



City of Homer

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Memorandum

TO: Mayor Castner and Homer City Council
FROM: Rob Dumouchel, City Manager
DATE: August 10, 2023
SUBJECT: City Manager's Report for August 14, 2023 Council Meeting

Employee Appreciation BBQ

On August 2nd, a rare sunny day, the City Manager's office hosted an employee appreciation BBQ at City Hall. Staff from all over the City, and a few elected officials, converged on the City Hall for an afternoon of good food and good company. With numerous work sites scattered all over the City, it's uncommon for the whole team to be able to get together like this, but it's always a good time when we can make it happen. A big thank you to Assistant to the City Manager Bella Vaz for coordinating the event!



Visit with DOT Commissioner Anderson

In an effort to address transportation challenges in Alaska's Central Region, Representative Sarah Vance organized a visit with Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) Commissioner Ryan Anderson to Homer on July 27. The visit aimed to familiarize the Commissioner with the area's needs and gain firsthand insights. Accompanied by DOT&PF Legislative Liaison/Special Assistant Andy Mills, the delegation met with local officials to discuss projects and plans, including Homer Mayor Ken Castner, Kachemak City Mayor Connie Isenhour, Homer City Councilmember Shelly Erikson, and City of Homer Special Projects Coordinator Jenny Carroll. Key topics included: addressing safety concerns and managing increased traffic on East End Road; evaluating road conditions and ensuring pedestrian safety on Kachemak Drive; exploring stormwater and groundwater management during road construction and the importance of local knowledge; analyzing Homer's Kachemak Sponge project and its significance; and erosion conditions on the Homer Spit.

Alaska Municipal League Summer Conference

At the time of this report's submittal, the AML summer conference is underway. On Wednesday, I led the one-day Alaska Municipal Management Association (AMMA) conference as president of the organization. We had about 25 participants from all over the state and wide ranging discussions covering topics like mental health/manager sustainability, homelessness in Alaska, strategic planning, and the future of generative AI in local government. The rest of the AML programming on Thursday and Friday is focused on legislative topics of statewide interest. The event will also feature a reception hosted by the City, coordinated by AML staff and Assistant to the City Manager Bella Vaz, on Thursday evening.

Finance Funds Overview

Working with the Finance Director, I have sketched out all of the various funds currently in use within the City. In future meetings, what we'd like to do is start working with Council to create policies for these funds. A few funds have existing policy documents, but the vast majority do not. We have approximately 40 to 50 funds to talk about. Some will be easy, some just need to be emptied and deleted, and others will require extended conversation. I anticipate that we'll be ready to get underway with the first of those discussions in September.

Transit Meeting

On August 3rd, I meet with Lisa Reinhart and Brad Parsons from the Southern Kenai Peninsula Transit Coalition (SKPTC) to discuss transit issues in Homer. There are a lot of benefits to enhanced public transportation, but Homer is a particularly tricky place in which to implement such services due to our population density, topography, lack of street parking, etc. We had a very wide ranging discussion about transit from the perspective of the City as a place, as an organization, and as an employer. Brad and Lisa are conducting numerous community interviews and I am very interested to see what findings come from the conversations.

Third Airline Potentially Coming to Homer

The City has been approached by Aleutian Airlines about signing a lease that would allow them the possibility of expanding their flights to include a Homer-Anchorage daily service starting this fall. Staff met with an Aleutian Air representative on July 20th for a walk through of the available terminal space for lease and to discuss options and operations. Aleutian Airlines run Saab 2000 aircraft, which are 50 seat passenger planes with takeoff capabilities that do well on short runways. They're thinking of providing a reliable business travel option, with service in the early morning and again in the evening to facilitate easy daily roundtrips. The collaborative meeting generated some positive ideas on how the available lease space within the Homer airport terminal might fit those plans. The City has received a lease application from the company that is going through internal staff review now and is slotted to be included in the August 28th packet for Council review.

Advisory Body Work Session Scheduling

In March, Council discussed the benefits of conducting off cycle work sessions with boards and commissions to conduct training that primarily addresses roles and responsibilities of advisory bodies, the report structure at Council meetings, recommendations to and from Council, and provide opportunity for questions and discussion. A successful session was scheduled in April with the Port and Harbor Advisory Commission. Sessions still need to be scheduled with the five remaining groups. City Clerk Jacobsen is interested in knowing if Council wants to begin scheduling in September or wait until October after elections, and if the preference to conduct one or two off-cycle work sessions per month.

AMLJIA Meeting

On July 28th I attended an Alaska Municipal League Joint Insurance Agency (AMLJIA) meeting of the board of trustees. As a reminder, I joined the board in 2022 as a member representative and all travel related to participation is paid for by AMLJIA. The big take away from this meeting, and frankly all recent meetings, is that “hard” market conditions continue to persist and will remain for an unknown number of years into the future. Members, like the City of Homer, should prepare for significant increases in the coming years. I think the increases already forecasted into the FY24/25 budget will cover our needs, but the next biennium may see big changes. These market conditions are not unique to Alaska, it is a nationwide phenomenon driven by large losses from fires, hurricanes, etc. One method AMLJIA is exploring to potentially reduce costs is a merger with Alaska Public Entity Insurance (APEI) to expand the pool in Alaska. Those talks are going well, but are a long term play.