



FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES, APRIL 8, 2024  
FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
800 CUSHMAN STREET, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

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The City Council convened at 6:30 p.m. on the above date to conduct a Regular Meeting of the Fairbanks City Council via Zoom webinar and at the City Council Chambers, 800 Cushman Street, Fairbanks, Alaska, with Mayor David Pruhs presiding and with the following Councilmembers in attendance:

Councilmembers Present:        Jerry Cleworth, Seat A  
   June Rogers, Seat B (remotely)  
   Sue Sprinkle, Seat C  
   Crystal Tidwell, Seat D  
   Lonny Marney, Seat E  
   John Ringstad, Seat F

Absent:                                        None

Also Present:                                D. Danyielle Snider, City Clerk  
   Thomas Chard, City Attorney  
   Michael Sanders, Chief of Staff  
   Margarita Bell, Chief Financial Officer  
   Ron Dupee, Police Chief  
   Nathan Werner, Police Captain  
   Andrew Coccaro, Fire Chief  
   Kristi Merideth, FECC Manager (remotely)  
   Brynn Butler, Housing Coordinator (remotely)

### **INVOCATION**

The invocation was given by City Clerk Danyielle Snider.

### **FLAG SALUTATION**

At the request of Mayor Pruhs, **Ms. Tidwell** led the flag salutation.

### **CITIZENS' COMMENTS**

*[Clerk Note: Names of citizens who provide comments may not be spelled correctly if their name was illegible on the physical sign-up sheet.]*

Robert Shields – R. Shields referenced a Resolution from 2023 that supported further economic development in downtown Fairbanks and shared that a local developer with over 20 years of experience will be up later in the month for the 6th Annual Regenerative Planet Summit. He reported that the Plumbers & Pipefitters Union Local 375 is sponsoring the summit, and they will be hosting Daryl Oster to speak about new technologies that could provide economic development

in Alaska, especially around transportation. R. Shields recognized that many of the suggestions from the organization he represents, the Alliance for Reason and Knowledge, were included in the draft plan for the Polaris Building site project, and he expressed a desire to know how they can advocate for those ideas to be included in the final cut. He explained that their interest in the future of the site is tied to the context of how Fairbanks looks when it prospers and thrives and to how they hope to see that again. R. Shields affirmed their commitment to invest in those goals by bringing in speakers and securing agreements with various entities who are interested in supporting their vision for the community. He invited the Council to attend the upcoming summit and requested that a Council work session be scheduled to share about the various opportunities, projects, ideas, and challenges they are involved with, specifically their vision for the Polaris site.

Victor Buberger – V. Buberger shared that upon his return from a recent trip, he had a medical issue with his heart which caused him to miss the last meeting. He reported that while in the hospital, he had conversations with several nurses and attendants, many of whom he perceived to be military spouses, about their thoughts on the GARS intersection. V. Buberger indicated that their responses were overwhelmingly negative and that the number of accidents in that area had dramatically increased. He acknowledged that this was a State project and claimed that he has yet to meet one person who likes the new intersection. He questioned whether the \$40MM cost was worth it and spoke against the project slated for the Steese Highway and Johansen Expressway intersection.

Bill Wright, Explore Fairbanks Director of Tourism and Meeting Sales – B. Wright gave an update on his work and shared about the various events they have hosted with groups representing numerous travel programs around the world. He listed several trade shows that his team had attended across the country to promote travel to the Interior. He shared that 2024 is off to a great start and that there is an anticipating an increase in travel capacity at the airport as certain routes have returned or been added. B. Wright discussed both occupancy and daily rates of local hotels. He reported that the “Today Show” had a segment earlier in the day highlighting the solar eclipse and other cosmic phenomena, and they included a reference to the northern lights in Fairbanks.

**Ms. Sprinkle** asked if Condor Airlines was one of the companies resuming routes to Fairbanks. B. Wright stated that unfortunately they are not. He added that Condor’s representatives have cited the challenge of making it economical for the airlines, though three flights to Anchorage will still occur in the summer. He indicated that some of their marketing is targeted to those travelers with the hope that they will make their way to Fairbanks while visiting Alaska.

David van den Berg, Downtown Association (DTA) of Fairbanks Executive Director – D. van den Berg expressed his organization’s support for Resolution No. 5115. He indicated that they view the City’s increase of the tobacco tax as a reasonable action to ensure stable revenue in order to budget for vital services. He affirmed that the DTA believes the request that the Borough exempt the tax within the City makes a lot of sense for the reasons expressed in the resolution.

**Mr. Cleworth** thanked D. van den Berg for the support and asked when the summer solstice celebration will be held. D. van den Berg stated it will be Saturday, June 22 from noon to midnight.

Hearing no more requests for comment, **Mayor Pruhs** declared Citizens’ Comments closed.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND CONSENT AGENDA**

**Ms. Sprinkle**, seconded by **Mr. Ringstad**, moved to APPROVE the agenda and consent agenda.

**Ms. Sprinkle** pulled item 12(b), Resolution No. 5115, from the consent agenda.

**Mayor Pruhs** called for objection to the APPROVAL of the agenda, as amended and, hearing none, so ORDERED.

Clerk Snider read the consent agenda, as amended, into the record.

**SPECIAL ORDERS**

a) The Fairbanks City Council held a public hearing and considered the following alcohol license application for renewal:

Lic. #	DBA	License Type	Licensee	Address
5780	Jazz Bistro "Havana Nights"	Restaurant/Eating Place	Bluenote Create, Inc.	529 4th Avenue

**Mr. Marney**, seconded by **Ms. Tidwell**, moved to WAIVE PROTEST on the alcohol license application for renewal.

**Mayor Pruhs** called for testimony and hearing none, declared Public Testimony closed.

**Ms. Sprinkle** asked what "no match found" meant in the attached report. Clerk Snider explained that that indicates there were no records for calls in FPD's records for this location and timeframe.

**Mr. Marney** noted that this may be the first time he has seen zero entries on a report.

**Ms. Rogers** stated that this business exemplifies the ideals they often discuss about a refreshed downtown environment with boutique businesses. She expressed support for their presence and efforts to add to the downtown scene.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO WAIVE PROTEST ON THE ALCOHOL LICENSE APPLICATION FOR RENEWAL AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Tidwell, Cleworth, Marney, Ringstad, Sprinkle, Rogers

NAYS: None

**Mayor Pruhs** declared the MOTION CARRIED.

**MAYOR'S COMMENTS AND REPORT**

**Mayor Pruhs** thanked the Public Works and Engineering departments for their work to make the Polaris Building Commencement of Destruction event and celebration a positive experience. He reported that they have begun work to draft package options for homeowners in the Island Homes subdivision in anticipation of the large project to redo roadways and utilities in that area beginning

in 2025. He recognized Mr. Marney's suggestion regarding public outreach as the process comes together. **Mayor Pruhs** stated that a recent newspaper article highlighted that the MACS transit center on 5th Avenue and Cushman Street experiences frequent calls to the police and claimed that response times can be from 20 to 30 minutes. He shared that, upon his request, the Chief of Police and FECC Manager provided a report for calls to that location which turned out to be an eye-opener. **Mayor Pruhs** indicated that by the typical definition, the property would be considered a nuisance property, with 103 calls during the timeframe of the search. He clarified that a majority of the calls were for trespassing issues, with only 10 calls classified as critical priority. He noted that the average total response time for critical calls was eight minutes, while trespassing and other non-critical call response times were 10 to 15 minutes. **Mayor Pruhs** pointed out that the location has its own security, so the concern is whether those personnel can adequately keep patrons safe. He acknowledged that his own private business has an office across the street from that property, and it is clear that problems are persistent. He expressed hope that the Borough could get more security presence at the transit center and affirmed that FPD is answering calls promptly.

### **COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS**

**Ms. Tidwell** indicated that she had no comments at this time.

**Mr. Cleworth** stated that like V. Buberger, he is baffled by the GARS intersection and noted that he was not involved with FAST Planning when it was being deliberated. He confirmed that now, as members of that committee, he and Mayor Pruhs have taken a good look at the planned updates to the Steese intersection, including video simulations of the new traffic flows. He expressed his belief that it makes sense and was well done and stated that he has faith in that project.

**Ms. Rogers** thanked the Council for its support as she goes through a difficult time with illness. She affirmed that while Zoom is a great benefit, in-person attendance is important to her.

**Mr. Marney** shared that he, Ms. Sprinkle, Chief of Staff Sanders, and Clerk Snider attended the retirement celebration for Sergeant Laska at FPD and gave recognition for his years of service.

**Mr. Ringstad** expressed regret that he was out of town for the Polaris Building event but was glad to hear that his granddaughter and her friends attended and saw the inside of the building for the first time. He wished success for the project. He referenced the issues at the MACS Transit Center and shared that he had recently driven past the location and witnessed a security and uniformed officer dealing with an unruly individual. He agreed that it is something that needs to be looked at.

**Ms. Sprinkle** stated she enjoyed attending the Polaris Building event and Sgt. Laska's retirement event. She expressed gratitude for things going on in the city and for the opportunity to serve.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

- a) Ordinance No. 6277 – An Ordinance Authorizing Additional Matching Funds for the Cowles Street Reconstruction Project and Amending the 2024 Capital Budget. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs. SECOND READING AND PUBLIC HEARING.

**Mr. Ringstad**, seconded by **Mr. Marney**, moved to ADOPT Ordinance No. 6277.

**Mayor Pruhs** called for testimony and hearing none, declared Public Testimony closed.

**Mr. Cleworth** expressed concern at the potential increase of the project from \$7.2MM to \$15.8MM since it is currently unknown where the cost will fall. He proposed that the Council approve the ordinance and see what happens when soil testing is complete. He suggested that if it turns out they will need to spend millions of dollars to ship away contaminated dirt, then they should instead at least consider shifting funds to the other Cowles Street project where the soil is not an issue. He requested that Mayor Pruhs come back to the Council with updated costs, once they are known, so the Council can review project feasibility.

**Mr. Ringstad** echoed Mr. Cleworth's concerns and concurred with his reasoning.

**Ms. Sprinkle** indicated that she was under the impression that there were two pieces to the project, but an email from City Engineer Robert Pristash and this ordinance seemed to suggest otherwise. **Mr. Cleworth** explained that he understands there to be two phases to the project, and the budget only includes what is known as Phase I. He stated he believes the ordinance only refers to Phase I but acknowledged that may not be the case. Others indicated that they thought it was combined.

**Mayor Pruhs** acknowledged that it is uncommon for the City to put something out there without an exact cost. He confirmed that the ordinance would allow them to go forward but assured the Council that it would review the item once the numbers were clarified. He stated that the location has been problematic and agreed that the environmental unknowns and costs are worrisome.

**Mr. Ringstad** asked for clarification on the work being performed in the coming summer, whether it would be only soil testing, and what funds have already been appropriated. **Mayor Pruhs** explained that the confusion about the project is due to its complicated and multi-faceted nature.

**Mr. Marney** pointed out that this is the second time the City has run into the issue of not being able to handle hazmat materials in-state. He noted that the military has completely different allowances as well as issues with contamination and asked if this is something they should be communicating with Alaska senators about. **Mayor Pruhs** shared that when they encountered the contamination issues with the Polaris Building in December 2022, he spoke for an hour with the Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) in Anchorage. He stated that the Commissioner indicated that since taking office, he has made an increased effort to pursue the permitting process for EPA approval for an in-state disposal site. **Mayor Pruhs** reported that he also discussed the topic with Senator Murkowski at the event on Friday, and she affirmed that they recognize the significance of the challenge and are working on it.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO ADOPT ORDINANCE NO. 6277 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Cleworth, Marney, Ringstad, Sprinkle, Tidwell, Rogers  
NAYS: None  
**Mayor Pruhs** declared the MOTION CARRIED and Ordinance No. 6277 ADOPTED.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

- a) Resolution No. 5114 – A Resolution Authorizing the City of Fairbanks to Apply for Funds from the Alaska Highway Safety Office for FFY2025 DUI Traffic Enforcement Unit. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs.

APPROVED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- b) Resolution No. 5115 – A Resolution Requesting the Fairbanks North Star Borough Consider Exempting Its Tax of Tobacco Products Within the City of Fairbanks. Introduced by Councilmembers Cleworth, Sprinkle, and Marney.

**Mr. Cleworth**, seconded by **Ms. Sprinkle**, moved to APPROVE Resolution No. 5115.

**Mr. Cleworth** stated that one of the problems is that the sponsor of the Borough's ordinance originally agreed with the position that the tax increase should exempt businesses within the city, and he went into the Assembly meeting under the impression that there would be an amendment to that effect. He pointed out that no such amendment was made, that another one was attempted but voted down, and when it came to the main motion, it only passed by a vote of 5-4. He indicated that the frustration is over signals being given, both to a Councilmember as well as a business owner, over anticipated adjustments that never came.

**Mayor Pruhs** explained that what he finds worrisome is that for possibly the first time in the history of the City and Borough, without any preceding discussion, one body has taken an action which creates a significant economic imbalance for businesses within the City versus those outside it. He expressed concern as to whether this might happen again either with future taxes or changes to the existing parameters of taxation on products and services such as alcohol, marijuana, and room rentals. **Mayor Pruhs** recounted the claim that the ordinance was primarily intended to combat underage tobacco and vaping usage, while simultaneously creating a situation where the cheapest place in town to purchase tobacco products will be at the gas station across from West Valley and Hutchison high schools. He stated that it does not seem that the Assembly went through the process soundly and that there are consequences for doing so, citing a loss of trust. **Mayor Pruhs** stated that Borough Mayor Bryce Ward had the option but chose not to veto the ordinance, despite the close vote. He recounted a situation from a few years ago where the Borough wanted to adjust the hours for alcohol sales because one business in the Goldstream Valley, outside the city, wanted their package store to be able to open earlier and close later. He reported that the police were in opposition for multiple reasons, but the Assembly still passed it despite vehement opposition from the City. **Mayor Pruhs** expressed the hope that the Borough will recognize the issues at hand, take the City's resolution seriously, and reconsider the action taken in March.

**Mr. Marney** stated that he has been thinking about the issue a lot and would simply like to ask the Borough Mayor and Assemblymembers what they would do if the shoe was on the other foot.

**Ms. Tidwell, Ms. Rogers, Mr. Ringstad, and Mayor Pruhs** each asked to be added as sponsors.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO APPROVE RESOLUTION NO. 5115 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Ringstad, Tidwell, Rogers, Sprinkle, Marney, Cleworth  
NAYS: None  
**Mayor Pruhs** declared the MOTION CARRIED and Resolution  
No. 5115 APPROVED.

### **WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS TO THE CITY COUNCIL**

a) Historic Preservation Commission Meeting Minutes of December 5, 2023

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

b) Clay Street Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes of March 6, 2024

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

c) Memorandum Regarding Fairbanks Police Department Budgeted Positions

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS AND COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS**

**Ms. Tidwell** stated that she had no committee reports, that the Polaris celebration was a great event, and that she looks forward to hearing the ideas people have for that property.

**Mr. Marney** reminded everyone that school will be out soon, and the speed limit in most neighborhoods is 20 mph. He urged citizens to exercise caution.

**Mr. Ringstad** indicated that he had no further report or comments.

**Ms. Sprinkle** shared that there would be a Chena Riverfront Commission meeting in a few weeks.

**Ms. Rogers** echoed Mr. Marney's call for caution and described situations of low tree branches covering speed limit signs in her neighborhood. She asked if Public Works could address the issue. She spoke about issues with the Borough and stated that until they can all work together in a way that helps the community prosper, neither entity will be as successful as they otherwise could be.

**Mr. Cleworth** thanked Clerk Snider and City Attorney Chard for helping get Resolution No. 5115 finalized in time for the meeting. He expressed hope that Ms. Rogers would be able to return soon.

### **CITY CLERK'S REPORT**

Clerk Snider stated she had nothing to report.

### **CITY ATTORNEY'S REPORT**

Attorney Chard stated he had nothing to report.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**Mr. Cleworth**, seconded by **Ms. Sprinkle**, moved to ENTER Executive Session to discuss Fairbanks Firefighters Union (FFU) Labor Negotiation Strategy.

**Mayor Pruhs** called for objection and, hearing none, so ORDERED.

**Mayor Pruhs** called for a brief recess. The Council reconvened in Executive Session following the brief recess.

a) Fairbanks Firefighters Union Labor Negotiation Strategy (*entered at 7:32 p.m.*)

**Mr. Cleworth** brought the City Council out of the Executive Session, noting that the City Council met in Executive Session to discuss FFU Labor Negotiation Strategy. He affirmed that direction was given to the negotiating team, but no action was taken.

The regular meeting resumed at 8:12 p.m.

**Mr. Cleworth** stated that he and Ms. Sprinkle would like to have the Cowles Street project included on the agenda for the next work session.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Ms. Tidwell**, seconded by **Mr. Ringstad**, moved to ADJOURN the meeting.

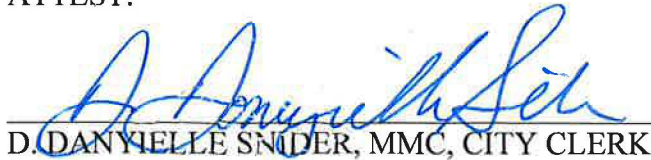
**Mayor Pruhs** called for objection and, hearing none, so ORDERED.

**Mayor Pruhs** declared the meeting adjourned at 8:13 p.m.



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DAVID PRUHS, MAYOR

ATTEST:



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D. DANYIELLE SNIDER, MMC, CITY CLERK

Transcribed by: CC