

**Mayor**  
Alice Ruby

**City Manager**  
Robert J. Mawson



**Dillingham City Council**  
Chris Napoli  
Michael Bennett  
Aksel Buholm  
Curt Armstrong  
Kaleb Westfall  
Perry Abrams

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** 31 March 2022  
**To:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**From:** Robert J Mawson, City Manager  
**Subject:** Monthly Council Report

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My first 30-days in Dillingham have passed very quickly. I have enjoyed meeting people and visiting organizations. I have also enjoyed the time I have been able to spend getting to know more about the rich history of the people who settled this area of Alaska and marvel at the strength and resolve it took to establish and maintain the region's villages and communities for many hundreds of years.

Since my arrival, I have been advised of many more challenges than opportunities facing our city, our neighboring villages and the region as a whole. But exploring and pursuing opportunities, rather than focusing on our challenges, is where I hope to spend the majority of my time. By focusing on our opportunities to improve and grow, I believe we can overcome more of these challenges than we can by dwelling on our trials and tribulations.

I have the same hope for our staff and partners. There are not many people in the world who really look forward to facing difficult challenges, but most of the time we learn more from tough experiences than we do from easy ones. When I was contemplating taking this job, one of my concerns was whether the city staff were up to chasing opportunities, when to day-to-day demands seem so great. It hasn't take me long to see that there are many talented and dedicated people working for the City of Dillingham. People who care about each other, their families, friends & neighbors. And even though life and work have been challenging of late, they are willing to look forward and strive for better things.

That being said, there is still a lot of work for us to do to reach a better place. Staff needs to be more competitively compensated & better trained for their respective responsibilities. Organizational processes and procedures need to be improved, facilities & equipment needs have to be addressed, financial resources of the City need to be invested in efforts that will bring the greatest returns, and the list goes on. All challenges that we can overcome by setting lofty goals and pursuing opportunities.

The recent implementation of a strategic planning program for the City will provide some useful structure and information to help us better focus our efforts and City resources going forward. But that can't be the only tool in the toolbox. It will take additional analysis and the combined experience, knowledge and insight of all of us (Council, staff and the greater Dillingham community) to achieve the big things we set out to accomplish.

I came to Dillingham to help cultivate the type of municipal environment where people enjoy working together to make their community an even better place to live, work and visit.

Considering all that I've experienced in my first 30 days, I'm confident that when we come together, focus our efforts and invest our resources wisely, we can do just that. I am excited to be here.

My activities / actions during the month of March include:

### Strategic Planning

- We kicked off our strategic planning effort, with the help of Mr. Bill Dann from Professional Growth Systems. PGS has developed an on-line, project management software program specifically designed to track initiatives, projects and tasks associated with organizational goals and objectives. This software program will allow our staff and Council to manage their various roles and responsibilities in a shared, informational environment.

After the City Council worked together to develop five city-wide strategic initiatives and populate the software with associated objectives and tasks, each department manager is now working to identify a list of projects to improve their respective municipal operations and service delivery.

These initiatives and projects will help us focus some of the City's resources on things that will improve our capability to meet our municipal responsibilities.

A dedicated strategic plan reporting section will be included on the Council agenda, beginning with the May 2022 meeting.

### Department Meetings and Site Visits

- I have had an opportunity to visit with all our department managers, meet many of our City staff, and visit most of the City facilities. This will be an ongoing effort.

### Legislative Activities

- With the help of Chris Hladick, contracted Lobbyist for the City, we have engaged in a focused effort to seek funding and partnerships to accomplish some much needed capital projects. Individually and together, Chris and I have met with several state and federal agency representatives to inform them of our needs and identify potential funding paths. Many of these funding paths will take time to work through and up-front investment to make ready, but the sooner we begin, the sooner we will harvest results. Chris has also submitted a report of his activities.

- On March 16<sup>th</sup>, I met with Dr. Jason Johnson, Superintendent of the Dillingham School District to coordinate, discuss legislative issues that we felt affected both the City and the School, and to make preparations for the Joint Council/Board meeting on March 24<sup>th</sup>. It was a good meeting and exposed a lot of opportunities for future consideration and collaboration.
- On April 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, Chris Hladick and I will be attending Senator Murkowski's Infrastructure Symposium, and the follow-up meeting being facilitated by the Alaska Municipal League, in Anchorage. This is going to be a well-attended event, with well over 500 people currently registered.
- I will also spend the 13<sup>th</sup> in Anchorage to meet with our Attorneys and some of our Consultants for introductions, updates, and project discussions.

### Grant-writing

- In addition to our efforts to identify potential funding sources, we must also develop the grant-writing capacity that will be required to obtain it. I plan on doing that by combining in-house efforts with consulting assistance. The City's RFP for grant-writing services closed on Thursday, March 24<sup>th</sup>. We received two proposals that are now being reviewed to determine which firm would best meet our needs. Once we identify that firm, we will bring a contract recommendation to the Council for consideration.

In-house, I will develop a small grant-writing team, consisting of City staff and part-time, paid or volunteer "grant-writing" trainees from our community.

### Regional Coordination, Community & Economic Development

- I have been participating in the weekly Community Health / COVID Response coordination meeting held virtually with regional health providers and local governments.
- I attended the regional Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) committee meeting to learn more about the City's participation in the process and how we can be of assistance regionally. The CEDS document can be an important reference when applying for some federal grant programs, especially through the Economic Development Administration.
- I attended the Wood Tik-Chik State Park Management Council meeting, mostly to introduce myself and see how things work there, but ended up participating in discussions about some ideas and projects that were being pondered or actively worked on.
- I visited with some of the staff at the Bristol Bay Native Association to meet, tour their facility, and discuss the City's role in the Playground Project. I also attended the Planning Commission meeting where the Playground Project was discussed.
- Mayor Ruby and I have a meeting scheduled with the First Chief and Administrator of the Curyung Tribe scheduled for April 6<sup>th</sup>.

- A few of our City staff met with Isaac Pearson, Senior Civil Engineer with Bristol Engineering Services Company, to discuss the proposed Nerka Subdivision Road Improvement project being undertaken by the Curyung Tribal Council. Isaac has agreed to make a short presentation to the Council during the April 7<sup>th</sup> meeting. This is a project that has been going on for many years, but a recent decision by the Tribal Council to take a phased approach has pushed up the timing.
- I attended the Community Liaison Training, facilitated by the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation, to learn more about their programming and the role each of the regional entities play in various processes.
- The ownership group for the NAPA facility here in Dillingham are interested in expanding their current operations, product lines and associated services. We have had one initial conversation to discuss some options and develop a path to allow them to do so. There are a few hurdles in the way, but I'm confident we can work our way through them.
- I met with Renee Magnuson of the Dillingham Sportsman's Club to discuss their current and future plans for the two shooting ranges they operate near the City landfill. They will meet in early April to determine their needs for a summer schedule.

#### Human Resources

- In addition to the day-to-day human resources paperwork that we process, Kelsa and I have been discussing some potential procedural / policy amendments to address identified gaps and lay the groundwork for some more significant organizational discussions, such as the City's present organizational structure, staffing needs, compensation package, and budget needs.
- I am also having discussions with department managers for our most challenging areas to recruit (Police, Fire/EMS, Public Works, and Finance)
- Kelsa will be participating in an upcoming career fair and taking other steps to encourage potential candidates to apply for full, part-time, and temporary (project specific) positions.
- We have received requests from both Unions representing City employees, to begin the Collective Bargaining / Contract Renewal process. We will be setting dates for those negotiations very soon.

#### Finance

- Preparations for the FY23 Budget adoption are underway. A budget calendar has been developed and meetings with finance & department managers are taking place. We are behind where I would like to be at this time of year, and there is a lot to do in a short amount of time, but we will get it done.

- Anita, Kelsa and I participated in our first quarterly coordination meeting with our IT Consultants, LMJ. We discuss a number of thoughts to improve our security, back-up, hardware and software configurations. We have some immediate items to address and are also working together to develop a 2 to 3 year Plan so we can better prepare for future improvements and expenditures.

### Planning

- It's good to have Patty on board to manage the Planning activities for the City. Her knowledge of the local area, development history, and genuine concern for the people are a refreshing addition to a municipal planning office.
- We have had some very productive discussions about several issues facing the City and are methodically working our way through them.

### Public Works

- Jean and I have had several discussions and site visits to discuss various functions of the Public Works department / Harbor and the upcoming fishing season preparations. We are discussing short and long-term needs for equipment, facilities, and infrastructure improvements. These discussions will continue as we work to develop an approach and plan to address it all.
- As mentioned earlier, Chris Hladick is also assisting with developing an approach and secure funding for our Capital Project needs.
- Some of the more immediate items we are currently addressing include; restoring the Landfill Monitoring Well contract, bidding the wastewater lagoon aeration project, and also bidding the fuel and oil contract for FY23 and FY24. Unfortunately, I expect a large increase in fuel prices across the board.

### Public Safety

- The biggest issue facing our Public Safety department is Chief Pasquariello's recently announced plan to retire in May. We have had several discussions about the department and will continue to talk and strategize.
- Given this news, I have made contact with some outside resources to get assistance to secure an interim Chief and develop a process to hire a permanent replacement. It will be very difficult to replace Dan, to say the least, but after 30 years serving the City of Dillingham, I think he deserves some time to spend with his family. We're all going to miss him.
- Officer, Corrections and Dispatch staffing remain a big concern for Public Safety. We lost another officer this week and are struggling to maintain a corrections staff capable of maintaining a full-time jail facility. Pay is part of the issue, but the bigger problem is finding enough people to do the work.

- The Alaska Department of Corrections has requested an increase for Contract Jails, like ours. If it passes, it will help. The State Legislature is now discussing it as part of the FY23 budget process. If approved, as presented, it would be a 45% overall increase. Some of that money would go to establish a full-time Contract Jail Liaison for the State and the rest would go to the jail operators to help fund their operations. Dillingham could see an increase of over \$200,000 annually, if the proposal is approved.

### Fire and EMS

- We have a couple of urgent needs that we are trying to address. One, is the replacement of our air-filling equipment at the Lake Road Fire Hall. Our existing system no longer works and is too old to be repaired and made safe to use. It would also be almost impossible to bring it up to current requirements. We are looking at a \$40,000+ replacement cost. Until we get this addressed, our firefighters will have no air tanks to use. I am working with staff to determine a way to fund it.
- We were informed recently, that the City received the grant to establish a redundant 911 system at the Lake Road Fire Hall. This is really good news. Those systems are quite expensive and very important. The present 911 system at the Public Safety facility is in good shape, with a few hiccups now and then. A redundant system will ensure a more resilient and reliable operation for many years to come. Anita and I are engaged in finalizing the funding agreement so we can get that project completed ASAP.
- We have received one quote to repair the Downtown Fire Hall water damage and are waiting for a second. Once we receive these quotes we will finalize the claim with our insurance company and determine the best way to utilize the funds to repair and enhance the present building.
- Recently, the Hospital contacted our Fire department and requested assistance with their medical transportation service. The ambulance they were using to transport patients became unusable and would be costly to repair. We responded by lending them one of our back-up ambulances temporarily, while we develop a long-term lease agreement for the same piece of equipment. We have been working with our attorneys to draft the agreement, which will be presented for consideration by the Council and the Hospital Board. I anticipate that agreement will be brought to Council for action during the May meeting.

### Library

- I met with the Library Advisory Board to introduce myself and get to know more about them. It was a good meeting and I will continue to coordinate with Sonja and the Board to pursue improvements to the operations and facilities associated with the Library system. One of the Board's initiatives is to establish and staff a Volunteer Program that can assist in various library operations, assist with activities, and perhaps increase the number of hours our library is open each week.

## Senior Center

We are currently working on a re-opening plan. Jean is working to get the entry doors fixed so we can welcome our Elders back properly. I have visited with a few of our community's Elders, informally, and they are anxious to get together again. Perhaps a grand re-opening activity would be a welcome opportunity, with proper precautions.