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Alice Ruby

City Manager
Robert J. Mawson



Dillingham City Council
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MEMORANDUM

Date: 6 October 2022
To: Honorable Mayor and City Council
From: Robert J Mawson, City Manager 
Subject: Council Report

Municipal Strategic Plan

City-wide Initiatives

The work on the Six City-wide Strategic Planning Initiatives continues, although making time to update the on-line platform has proven to be a challenge for most, if not all of our managers whose day-to-day responsibilities leave minimal time for this administrative task. We do regularly touch base on our progress and are doing quite well in accomplishing the six initiatives adopted by Council. We are looking at ways to better address the data entry portion of the effort, which will likely lead to having one person responsible for the on-line updates.

Despite the challenge of updating the on-line platform, we are making good progress with the established initiatives for FY23. Progress is noted below.

1. Right Size and Balance the Municipal Budget

- A Balanced Budget was achieved for FY23 that moved us very close to matching estimated revenues and anticipated expenditures, but we still relied on a transfer from the General Fund to do so. Getting to the ultimate goal of utilizing only estimated revenues to offset anticipated expenditures will likely take us one or two more years to achieve. Increasing collection rates, establishing additional revenue streams, and reducing expenditures where possible (all of which are underway) will play a large part in achieving a true balanced budget.
- The FY23 Budget Development Process allowed us to take a closer look at how the City has addressed services and needs in the past. It also required us to look at the historical collection of revenues and how we can maximize our collections. It also allowed us an opportunity to look at the historical allocation of City resources and where allocations should be focused to going forward.
- Preparations for FY24 are already being made, as we analyze our operations and gauge the needs for next and future fiscal years. Working other aspects of the Strategic Plan is proving beneficial to this Initiative as well.

2. Optimize Existing Revenues

- Finance staff have been reviewing processes and practices associated with revenue collection, across the board. Collection efforts have been stepped up to better address expired or non-purchased Business Licenses, Property assessments and associated Taxes, Sales & Excise Tax receipts and other sources of revenue. Efforts to expend and collect Insurance Claims and Grant Funds, already on the books, have also increased.
- Rate and Customer Connection studies for the Water, Wastewater and Landfill need to be completed over the next 6 to 8 months to ensure that customers are classified correctly and the respective City Enterprise is receiving sufficient revenue to operate safely and in accordance with all City, State and Federal requirements.

3. Develop New Sources of Revenues

- Early collections for the Marijuana Excise Tax, recently put in place, have been promising and look to be exceeding our estimates for FY23. With the first year of this tax being in place, and no historical experience with this taxing situation locally, this year will provide a baseline for future fiscal year projections.
- Establishing a Fish Excise Tax, which is currently subject to further study and discussion to refine, will provide a second new source of revenue. Once in place, this excise tax should provide a significant addition to City revenue stream. Until a final conclusion is reached on the breadth and scope of the tax, it will be difficult to estimate the potential revenue associated with this tax.
- We are also in the process of establishing a more robust grant-writing program to address minor and major funding needs City-wide. This effort will combine a strengthening of internal capacity and supplementing internal efforts with external contract grant-writers.

4. Improve Staff Retention and Recruitment Efforts

Much has been accomplished in regard to this Initiative.

- Current hiring practices, employee working conditions & resources, wages, and benefit offerings are being reviewed to determine what and where improvements can be made to make working for the City a more desirable situation. The results thus far have been:
 - i. A 10% raise for all employees.
 - ii. Amendments to the two Collective Bargaining Agreements that reflect more favorable benefits for their respective participants.
 - iii. Proposed amendments to the City-wide Personnel Regulations to reflect similar benefits for all City employees.
 - iv. Changes in the methods and sources used to recruit potential candidates.
 - v. Establishing Part-time, Temporary, Project Specific and other flexible job opportunities for potential candidates.
 - vi. Expanding our network of contacts and attending job fairs.
 - vii. Creating a better Staff Development & Training program for current employees, with an eye toward more internal promotions.
- Additional exploration into remote work and other methods of accomplishing various responsibilities is also in progress.

- The overall Municipal Structure, Job Description Reviews, and Department Responsibilities are also being studied to determine if department and position responsibilities are adequately described, properly assigned, and if individuals are over-burdened or under-burdened with work. This effort will also provide additional knowledge about needed training and job direction.
- Department structures and staffing are being reviewed with Department heads to determine whether current staffing is sufficient to accomplish all the objectives and responsibilities assigned to their departments, and if not, what options are available to either reduce the workload or supplement their staffing.

5. *Initiate Monthly Community Stakeholder Gatherings*

- This effort has been delayed for a few reasons (COVID, Fishing Season, Hunting Season, Other meetings, etc.). Now that some of these activities have slowed some, we will make more progress on this particular Initiative.

6. *Develop and implement a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan*

- Much groundwork has been and is being completed to support an official update to the City’s Capital Improvement Plan. Facility evaluations, Equipment evaluations, Project scoping, Minor & Major funding request lists are being generated, and historical Program/Project needs and ideas are being evaluated. A template for the Plan has also been prepared and will soon be updated and populated for presentation & discussion with the City Planning Commission.

September Activities and Actions

Internal Staff Meetings

- Department head / Manager meetings are held every Tuesday morning to coordinate with each other, train, and share information pertinent to departments and their respective staff members. We also use this time to invite other agencies or organizations in to provide an opportunity to discuss common issues or learn more about their services. Most recently, representatives from the National Weather Service in Anchorage were in town and met with us to learn more about our region of Alaska and how they could better assist us with forecasting services and emergency notifications & protocols. Earlier in the month we participated in an on-line Human Resources training for Supervisors to discuss Documenting Employee Behavior, Performance, and Disciplinary actions.
- Monthly all-staff meeting are held, typically on the last Wednesday of each month. We utilize these meetings as a forum to share important information, conduct training and just build better relationships between staff members of all departments. Our most recent meeting included training on our “Emotional Bank Accounts” and how to deal with other people and balance regulation enforcement with compassion for those we serve. Everyone participated in “Department Trivia”, which was an activity designed to teach us all more about each other’s responsibilities and a few things we didn’t know about our City’s operations. We concluded our meeting with a “Chili Cookoff” for lunch. Judging was done by our Senior Center Cooks and a People’s Choice vote. Chris Maines swept the two awards with his entry, which was a big hit among diners. Other contestants also presented great chili’s, which were very tasty and didn’t go to waste.

Legislative Activities

- Although the Legislative Sessions have concluded for the State of Alaska, Federal activities continue year around. Chris Hladick and I continue to follow-up on matters that are specific to Dillingham and this region of Alaska, with Federal and State agencies and elected representatives. Particularly regarding our active requests for project funding.
- In concert with these administrative activities, I would like to suggest that Council consider adopting a Legislative Agenda for the City and our surrounding area. This can be a simple statement or resolution adopted each year to indicate what issues the City feels are important to support or push for at the State and Federal levels. This statement can then be used to support legislation that forward these issues and when visiting State officials in Juneau and Federal officials in Washington, D.C. It also gives our City Lobbyist additional direction and focus beyond the existing effort to find funding for capital projects. Considerations for this type of statement could include a Stance on the proposed Pebble Mine and other Protections for Bristol Bay and the Salmon Fishery, Remediation of the PFAS contamination near the Airport, Housing and Day Care resource development, Veterans, Elders, and so forth. A process can be developed to review and generate this Legislative Agenda each year, along with a review to determine the success of the previous year's goals and objectives.

Grant-writing

- In addition to the major funding requests noted below, the City continues to obtain smaller grants for the Library, Senior Center, Fire Department and others, as time and staff availability permit.
 - \$36 million dollar request for Erosion Control near Snag Point, through Senator Murkowski's Office. (Recently, \$5 million was included, as a first-year allocation, in the appropriations bill currently working through the Federal process).
 - \$11.3 million dollar request for Harbor Floats, Water/Sewer Line Extensions and other Harbor property improvements, through the USDOT Maritime Administration. (Awards are pending review and announcement).
 - \$2 million dollar request for Harbor Project matching funds, through the Denali Commission. (Awards are pending review and announcement).
- Mayor Ruby and I met with representatives from Agnew-Beck to discuss some minor funding needs. Consulting work would be paid for using a grant-writing award received through BBEDC.
- To supplement our present efforts and focus more diligently on the quest for funding, we are in the process of developing a Grant-writing Program designed to organize our internal efforts and expand our ability to respond to funding announcements that promote the City's needs and priorities. The key to this effort will be assigning a Steward and creating an internal "Team" of city staff to manage the program, research, write and administer grants. Internal efforts would be supplemented with consulting grant-writers when needed for quick turn-around grants or when more complicated/specialized application preparation is required.

Regional Coordination, Community & Economic Development

- I continue to participate in weekly Community Health / COVID Response coordination meeting held virtually with regional health providers and local government representatives. The group is led by Mayor Ruby and with the decline in COVID related concerns, the group is discussing additional issues that have a community-wide effect.

- I am meeting with other Jail Contract Communities, through a task force put together by AML to discuss Jail Funding and Recent Contract Operational Requirements.
- We continue to meet and coordinate with representatives of ADEC concerning Landfill operations and remediation efforts after the metal pile fire.
- Still working with APEI adjusters to close out two outstanding insurance claims for the Landfill Equipment Building fire and the Downtown Fire Hall water damage claims.
- Held a meeting with landowners and residents of the Squaw Creek area to develop and execute a plan for long-term courtesy maintenance of Squaw Creek Road. This is the first of several efforts we need to undertake to develop a City-wide Health and Safety Plan for streets, roads and walking paths within the City limits.
- Visited with local State Troopers to learn more about their operations in the region, how relations are with the City Police, and how the Jail operations support their efforts.
- I met with the Volunteer Fire Department Board to learn more about their operations and how the City and the Board work together. We also discussed having a debriefing to discuss recent fires in the community and what the challenges and take-aways were.
- We met with representatives of BBNA and the Playground Project contractor to close out the project and discuss on-going repair and maintenance plans.
- I have been meeting with the new State Jail Contract Coordinator to discuss challenges with keeping the City Jail staffed and managed in accordance with recently updated Contract requirements.
- Mayor Ruby and I met with Representatives from Agnew-Beck to discuss some minor funding needs and discuss the potential for grant-writing services to address some of them.
- I'm also participating in three processes to update the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) for the Bristol Bay area, Southwest Alaska, and the State-wide CEDS.

Human Resources

- Kelsa and I have been polishing up our efforts in human resources, better organizing our approach, reviewing job descriptions with department heads, analyzing the municipal organization, interviewing admin candidates and continue our efforts to improve recruitment and retention.
- Five interviews were held for potential Police Officers, with promising results. More follow-up paperwork and background checks are needed, but we are optimistic that we have some good candidates.
- We also continued to work on improving our overall Staff Development and Training program, to include on-line offerings that can be taken when convenient and an added emphasis on internal processes and procedures, such as Procurement and Accounts Payable training that will be offered to employees in October.
- Kelsa will also be taking a larger role in training and supporting administrative staff in all departments.

City Clerk

- September has been busy with local Election preparations and accommodating participants in the early-voting process.
- Record-keeping and Retention projects are moving forward with much organization and house-cleaning being accomplished in both the Administration and Finance departments.

- Lori helps to organize and participates in all the Department Head and All-staff meetings, which I appreciate.
- We also discuss many aspects of the City operations and historical records that have guided the establishment and development of current practices and procedures, in an effort to stay current and better address local needs.

Finance

- Anita and her staff have worked very hard to improve the work flow and processes associated with taxation and revenue collections, accounts payable, payroll and other aspects of their responsibilities. They have tackled a very large backlog of historical records and archived documentation that has been accumulating for decades. If the City had a talent show, I'm sure that the Finance Department would win the "Juggling" contest. They work very hard to push an incredible amount of responsibilities forward each month and we have frequent discussions to consider better ways to accomplish things and how we can integrate additional technology or software to assist.
- As stated above, preparations are already underway to look ahead to the FY24 budget, as we discuss department responsibilities and staffing throughout the city. Revenue forecasting and planning for up-coming expenses are always included as a part of our conversations.

Planning

- Patty continues to dive into research and numerous planning activities, both past and present. Unfortunately, although we talk daily, I am not as available as I would like to be to assist her, but she works well with limited direction.
- Along with other department heads, we are discussing department responsibilities and demands so we can focus our efforts on the things that matter most. We have upgraded the computer system and storage capacity in the planning office and now are working to secure a new plotter/scanner so we have the capability to print maps and larger documents once again.
- Patty continues to work with several of the City's consultants and various agencies to resolve land use and record conflicts that occur between assessor's information and the City's mapping software interfaces. Updates to the City website have also been accomplished.
- One of the biggest projects that planning has been working on is the inventory and disposition of City-owned facilities and properties. Not a day goes by that something isn't done on this project, which has been held up by years of neglect, poor recordkeeping, and little coordination with other governmental agencies and organizations. Often, there are no records on file to document official City ownership, which has lead to weeks or months of correspondence and research to obtain the appropriate documentation or complete a process that had not been finished. We will provide an update presentation of this project for the Council during the October 13th special meeting.

Public Works

- Manpower remains a challenge for all areas of public works, but with seasons ending for the Harbor and the Dock, we will see three employees return to streets and the shop. We have also hired an Administrative Assistant to fill a position that has been vacant for several months. Buildings and Grounds remains unstaffed, so we have been relying on local contractors to complete some of the work that needs to be done. We have a couple of recent applications for open positions that are pending interviews.

- During the month of September, both of the large container handlers at the Dock received a much needed dose of part replacements and maintenance care. This will help us in the short term, but long term we are working on a plan to upgrade or replace the smaller of the two, as larger, heavier containers are becoming the norm.
- Dan continues to address as many vehicle and equipment issues as he can and we have contracted with SMI to address some larger equipment repairs, such as the landfill dozer. Obtaining parts continues to be a challenge, which seems to be our biggest hurdle to getting some of this equipment back in service.
- In addition to the challenges, we have with aging or inadequate heavy equipment, the City's fleet of Police cars, Transportation vans, and Pick-ups are also aging and frequently in need of repair or maintenance. A plan to address these needs is also in the works.
- We are wrapping up preparations for the City Surplus Sale, to take place in mid-October, weather permitting.
- Chris Maines was able to adjust the aeration system in the wastewater lagoons, which has had a positive effect on the treatment process. We have also ordered a backup generator for the wastewater plant, using grant funds remaining from an earlier wastewater project.
- Grading city streets has been difficult with a lack of grader operators for the past few months. Continuous rain has also hampered our efforts. As noted above however, with the closure of the Harbor and Dock soon we will have more operators available and a more concentrated effort can be made to address our vast network of gravel roads. Delivery of a new Plow Truck is also scheduled for October so we will have another resource to use for sanding and plowing, as needed.
- We are looking into methods to improve the condition of our gravel roads. Additives and techniques are being explored that could make our gravel roads more resilient and less likely to pot-hole as quickly as they do now. These treatments will cost some money but should pay dividends with less maintenance and better driving conditions in the long run.
- With two operators now on staff at the Landfill, there have been some improvements made to the condition of various areas of the Landfill. We are better able to keep up with the household trash pile and the metal pile is in the early stages of being re-groomed. Max just recently returned from CDL training and now has his CDL endorsement. There is much to be done to get the property into a "model" of solid waste management, but we are making positive strides. We are also looking for one more attendant to direct patrons to the appropriate area to drop their debris and monitor for unacceptable materials.
- With the arrival of the new plow truck for streets, the older plow truck will be transferred to the Landfill to assist with on-site snow removal, road repairs, and drainage improvement projects.
- Final preparations are being made to ship a container of aluminum cans from the Senior Center to Seattle. The container is scheduled to ship out the first week of October. Special thanks to the Friends of the Landfill, Senior Center and Summer Staff, and Desi Bond with the Curyung Tribe's Environmental department for making this happen.

The Port of Dillingham

- The Harbor season has come to a close, with the last of the floats being removed at the end of September. With the closure, CJ will return to work as an operator for public works, along with his former assistant Kelly who will be transferring to public works as well.

- We will soon be completing a post-season evaluation of the Harbor activities and make plans for next season. We will also be reviewing the Harbor Master position description so we can officially post for next season's operations.
- I want to thank CJ for stepping into the Harbor Master position this past season. He and his staff did a commendable job getting and keeping things up and running during a very busy fishing season that saw 717 boats in the harbor prior to the opener.
- The Dock will continue to operate for about another month to accommodate expected cargo ship deliveries and outgoing shipments. Hats off to Dean and his crew for handling the challenges and increased workload that accompanied this season. This season saw the biggest cargo ships ever received here in Dillingham and an dramatic increase in goods, materials and fish pass through the dock.
- Like the Harbor, we have begun post-season discussions about the operations and facilities associated with the Dock. Increased activity this past season taxed our ability to unload, store and load containers and other materials safely and effectively. It also posed a problem for users of the Dock facilities because we were not able to accommodate container storage for very long because space was at a premium.

Public Safety

- Craig Maines continues in an Acting Chief role for the Public Safety Department. Following a Department Assessment, to be completed by an outside consulting firm during the month of October, we will prepare and post the Chief of Police position.
- Five applications for rotational officers were received and interviews held the last half of September. We expect to make a couple of offers once the required paperwork is received to confirm past training and qualifications.
- Dispatch is in need of additional staff and the Jail remains closed due to a lack of certified corrections officers to meet supervision and safety requirements outlined and referred to in the new Jail Contract. State DOC officials are looking at ways to assist with staffing recruitment and perhaps utilizing rotational COs from other DOC facilities.

Fire and EMS

- We now have one full time EMT on staff to go along with our Fire Coordinator position. We also have a temporary driver position that was extended from a BBEDC position that helped with the seasonal EMTs. The number of volunteers has been on the decline in recent years and having a full time EMT and driver will help cover some of the gap.
- The Fire Department is also conducting EMT classes right now, with over a dozen participants, so hopefully we will see some additional qualified volunteers in the near future.
- The 911 system upgrade project taking place at the Lake Road Fire Hall and the Public Safety building was interrupted because the installation of three phone lines at the Lake Road facility were not complete. Installers are expected back in mid-October to complete the installation at the Lake Road building, transfer the service from the Public Safety building, install the new system at the Public Safety building, and then transfer operations back. At no time will the 911 system be out of service. This upgraded, redundant system will ensure a more resilient and reliable operation for many years to come.
- We are expecting a compressor delivery on the October barge to complete the replacement of the inoperable air-filling station at the Lake Road Fire Hall.
- We are working with APEI to close out the insurance claim for the Downtown Fire Hall after it suffered water damage to the lower level. Repairs are pending.

- We appreciate JJC Construction and their mechanics for repairing the City's large green tanker for the fire department. This tanker had some mechanical issues that rendered it unusable. JJC not only used their mechanics to repair it for us but donated the labor cost to do so.

Library

- Sonja and her staff continue to make sure paperwork for Library Grants and other documentation is completed as needed.
- An additional Library aide position was funded by BBEDC and an offer of employment has been extended. We hope to have someone on board the first week of October. This new position will provide additional coverage and may allow for an extension of Library hours of operation.
- I want to thank the Library staff and volunteers who did a great job with the Summer reading program, Storytime and other Summer activities provided for the kids. They also put together a hydroponic garden, which not only served as a great learning activity, but is now successfully producing a bumper crop of lettuce and basil.

Senior Center

- The front doors are fixed and the old wooden deck at the back door has been replaced with a nice concrete patio. A new roof will be planned for installation in the Spring.
- The Senior Center is now open every weekday. Elders can come to the Center to have a warm lunch, play games, work puzzles or just enjoy one another's company. Meal deliveries are also offered to those who would prefer to eat at home or are unable to make it to the Center.
- We are making arrangements to replace a couple of upright freezers that recently quit working.
- Discussions are taking place to prepare for, and assist our Elders to prepare for, another difficult Winter. Projections from the National Weather Service show that we are in for another Winter with one storm after another. We'll have more to share on this at a future date.

Additional Thoughts

There are a number of things that are not necessarily department specific that we are presently engaged in or that I think we should work toward.

- The Samuel K. Fox Museum, which shares space with the City Library and contains a marvelous collection of local and regional historical artifacts, is in need of an updated Operations and Curator Plan. For many years, the City has relied upon the Samuel K Fox Museum Association Board as its advisory board for the Museum. The Association is incorporated as a non-profit organization under the laws of the State of Alaska. I would like to engage the Association and others in an active planning effort to provide better safeguards for the collection and develop an Operations Plan to address current and future needs. Doing so will provide better documentation, caretaking, and an opportunity to develop a supporting annual budget. It would also be invaluable for insurance purposes.

- I already mentioned the thought of developing a Legislative Agenda for the City of Dillingham to assist in our lobbying efforts. This agenda would complement the City's Capital Projects Priority List that is generated each year for the CAPSYS but cover non-project related priorities. It could also contain a plan for visits to Juneau and Washington, if warranted, and used as a basis for budget development (lobbying, travel, etc.). If this is something that Council would like to pursue, we can prepare a discussion for the November Council meeting.
- Housing is a major concern for pretty much every segment of our community. Not enough housing, overcrowding, unsafe/dilapidated structures, unsanitary living conditions, housing, affordability, homelessness, and the list goes on and on. Alone, the problem seems daunting and unsolvable, but with partners we could make a lot of headway. As a starting point, I am putting together a Housing Forum for the purpose of bringing together the major stakeholders in the community to discuss common needs, available resources, and the possibility of coming together to provide some solutions. Hopefully, this will lead to additional discussions, community outreach, and various other efforts designed to make projects happen.

I remain available for any questions or comments.