

Mayor's Report

March 10, 2023, General Meeting
(Drafted for Deadline Wednesday 4-5-23)

It has been a busy month at City Hall with several project RFQ bids closing, completing related communications with bidders, bid paperwork, preparing award confirmations for the Council, and issuing Notices to Proceed. City Administrator Kathy Leary has completed applications and documentation for infrastructure grants. Kathy and Treasurer Ben Sadler have put finishing touches on the draft operating budget for introduction this month. And we are spending more time to understand and react to developments relating to PFAS issues in Gustavus. Some details:

City Clerk Position. We are sorry to be losing Karen Platt from the City Clerk position. Karen has served ably and with diligence as our for five years. During that time she achieved her Certified Municipal Clerk standing. Karen leaves for new opportunities with the National Park Service at Bartlett Cove and we wish her the very best in her new line of work. She helped draft an updated City Clerk position description and we have posted it for applications.

Budget preparation. Treasurer Ben Sadler has worked with department heads, City Administrator Kathy Leary, and me to adjust line items in the draft FY24 operating budget, updating a few expense cost estimates. On April 3 we met with Administrative Librarian Jessie Soder to realign expense entries to match revenue from annual grants, and we added some supplementary funding for book purchases above the grant funding we use every year for reading materials.

The draft remains a balanced budget moving forward to FY 24 only \$100,000 in known unspent carry over funds from FY23. We expect the ultimate carryover to be much greater than \$100,000 and to exceed our conservatively-budgeted revenue, but we have crafted a budget that the departments can live with if we do not have extra carryover or revenue. With FY23 closeout in July we will know exactly how much unspent funds are available for re-appropriation to FY24 and we can decide whether to boost some department expense lines that were trimmed to balance the budget. Most of the carry over should be transferred to savings, primarily for capital projects.

Alaska Power and Telephone Filing to Adjust Rate Calculation. *Here I have disappointing news.* On April 4, the Regulatory Commission of Alaska declined to “reopen the docket” as requested by AP&T’s filing TA905-2 to alter the rate calculation to benefit better Gustavus ratepayers qualified for PCE. We have worked to provide ratepayers the full benefit of the NPS power sales credit without losing any of their Power Cost Equalization credit. The RCA cited technical reasons but left the door open for another filing, perhaps in conjunction with a new rate case. We hope still to make the case for Gustavus residential rate payers to receive the full credit without losing any PCE credit. Jim Mackovjak and I worked with Jason Custer of AP&T as Jason generated the first filing. After AP&T has an opportunity to study the RCA order and consider new options we will explore options for a new proposal. In the meantime, at least business owners get the full 11.7 cents/kWh benefit. That can

mean a lot to firms with high electric costs for refrigerators or freezers, so can help reduce product prices for consumers.

Airport Lease Approved for Softball Field Lease Approved. Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities this month approved our City's lease application to allow continued use of the soft ball field on Airport property next to the Post Office. Thanks so much to Sharyn Augustine at DOT&PF for shepherding our application through the Federal and State approval process. I signed the five-year lease on behalf of the City and the community. *Play Ball!*

Beach Park Signs Renewal. Thanks to Kathy Hocker for a fine job to refurbish the Beach Park sign that was vandalized earlier this winter. And Thanks to Zack Williams for nice work replacing the posts that were sawed off. We still have to reinstall the vandalized dog waste collection bins to new wooden posts at trail entrances on both sides of the park. All will be complete in time for the summer season.

Road Maintenance. Thanks to Ponch and Justin Marchbanks, and Larry Hazen of Glacier Bay Construction, our road maintenance contractor, for diligent City gravel road work through this breakup period following recent high snowfall and alternating rainy and freezing weather. With continuing wet conditions and still-frozen road embankments, there is still much to do, but once we get a good stretch of warm and sunny weather the roads will dry enough to be reshaped and smoothed with the motor grader. We plan to resume gravel additions once the underlying road embankments have been reconditioned. Please be patient as we restore the roads and give a thankful wave to the good folks getting it done for us!

The Library bike shelter project received a successful bid from Terra Construction (Matt Davis) that is well within our budget. The Council awarded the contract at the March 13 General Meeting. Project Manager John Barry, PE, has issued the Notice to Proceed and has staked out the location for the gravel pad extension where the shelter will be built at the parking area edge. Construction is expected by early summer.

The Salmon River Park Playground Equipment Project is moving forward. I received proposals from three manufacturers to provide facilities more suitable for older children. Each proposal has three options for equipment priced around \$20,000. Vice Mayor Kyle Bishop and Council Member Janene Driscoll are meeting with me this week to review proposals. After an initial review we plan to seek input from Ms. Karen McSpadden's class at the Gustavus School, which brought the idea for the play equipment improvements to us last fall. We are all excited to select equipment and purchase it for shipment to Gustavus in the coming weeks.

The Septage Holding Facility Project is also progressing. The City has purchased two used 10,000 gal tanks from a supplier in Juneau to be installed at the DRC to store septage pumped from local tanks until the material can be shipped to Juneau. The RFQ for installation closes Friday April 7. We scheduled a contract award for the general meeting Monday April 10, so work can proceed while groundwater at the site is at its annual spring minimum.

The Beach Park Hardened Trail Project will improve the trail to the west side viewing bench and campfire circle for walkers and wheelchair users. Glacier Bay Construction is the successful bidder on the RFQ, which closed March 7. Council award of the project contract is on the Agenda for April 10. We will issue a notice to proceed to the contractor so the work can begin this spring. We look forward to seeing this long-anticipated project completed this summer. John Barry, PE, is managing this project for the City.

The Firehall Repeater Tower Project RFQ for installation closed March 21 with Glacier Bay Construction the successful bidder. Project award is on the April 10 general meeting agenda. After Council award, project manager John Barry, PE will issue an NTP for construction.

The Gustavus Bike Side Path Project will build a bike and pedestrian side path parallel to, but separated from, Gustavus Road between the Gustavus School and Good River Corner. The side path will enhance safety for bike riders and pedestrians along this busy route. Better safety for students commuting to and from school by bike is the primary goal. City Administrator Kathy Leary and our grant writers are submitted the grant application in March. The application includes the resolution passed by the Council at the March General Meeting supporting the grant application and offering an extra 1% match to boost our score. Let's all hope for success!

The Cul-De-Sac Turnarounds Improvement Project will improve turnarounds at Porcupine St., Extratuff Rd, Mary's Rd, Meadow Ln, and Glen's Ditch Rd for more turning space, particularly for snow plowing equipment. An NCO to fund this work as a capital project is on the April 10 General Meeting agenda. Glen's Ditch Rd will be improved from Same Old Road to the Nagoonberry Trail parking area. Road and neighborhood appearances will benefit from having more finished and usable cul-de-sac turnarounds. I will manage this project, through provisions in our existing Annual Road Maintenance Contract.

The City Hall Heat Pump Installation Project took a big step forward when the heat pump system donated by the manufacturer, Mr. Cool, arrived in Gustavus. Thanks to Mr. Cool for the generous donation and to Frontier Freight for getting the equipment to Gustavus. Dean Weikle and I intend to install it as a trial of the "do-it-yourself" technology when he returns from his vacation travel in mid-April. John Nixon is will install the electrical circuit to power the heat pump. Andy Romanoff and Steve Behnke of Alaska Heat Smart and NCO in Juneau, which promotes heat pump technology, have offered to evaluate the heat pump performance and to calculate the cost differential compared to oil heat. We expect our system will be part of a state-wide evaluation of heat pumps conducted by the Alaska Cold Climate Housing Research Group in Fairbanks.

Watch for the heat pump to be installed soon along the east side of City Hall and stop by for a demonstration of the technology by our staff.

The Old Post Office Building Renovation work has resumed this week as Kenn Magowan has returned from seasonal work in Antarctic. City Administrator Kathy Leary and I met with Kenn April 4 at the site to discuss cleanup of the building and

renovation plans. Kenn is anxious to open his bike repair and rental shop there this summer. We are excited to see the historic World War II building renovated and back in productive service.

PFAS Contamination Issues in Gustavus. I'm most grateful for the presentations by Kelly McLaughlin and Whitney Rapp at the City Council work session Monday night April 3. We council members benefitted from gaining a stronger understanding of PFAS contamination patterns across the portion of Gustavus where sampling has occurred and of the potential unknown further extent of the problem. Sampling of water from the 20 ft deep monitoring well next to City Hall has indicated the presence of PFAS compounds substantially exceeding the EPA health advisory level. Samples from the adjacent 30 ft deep well have not detected PFAS. The concentrations of PFAS compounds at the shallow well reported from the 2023 sampling effort were much higher than in previous years. The pattern suggests groundwater conditions change markedly with time, season and possibly with tide level in the adjacent river. Further, it seems likely there is a separate PFAs source on the west side of the river, where City Hall and the Fire Hall are located.

The City is responsible for assuring that drinking water from wells on City properties meets State and Federal health standards and recommendations. As an initial precautionary measure, we are purchasing and installing new replacement carbon filter elements through which raw well water flows on the way to taps at City Hall, the Fire Hall, and the Public Library. We will set forth filter change schedules for all well water filter systems. The library has a special Berkey carbon filter unit supplying drinking water in the conference room, and we will assure that it is properly maintained.

To understand better the contamination levels and patterns at city wells we are contracting with Shannon & Wilson to sample PFAS compound concentrations both in raw well water and treated tap water at City Hall, the Fire Hall, and the Library, in May, July, and October, 2023. The intent at those buildings is to capture seasonal variation and increase confidence in sample results for ground water and to determine the effectiveness of the treatment systems in reducing or eliminating PFAS at the actual taps. Furthermore, we will sample raw water from the well serving growers at the City's Community Garden. The Garden is not within previously outlined PFAS contamination plumes but we need to be sure water there meets quality standards, particularly as the EPA is tightening its Health Advisory Level greatly.

We have asked Shannon & Wilson to report sample results immediately to us as they receive them from the analytical laboratory. I will report results to our staff and the public as we get them at City Hall.

The City continues to advocate for State and Federal mitigating action for PFAS contamination in Gustavus. On March 15 I wrote DOT&PF asking for an update on removal of the pile of PFAS-contaminated soil from contaminated areas stored there during the repaving project. Having had no response yet to that email, I followed up with a new request on April 4, once again communicating community concern about the stored soil.

Finally, the City is supporting passage of Sen Keihl's Senate Bill 67, which would end the use of PFAS-containing Fire Fighting Foam at Alaska airports. The bill will remove the threat of new spills at Alaska airports but does nothing to address existing contamination. We will advocate for expanding the State response to deal effectively with existing contamination either through additions to this bill or in separate legislation.

The Gustavus Health Fair will be held on Saturday, April 29 at the Gustavus Community Center. Fire Chief Sol Martinez is organizing the Fair this year on behalf of the City, with help from Council Member Tania Lewis, Colleen Stansbury PA(C), Rod Vaught, MD, and Kelly Warren from the SEARHC Clinic. Sol is recruiting outside practitioners and agencies such as AWARE to provide informational tables at the fair. We welcome those participants along with the professional team of the Alaska Health Fair and hope Gustavus residents will make the most of the services offered at the Fair. SEARHC will offer tours of their new Gustavus Clinic that afternoon. Watch for more information from Sol as the date nears. And be sure to sign up for economical health screening lab tests at the fair!

Chatham School District Meetings. City Administrator Kathy Leary and I appreciated a visit from District Superintendent Ralph Watkins at City Hall on Monday April 3. We had a nice discussion on how the city can support the success of the school. We have agreed to generate a Memorandum of Understanding between the District and the City with focus on how the City Public Library can partner with the school to increase educational opportunities for Gustavus School students.

On April 4, Vice Mayor Kyle Bishop, Council Member Janene Driscoll, City Administrator Kathy Leary, and I participated in the evening Chatham School District Roundtable public meeting at the Gustavus School. We appreciated the opportunity to hear Superintendent Watkins outline the District's Strategic Plan and discuss how it is being implemented. We heard about the school budget and Superintendent Watkins' hopes to make use of a new Reading in Alaska program from the Department of Education.

Mike Taylor
Mayor, City of Gustavus