

Tara Hueper 4/14/2025 - City council meeting
Volunteer at HVFD 2022-2024

Dear City Manager and City Council,

Here is my personal story and experience at HVFD::

Thanksgiving 2022, I and 3 other EMT 1 students met up to practice drills. We loved learning about EMS so much that we didn't want to tear ourselves away from it for even a single holiday. While I was with them, I got a phone call from my grandma Chicee. I could hardly hear words escape her mouth. I knew she had lower than 50% lung function due to COPD. My training kicked in. I threw some EMS tools in my car and ran.

Fast forward two years:

Christmas 2024, I was in a hospital room in Minnesota watching over my grandma Lorraine. Her body was shutting down, between a stroke, pneumonia, Covid 19, & congestive heart failure. Despite this, multiple nurses turned off her oxygen. I swear they were trying to kill her. If it were not for some of the training I had at HVFD, I would have never caught it.

I used to be a caregiver for the criminally insane. Like me, almost everyone in my EMT volunteer class had already seen blood soaked floors and chaotic emergencies. We knew what we were getting ourselves into. For 2 ½ months in 2022, I spent 30 hours a week studying EMS. This is why I think it's silly to say volunteers leave because they don't realize how much of a time investment it is. We all invested at least 200 hours before even being allowed to touch a patient.

I was excited, ready, hungry, and empowered after graduating EMT 1.

I was extremely nervous being so new. Despite this, I never dreaded the calls.... But I did grow to dread entering the 4 walls of the fire station. I stopped going to HVFD because the work environment (not patients or calls) had an impact on my health. I learned quickly that the unspoken motto of the department was "volunteers are supposed to be seen, not heard". Certain staff (that are not there now to clarify) would consistently ignore me, to the point where some wouldn't acknowledge I even entered the room unless I said hi loudly enough that they could not pretend that they never heard it. I have had some staff look at me dead in the eyes for trying to contribute to casual non-work conversations in the public member kitchen when they were talking to each other during downtime.

I left and came back when I felt my health could handle the environment.

I came back in January 2024 and transitioned into a volunteer support staff role until I was ready to be on an ambulance again.

Several volunteers were cut off from the department without any explanation or warning of what the issues the fire department had with them. I am one of those volunteers. A couple of months after I donated 40+ hours of help in an EMT 1 class, my key access was deactivated and I was locked out of volunteer meetings. I was never sat down, I was never given warnings. I never knew what the issues were that HVFD had with me. And to be honest, I didn't want to ask Chief Kirko. I was extremely intimidated by him. I will have to expand more on that in the future.

Please do not perceive this as needless panic. Volunteers have more to lose than gain by coming forward. Inherently people in EMS are not easily phased by emergencies. EMTs see things like blood, guts, vomit, feces, suicide, cardiac arrests, collapsed lungs, and several other things that would cause normal people to go into panic. If you're hearing several volunteers say they're scared, particularly the ones who have stood by HVFD for decades, **it is for a reason.** Volunteers are one of the strongest advocates for the community since we do not lose the ability to feed ourselves by being honest about an organization's faults. A paid EMT/firefighter understandably has to weigh that risk, and I do not blame them for it.

I mourn the loss of my EMS community and the purpose it gave me. What I mourn the most, however, is the fact that I will not be adequately prepared to help save my loved ones or community members in a life-threatening emergency. Being a part of a fire department gave me the education and ongoing practice to assist my fellow man. I never would have been able to help protect my family without it.

Thank you so much for all your listening. It means so much!

Solutions:

Information gathering

- A) Task Force
 - Multiple long-standing community members, with different backgrounds (it will be important for there to be at least 2-3 people with a medical or EMS background, however).
- B) Exit Interviews
 - Going as far back as possible to trace trends & patterns.
- C) Anonymous surveys
 - For current volunteers: anonymous and going directly to city manager.
- D) Research into the Chief Mark Kirko's past investigation and resignation (sparked by dozens of volunteers coming forward to journalists in 2019) at North Whidbey WA Fire Department right before taking a position in Homer.

→ to understand potential weaknesses and blind spots in leadership. There are some areas Chief Mark Kirko may need mentorship and accountability in.

Maintaining Volunteers to prevent turnover

- A) A version of H.R. for volunteers (Since we are not employed and cannot go to HR as an employee normally would).
- B) Anonymous surveys (as listed above).
- C) Making sure necessities are covered for volunteers
→ clean bedding, gas allowances (Needed for volunteers answering 911 calls from home when HVFD is short of people at the station), newsletters, and so on.
- D) Digital handbook and rules available to volunteers
→ We had to depend primarily on word of mouth instead of readily available documents to see all the rules and expectations. A digital handbook I think is important.
- E) Warning systems & protocols (with required sit downs to discuss issues).
→ I was never sat down or given warnings as to why the fire department would choose to shut me and other volunteer support staff out of meetings. Sadly, this has also been the case for several long-term and highly skilled EMTs/firefighters. Many have been thrown out with no notice or opportunity to resolve issues. There has to be communication, written warnings, and chances to resolve issues to keep a healthy volunteer population.
- F) Prioritizing things that boost morale and place emphasis on the overall purpose of HVFD.
→ One of the most disheartening things I observed: In most meetings, the needs of the community were mentioned very little in comparison to the needs of the fire department. There has to be a sense of ultimate purpose and vision to keep volunteers!

Bringing new volunteers in

- A) Prioritizing of EMT 1 classes
→ December 2024, I asked HVFD if there was going to be an EMT 1 class that winter or one scheduled in the future. They let me know they had no current scheduled plans for a class. If rapid turnover rates are normal (according to HVFD), it is reckless to choose not to consistently do EMT 1 classes and get new people through the door. If HVFD is functioning normally like is being said, the same number of classes that were offered in the past would be mirrored currently.
- B) Advertisement of classes
→ on posters throughout the community, on KPC, & city website, etc.

Guidance for the Chief

- A) A board for the fire department so the chief has multiple voices for guidance
→ Note: I think this will be important not only for leadership, but for budgeting.
December 3d 2024, Chief Mark Kirko posted on his personal facebook an announcement for the arrival of 5 new custom recliners with new custom fire department emblems on each. I researched the cost and I estimated it to be at least \$5,000 altogether. I was shocked that that money was not spent on member education. It is important for a board to be in place, as it is not possible for city council and city manager to be able to keep up with the decisions being made.
- B) Ongoing education and mentorship for Chief Mark Kirko
→ Specifically from experts in boosting volunteer experiences and retaining numbers. Leaders need help and education too.

Community communication

- A) EXTREMELY important: Numbers (not names, however) and general analysis available to everyday citizens.

Tara Hueper

From: [Houlihan](#)
To: [Department Clerk](#)
Subject: Written Testimony Submittal
Date: Monday, April 14, 2025 1:47:44 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Written Testimony for City Council Name: Patrick Houlihan
Email: patrickhoulihan.ak@gmail.com
Phone: 907 299 2993 Residency: Non-City Resident
City Council Meeting to Participate In: Regular Meeting
Mon, 04/14 Public Comments Upon Matters Already on the Agenda - Citizen may comment on regular agenda items not scheduled for public hearing such as Consent Agenda items, Memorandums, Pending Business, New Business, Resolutions, and Ordinances to be introduced. Written Testimony:
I would like to address Resolution 25-030, A Resolution of the City Council of Homer, Alaska Amending the City of Homer Personnel Regulations Sections 5.8 Shift Pay and 5.14 On Call Pay.

I am happy to serve the City of Homer in my capacity in Building Maintenance within Public Works. I accept the on call nature of my position which includes 24 hours on my days off, and 14 hours of my non

working hours during my work week. I am happy to respond to needs such as snow plowing or sanding at the airport parking or apron area, or any building emergency such as a leaking pipe or toilet in any city building.. I do find it a considerable strain to monitor the weather, flights, and cameras, phone and texts, guiding me as to whether weekend or nighttime response is needed. Being on call prevent me from enjoying some of my normal activities like backcountry skiing, camping, or just traveling around the Peninsula. This requirement is done in rotation, so every third week it has this effect on my family. It is my understanding the on call pay has not been updated since the 1990's. It is time to increase the on call pay rate for City Employees. We are sleeping a little less well, so that if a call comes in, others will be more likely to wake up with clearer roads, warm dry buildings and a functioning City. I believe the current request of \$5 per hour for on call pay is more than reasonable. Please consider passing this Resolution and adjusting futures on call and shift pay and regular pay automatically to reflect changes in the CPI.

I thank you for your service and consideration of this Resolution as a stand by on a day off to cover the City as needed.

Sincerely,

Patrick Houlihan

Electronic Signature: Patrick D Houlihan Submitted on
Monday, April 14, 2025 - 1:47pm The results of this
submission may be viewed at:

[https://www.cityofhomer-
ak.gov/node/60081/submission/53216](https://www.cityofhomer-ak.gov/node/60081/submission/53216)

From: [Lexie Pearl Sweeney](#)
To: [Department Clerk](#)
Cc: Citymanager@cityofhomerak.gov; [Mayor Email](#); [Renee Krause](#); dkort@ci.homerak.us
Subject: Request for Stakeholder Meeting – Old Town Project
Date: Monday, April 14, 2025 2:25:16 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Dear Mayor and Members of the Homer City Council,

My name is Lexie Sweeney. While I'm currently attending college abroad, I am a longtime resident of Homer and still live at the Driftwood Inn at 135 W. Bunnell Avenue when I'm home. I've grown up in the Old Town neighborhood and have worked in our family businesses, The Driftwood Inn and AJ's Steakhouse for as long as I can remember.

I'm writing to respectfully request that the City pause the Ohlson Lane and W. Bunnell Avenue construction project until a formal meeting can be held with Old Town residents and business stakeholders.

Like many other college students, I plan to return home this summer to work and save money for the next school year. I was looking forward to a good season. However, now I'm very concerned that there may not be a job for me, or for many others who rely on work at Old Town businesses. I've watched my parents and our team work incredibly hard to build back up from the COVID shutdowns and suffered immeasurable losses. The thought of another event similar happening feels absurd and unfair. How is it that this can happen when the City planners specifically stated that they would reach back out to stakeholders with revisions.

As someone who works directly with our guests, I know firsthand how even small disruptions can impact their experience. When parking is blocked, deliveries are late, when the weather turns or if an excursion is canceled, it's the front desk staff or the servers who absorb the frustration and try to make things right. If our street is torn up, if our buildings vibrate or shift, or if access is compromised, it will be nearly impossible to deliver the kind of service we're known for.

To make it perfectly clear, we're not opposing progress. We understand infrastructure needs maintenance. But we're asking you to recognize the very real human and economic impacts of this project, and to give the people of Old Town a seat at the table before irreversible damage is done.

On behalf of our team and community, I respectfully ask the City to please consider the following:

1. Pause construction near vulnerable properties until appropriate measures can be implemented to mitigate risks.
2. Convene a formal stakeholder meeting to review the engineering plans, construction timeline, and risk mitigation strategies.
3. Develop a clear and collaborative plan to protect our buildings, our teams, our guests, and our livelihoods.

We believe in this town. We believe in hospitality and in building something meaningful for generations to come.

Sincerely,
Alexandria Sweeney
Team Member
The Driftwood Inn & AJ's Oldtown Steakhouse
Homer, Alaska

From: [Hopper](#)
To: [Department Clerk](#)
Subject: Written Testimony Submittal
Date: Monday, April 14, 2025 2:56:59 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Written Testimony for City Council Name: Tiana Hopper Email: hoppertiana@gmail.com Phone: 9073177444 Residency: Non-City Resident City Council Meeting to Participate In: Regular Meeting Mon, 04/14 Public Comments Upon Matters Already on the Agenda - Citizen may comment on regular agenda items not scheduled for public hearing such as Consent Agenda items, Memorandums, Pending Business, New Business, Resolutions, and Ordinances to be introduced. Written Testimony:
City council

Commenting on the reconstruction of Ohlson Lane and West Bunnell Avenue:
Resolution 25-031 and 25-032
-Directed toward item j on the consent agenda

I am coming to you as an employee of one of the businesses that will be impacted by this project. This

summer is already threatening to be a financially unstable one as we watch our 401k and stock investments shrink. My family is counting on gleaning as much from the summer tourism boost as possible to prepare for whatever comes next. The possibility of losing any potential customers to a construction project is terrifying.

If you tell me now, that NEXT summer will be impacted by a road construction project, I can prepare for the inevitable dip in business and income. I can even make a business plan with my employer to respond to the potential income drop and find alternative ways to regain our clientele. But if that project happens THIS summer, I have no way of recovering in time. I have nothing set aside for a loss of income due to construction. And any plans to amend our business model would have required the whole winter to refine and advertise for.

Electronic Signature: Tiana Trew Hopper Submitted on Monday, April 14, 2025 - 2:56pm The results of this submission may be viewed at:

<https://www.cityofhomer-ak.gov/node/60081/submission/53218>

From: [Edward Livingston](#)
To: [Department Clerk](#)
Cc: [Melody Livingston](#)
Subject: Written Comment for 4/14 City Council Meeting; Consent Agenda Item (j)
Date: Monday, April 14, 2025 2:16:10 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Please see attached written comments for tonight's meeting that was also submitted on the website:

This comment is regarding item (j) on the Consent Agenda for the meeting of April 14, 2025.

We are the owners of Wild Honey Bistro and City Bear Bread, operating out of 106 W Bunnell Avenue, in Homer's Old Town. Melody Livingston has been operating Wild Honey Bistro since 2017. Scott Livingston joined the business in June 2022 after an expansion to add a prep kitchen and bakery space.

We are asking the City Council to remove item (j) from the Consent Agenda and pause the award of the contract for the reconstruction of Ohlson Lane and West Bunnell Avenue, to provide the business owners and other Old Town stakeholders the information and input to the planned reconstruction which the City promised to provide in July 2022.

The City is proposing to move forward with major reconstruction of this corridor during the height of tourist season (Wild Honey Bistro makes approximately 70% of its yearly revenue between May and August), without any communication with the effected businesses or other neighborhood stakeholders. Loss of access to the businesses, reduction in parking, and the noise and disruption that such construction entails could have a significant impact on our business, for which we have not had an opportunity to plan for, due to the lack of notice and failure to provide the due process that the City told Old Town owners, residents, and business owners that it would.

Old Town stakeholders were first informed of the potential reconstruction of Ohlson Lane and West Bunnell Avenue in July 2022 at a meeting held at the Bunnell Street Arts Center. Two representatives of the City and two representatives of the engineering firm doing the planning presented a version of the reconstruction project to a group of Old Town business owners, property owners, residents, and other community stakeholders. The proposal had originally contemplated construction to begin in 2023.

While there was general support for some sort of reconstruction of the corridor, substantial feedback regarding the specifics of the plan as well as concerns about the potential impact of such construction on the Old Town businesses was expressed to the City. At the end of this meeting, the representatives of the City made an explicit promise to hold another meeting with the same group that would come back and detail how the feedback provided had been incorporated into the plan and address how the plan would be implemented in order to minimize disruption of business during construction.

No such meeting was ever held and the last anyone in the neighborhood had heard was the project was on “indefinite hold” as there were not funds available.

Old Town stakeholders were not informed that the plan had been taken back up for reconsideration or that it was on track to be started this year.

Old Town stakeholders were not given the follow-up meeting the City promised in order to discuss the details of the revised plan and business mitigation plans.

As far as we have been able to tell, no one in the neighborhood was contacted to discuss project timelines, potential business mitigation plans, alternative parking arrangements to compensate for loss of parking due to construction, alternative access plans to mitigate the effects of road closures due to construction, or any specifics of the plan since the meeting in 2022.

Businesses need to plan for these types of disruption, and we and the other businesses of Old Town have not had that opportunity. For our part, we were hoping this Summer would be the season we would finally be able to emerge from the financial hole we found ourselves in after the expansion was completed in June of 2022. We are afraid that this could potentially put us out of business given that we have not had any opportunity to prepare for the reduced revenue that the construction will almost certainly bring, especially since it is unclear what mitigation efforts have been contemplated and whether those efforts will be successful given the lack of communication with the community.

We would very much prefer that the City works with us, provides us with the meeting that was promised in 2022, and facilitates a discussion with the community so that everyone involved can feel good about the project and move forward with it in 2025. Without such cooperation, the project may be subject to legal challenges resulting in delay, additional expenditures, and/or liability to the City for failing to follow through on process that was promised.

We do not oppose reconstruction of this corridor, but we do want to make sure it is done in a way that does not put Old Town out of business or that threatens the existence of the businesses that help make Old Town what it is.

Melody Livingston (Wild Honey Bistro)

Scott Livingston (City Bear Bread)

From: [Livingston](#)
To: [Department Clerk](#)
Subject: Written Testimony Submittal
Date: Monday, April 14, 2025 2:13:14 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Written Testimony for City Council Name: Melody & Scott Livingston Email: livingston.edscott@gmail.com
Phone: 7735044043 Residency: City Resident City Council Meeting to Participate In: Regular Meeting Mon, 04/14 Public Comments Upon Matters Already on the Agenda - Citizen may comment on regular agenda items not scheduled for public hearing such as Consent Agenda items, Memorandums, Pending Business, New Business, Resolutions, and Ordinances to be introduced. Written Testimony:
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We do not oppose reconstruction of this corridor, but we do want to make sure it is done in a way that does not put Old Town out of business or that threatens the existence of the businesses that help make Old Town what it is.

Melody Livingston (Wild Honey Bistro)

Scott Livingston (City Bear Bread)

Electronic Signature: Melody & Scott Livingston

Submitted on Monday, April 14, 2025 - 2:13pm

The results of this submission may be viewed at:

<https://www.cityofhomer->

[ak.gov/node/60081/submission/53217](https://www.cityofhomer-ak.gov/node/60081/submission/53217)