



City of Homer

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Memorandum

TO: Mayor Castner and Homer City Council
FROM: Melissa Jacobsen, Acting City Manager
DATE: February 21, 2024
SUBJECT: City Manager's Report for February 26, 2024 Council Meeting

Welcome New Staff

While City Manager Dumouchel was out I had the opportunity to welcome our new Public Works Director Dan Kort and City Engineer/Special Projects Coordinator Leon Galbraith to the City of Homer team. I took them around City Hall to familiarize them with the building and meet the administrative and finance teams before they made their way to Public Works. They've been busy engaging with the departments and local partners to get up to speed on City projects and processes. We're glad to have them on board!

Visit from Strong Towns

On Tuesday February 20th, the City hosted a visit by Strong Towns founder Chuck Marohn. Chuck is a nationally renowned speaker from Brainerd Minnesota who advocates for land development patterns that are financially strong and sustainable for municipal governments. His presentation was attended by about 80 community members in person and via zoom. Chuck's visit was a great start to upcoming conversations about the City's Comprehensive Plan. While he found the Homer Spit, harbor and the scenery breathtaking, he was "underwhelmed" by our built community. One of his talking points is that it takes a tax base to pay for long term maintenance costs of infrastructure – the water and sewer pipes in the ground, road maintenance and eventual repaving. The many gaps between buildings on Pioneer Avenue provide an opportunity for development that would use existing infrastructure, and help pay those long term costs. Infill development would also create more economic activity, help create a walkable environment, and contribute for a more financially viable development pattern particularly for small towns with a limited tax base. His presentation was recorded and will be shared in the coming weeks. Many thanks to Adele Person and Bunnell Street Arts Center for helping to coordinate his visit, and to Guiding Growth for helping with advertising this event.



Screening of the Movie “Cruise Boom”

On February 27th, there will be a free showing of the movie “Cruise Boom” at the Homer Theater. The movie was filmed in Sitka and takes a look at the cruise ship industry and the impacts of tourism. The Port & Harbor and Economic Development have partnered to bring this movie to town and engage in conversations related to the impacts of tourism on small cities in Alaska.

ADFG Waterfowl Monitoring Program

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game plans to trap waterfowl via rocket netting on April 19th to 26th in Beluga Slough. The purpose of this project is to band and tag migrating waterfowl as they transit through the Homer area. The target species of this work will be Lesser Canada and Taverner’s cackling geese, but all waterfowl capture will be banded as part of the state’s waterfowl monitoring program. The primary objectives of this project are to map the seasonal distributions of Lesser Canada and Taverner’s cackling geese and to estimate survival and harvest of these species. This is critical information for the management of these species. Work will be conducted under Federal Bird Banding Permit 08350. Agency staff conducting this work have extensive experience with the use of rocket netting to capture waterfowl, including geese.

Voter Turnout Working Group

On August 1, 2023, the Borough Assembly enacted Resolution 2023-053 forming the Voter Turnout Working Group. The working group’s scope of work was to explore actionable options and ideas to present to the Assembly that are aimed at increasing awareness, participation, and voting in local elections, including but not limited to changing the Borough election day to align with the State of Alaska. The 14 member working group was made up of City and Borough Clerks and interested citizens that included myself and Council Member Aderhold. We met six times with the last meeting on February 22nd when we finalized our prioritized recommendations to the Borough Assembly. Our recommendations include surveying borough residents, public outreach/education, promotion, offering early voting prior to an election, developing partnerships with businesses in the community, considering email distribution of ballots and changing statute language from Special Needs ballots to Additional Needs ballots. The group also addressed combining borough and city ballots, changing the local election date, and vote by mail, but after roll call votes, those items weren’t added to the prioritized list. I went into this wondering how we’d be able to get through our charge in such a short time! I was pleased and impressed by the way this group of people with very diverse ideas and opinions who care about elections gathered together and had robust conversation, listened respectfully, and shared some really great ideas. The final report is scheduled to go the Assembly in March and I’ll share a copy when it’s available.

An Opossums Life for Me

After last year’s excitement of having our furry marsupial friend Grubby and her passel stow away to our town and win our hearts, there have been a couple of reports of her little joeys making it big in other towns. This past December the Oregon Zoo welcomed Homer to their facility, and recently Bramble Park Zoo in South Dakota shared a story about Grublet, who recently made his debut. Both of these youngsters have joined Ambassador Teams at their respective zoos and are being won over by their keepers with enticing treats of berries and bananas. In looking at the top right photo, Grublet may have been the little one who stopped by the City Clerk’s office for some assistance. How neat is that? 😊

