

Mayor's Report For July 18 2022 General Meeting

Drafted July 13, 2022

July finds us three quarters of the way through our Council year but in the first month of the new 2023 fiscal year. We have been blessed with fine summer weather through the July 4th holiday, blessing one of the finest Independence Day celebrations ever at the Salmon River Park. Some highlights of work the last month include:

1. Salmon River Park clean up and beautification for the holiday. Thanks Glacier Bay Construction for renovation of the parking areas for the Salmon River Park and City Hall. Thanks to Jeff Jarvis for providing and nicely spreading new fine gravel for the parking in front of the park on Gustavus Rd. and to Marine Facilities Coordinator, Ben Sadler, for repairing the planter boxes and installing new parking strips there. Thanks to Karen Platt, Meadow Brook and Ann Wildman, and the help of other community garden folks, for planting flowers in the planter boxes, hanging baskets for City Hall, the Fire Hall, Library, and the Welcome Sign at the airport. And thanks to the LDS Church volunteers under the leadership of former council member Joe Clark for mowing grass and generally sprucing up the Salmon River Park area. The work of all these volunteers brightened our community in time for the holiday celebrations and we have never looked so good as this year! You all make me proud of our community!

2. Library Flower Beds and Story Trail. Thanks to our librarians Jessie Soder and LeAnn Weikle, the kids in summer reading program, and other parent volunteers for planting the flower bed at the library. It's yet another bright spot for us all to enjoy this summer! And thanks to Elm Robichaud for clearing the pathway for the Story Trail. It's a nice winding stroll in the woods behind the library and I look forward to seeing the first stories posted along it. Another fine program development by our library staff!

3. Holiday celebration. Thanks to Robin Jones and Karen Platt for organizing and posting activities for the community 4th of July celebration. What a fine set of activities we had! I hope "Wellie Wanging", an import from the UK, remains a regular event for years to come!

4. Holiday Accident. We were all saddened by a visitor's terrible fireworks accident on the evening of the 4th of July at the beach. The private accident was unrelated to the planned community fireworks display but occurred near many folks gathering for the later-scheduled community event, which was appropriately cancelled. Our GVFD EMS response team earned our profound gratitude and respect for their professional response and recovery of the victim. Our condolences are extended to all who knew the young person and who witnessed the event. Chief Sol Martinez is working to identify and arrange counseling resources to assist those struggling with the impact of the terrible event. The accident was a sobering reminder of the disastrous power of fireworks to alter lives suddenly and forever. Let us all resolve to apply all appropriate risk controls whenever future fireworks displays are planned.

5. City Administrator Kathy Leary had her first month serving our community and has quickly dived into the work. Be sure to read Kathy's work session report. I am so pleased to have her on our team. She doesn't shy from difficult tasks and decisions.

6. Phone Service issues. Kathy Leary has been advocating strongly on behalf of all Gustavus residents and businesses with both cell phone and land line service providers to improve service quality and reliability. Before she left for her pre-planned family trip this month she communicated with AT&T and GCI to request that they make improvements to broaden cell coverage in Gustavus. AT&T has already

planned to increase the tower height in Gustavus and to make other improvements to provide a better signal across Gustavus. Kathy has asked them to consider a new cell tower at the Falls Creek Y overlook site and AT&T engineers have agreed to evaluate that site. Because AT&T generally does not build their own towers, but rather leases space on towers owned by others, it is possible that the City may seek a grant to build a tower at the higher elevation and lease space to various mobile providers. The tower could also serve the GVFD radio system. We will be following up on these possibilities in the coming weeks.

On or about Saturday July 2 ACS land lines went down for about a third of Gustavus, mostly west of about the Dolly Varden/ Gustavus Road intersection, and for residents in subdivisions along Mountain View Road. I filed a trouble report on Sunday morning by email when I could not reach any person at ACS by phone with my report. Others also struggled to file reports with ACS because they don't answer the phones during non-business hours or on weekends and holidays. Many of us were extremely frustrated. We sought help from State Senator Jessie Kiehl, whose office managed to reach ACS managers with our complaint. Despite all those complaints, the ACS repairman arrived only on Monday July 11, at least 8 days after the outage began. Some service was restored quickly that day, but ACS said other customers would not be restored for a couple more days. The initial report is that the outage was caused by someone severing the phone line in an excavation. I don't yet have any confirmation of the responsible party.

The outage event reminds us how important our land lines are to this community, particularly given the poor cell coverage. Lodge reservations were impacted and residents were unable to make calls to doctor's offices and other essential contacts. Fortunately there were no emergency calls prevented. In my communications during the outage with ACS representatives, I have asked them to improve their outage response service by making it possible for ACS to take outage reports 24/7. A communications company should answer the phone or at least provide for someone to leave a voice mail message. I have also asked that ACS maintain a repair technician here in Gustavus as their legacy phone company used to do 45 years ago when our population was only 100 people.

7. Good River Bridge Repairs. On July 8, 2022 the City received the PND consulting engineer's report evaluating maintenance and repair needs for the Good River Bridge. The bridge has had very few repairs since its 1985 construction and State inspection reports over the last decade have highlighted deterioration of some elements such as guard rail posts and deck running boards but nothing that immediately threatens structural integrity. We have also been concerned about slumping of the road approach embankment on the northwest corner of the bridge due to the increasingly incised side-stream entering Good River along that corner of the bridge. The PND report details needed repairs for the wooden bridge structure, totaling just under \$100,000. The report also provides options for stabilizing the embankment adjacent to the side stream with those options varying in cost from about \$102,000 to \$929,000. The Road Maintenance Team will meet soon to evaluate the repair needs and will develop a scoping document. I will also ask the grant agency to look for an infrastructure grant for the bridge work.

8. Library Bike Shelter. The librarians did a fine job scoping the project and we have now taken it into the City Hall public works function to push forward. At our request, PND Engineers is preparing a proposal for consulting services to provide plans and specifications suitable for submission to the Fire

Marshal for approval and for inclusion in an RFQ for construction. We may be able to construct this fall, but more likely in 2023.

9. Grandpa's Farm Road Bridge. The bridge package is in manufacturing by Western Wood Structures in Oregon and is scheduled to go to the pressure treatment plant in a few days. Scheduling there is busy. We expect now that it will ship to the barge in Seattle in after mid-August. Construction should begin in late August and be completed by mid-September, we hope. Thanks a bunch, to Treasurer Eduarda Loggins for successfully navigating the complicated and frustrating Fish and Wildlife Service grants portal to make reimbursements possible! Thanks also to Andy Stevens, our point of contact at FWS for helping us work through that developing web site.

10. Old Post Office/Preschool Building. Thanks to Council member Tania Lewis for helping to scope needs for renovation of the Old PO building. The city owns the property and has used it for cold storage in recent years. The lot has looked like an abandoned property, giving a poor impression to visitors passing by from the airport. Recently Kenn Magowan has requested to rent the building for his bike repair operation. The council appropriated \$10,000 a couple years ago for a basic clean up. I directed Glacier Bay Construction to cut brush on the 0.19 acre property and trim the large willow at the corner of the building back from the structure. They also leveled a mound and filled a depression where an old septic crib had collapsed. Thanks to Justin and Ponch Marchbanks for the big improvement! They will follow up with more raking of splintered willow stems and finally with a hydroseeding to improve the lot appearance. I am getting estimates from various trades specialists for removing the two decaying entry structures, upgrading utilities, and painting the building. I also have a meeting with Kenn Magowan Thursday 7/14 to discuss his needs. After discussion with the council in the work session, my plan is to determine what basic work is needed to make the building look decent and function only as specifically needed for the bike shop. We may be able to take Kenn up on his offer to do some of the work.

11. Softball Field. A recent DOT inspection of Airport Lease Lots determined that continued use of the softball field on the lot behind the Post Office requires a permit. The activities there are not sponsored by the city, but advocates for the popular activity have asked the city for help in securing a permit. If private individuals apply there would be a large fee, but we understand that if the City applies the permit may be issued without fee. This is yet to be finally determined. In response, I communicated with Sharyn Augustine of DOT and on July 11 I submitted the permit application, making my best case for the continued use, on the form she provided. She said the application will have to pass through several layers of approval at DOT. I'll follow up to monitor progress. I hope through this measure the activity will be secured for years to come.

12. FEMA flood recovery and mitigation projects. Our point of contact for the flood recovery and mitigation projects has shifted to Jenny Belanger at the Alaska Department of Homeland Security. Jenny has been very helpful and patient with us through the process. She works tirelessly on our behalf to help us navigate the complicated requirements for the federal funding FEMA has authorized us. So far, we have qualified for as much as \$260,000, which is going toward permanent road and drainage improvements. We will soon be extending the ditch along the east side of Wilson Rd as far north as Hemlock Rd. Later phases will complete ditches on both sides of Wilson with culverts under intersecting driveways and roads. Those projects will take some time to design and contract, so may extend through or beyond 2023. We expect to complete a culvert replacement at the west end of Tong Road in late

summer after the adjacent Glacier Bay Country Inn is closed. We are re-evaluating a ditch and culvert plan for the east end of Tong Rd and will need to postpone it.

13. Annual Road Maintenance Contract. Glacier Bay Construction was the sole bidder on road maintenance again for FY23. We have agreed changes to the “Hold Harmless” provisions to protect the contractor from threatened frivolous suits from the fiber optic firm over disturbance of improperly installed fiber optic cables during routine road maintenance, but I believe such conflicts can be managed successfully. The contractor has also declined to plow some roads next winter unless we can provide better turning space at the ends for the large equipment. I am working with residents near those turnaround locations to configure and construct more space to enable proper maintenance. I believe we can resolve all or most of the issues.

14. Meetings with State legislative delegation. Senator Jessie Kiehl and Representative Andi Story visited Gustavus last week. It was an introductory visit for Rep Story who is running unopposed for the seat covering Gustavus after redistricting. We will miss visits from Representative Sara Hannan whose district no longer includes Gustavus, but we look forward to working with Rep Andi Story going forward. Thanks to Councilmember Jim Mackovjak for putting the visitors up at his home and for joining me in giving them tours of Gustavus.

13. Intertie. I received an encouraging update from NPS Chief of Maintenance Jake Ohlson regarding the startup of the electrical intertie to Bartlett Cove. Jake reported that the resolution we passed at our special meeting in June has indeed been effective in enabling progress toward a commercial agreement between the NPS and AP&T to start up the intertie soon. They continue to work details, but I am hopeful that success is near. Thanks to Jake, Superintendent Hooze, and others at the NPS for moving it forward.

14. Covid Cases are on the rise in Gustavus. The last week has seen a major spike in Covid-19 cases in Gustavus and Statewide. As I write this report before the Wednesday morning 7/13 deadline there are at least a dozen officially-posted cases and many others reported from home testing. I am evaluating once again imposing a mask-wearing requirement in City buildings for protection of staff and as a responsible measure to reduce transmission risk. I urge all Gustavus residents and businesses to implement controls to reduce transmission. The BA.5 variant is the most contagious ever, has evolved to circumvent previous immunities, and continues to cause serious disease for some, particularly among the elderly and folks with vulnerable conditions. On average each week over 325 Americans are still dying of Covid-19. Please be considerate of others and follow the established public health control measures to protect each other and show our respect and concern for those with vulnerabilities.

I wish everyone enjoyment of the rest of the summer in Gustavus. May fine weather continue to bless our busy outdoor activities!

Mike Taylor
Mayor