3. Consider the use of AI in making local government more effective and efficient.

Investing in Public Safety

Ensuring public safety is the most important work of any local government. The investment in our police and fire departments not only ensures the immediate safety of residents but builds long-term community resilience and trust.

The police (APD) and fire (AFD) departments in Anchorage are facing significant staffing challenges. AFD is experiencing a shortage of firefighters and paramedics, which is straining their ability to respond to emergencies effectively. AFD firefighters work a 56-hour work week, but their current staffing model does not meet industry standards. This has led real world consequences including increased turnover, more injuries, a higher fire fatality rate, longer response times, and low morale.

Every community in the country has been grappling with a tight labor market and limited budgets, making it challenging for these departments to maintain optimal staffing levels and provide comprehensive public safety services. For comparison, however, no departments in Washington state work a 56-hour schedule and they also have a defined benefit retirement incentive. This has resulted in many of our police officers and firefighters leaving the state for

places with better pay, fewer hours, and a secure retirement. It probably isn't common knowledge that AFD firefighters do not qualify to receive social security in retirement. These challenges make us the best training facility for police and fire departments in the Pacific Northwest.

This must change.

It is imperative that the state of Alaska work together to modernize a broken public employee pension system to retain public employees and cut wasteful spending on avoidable turnover and retraining. Alaska has the worst-in-the-nation retirement system for local police, Alaska State Troopers, and statewide firefighters, costing our state and local governments approximately \$76 million annually due to turnover and retraining.

Sustainable public safety requires continuous investment and innovation. The MOA must look beyond immediate needs and plan for long-term safety strategies. This includes maintaining and upgrading equipment, providing ongoing training for personnel, and developing robust community engagement programs. For instance, cities like Baltimore have utilized ARPA funds to implement comprehensive violence reduction strategies, which have led to significant decreases in crime without increasing arrests.

It is important to understand that public safety is not the sole responsibility of the police and fire departments. It requires a collaborative approach involving various groups, including government agencies, community organizations, and residents. Local governments play a crucial role in organizing and motivating these partnerships. Effective collaboration can lead to innovative solutions and more efficient use of resources.

Investing in local government fire and police services is essential for enhancing public safety. These investments ensure that emergency services are well-equipped, well-trained, and capable of responding effectively to crises. Moreover, they contribute to economic growth, social cohesion, and long-term sustainability. By prioritizing funding for fire and police services, local governments can create safer, more resilient communities.

Possible Recommendations for LaFrance Administration to Consider:

1. Comprehensive plan to allow AFD to meet industry staffing within 10 years.
2. Provide competitive wages and benefits to our public safety employees to allow Anchorage to attract and retain employees.
3. Invest in the overall fleet requirements for both APD and AFD.

Conclusion

The transition to the administration of Mayor Suzanne LaFrance marks a pivotal moment for Anchorage. Mayor LaFrance has committed to focusing on good governance, financial stability, and enhancing municipal services.

Getting Anchorage back on track will require significant work in each of the following areas:

1. **Strengthen Recruitment and Retention:** Address staffing shortages by enhancing recruitment efforts, offering competitive salaries, and improving working conditions to retain skilled employees across all departments.
2. **Financial Oversight and Accountability:** Prioritize timely financial audits and transparent reporting to secure grant funding and maintain financial stability. Implement measures to prevent burnout and high turnover in critical financial roles.
3. **Infrastructure Investment:** Continue to leverage federal and state funding for infrastructure projects, ensuring the completion of key initiatives like the Don Young Port of Alaska Modernization Program. Focus on maintaining and upgrading essential city assets, including snow removal equipment and public safety facilities.
4. **Community Engagement:** Foster strong relationships with community leaders, businesses, and residents to promote civic engagement and address constituent concerns effectively.

By focusing on good governance, financial stability, and improved services, the incoming administration of Mayor LaFrance is well-positioned to address the critical issues facing Anchorage. The path forward requires a concerted effort to strengthen municipal operations, ensure financial transparency, and engage the community in shaping Anchorage's future.

We want to extend our thanks to our core transition team members, Mike Abbott, Jane Angvik, Eleanor Andrews, Jasmin Smith, Jennifer Johnston, Forrest Dunbar, Justin Mack, and Tasha Pineda, for their invaluable contributions. Their expertise and dedication have been instrumental in understanding the issues the MOA is facing and providing a roadmap and vision for the city's future. Their efforts exemplify the spirit of civic engagement that will be crucial as we move forward.