

City Council Minutes
Regular Meeting
January 21, 2025 ~ 5:00PM
City Hall, Delta Junction, Alaska



CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE / PRAYER

Mayor Igor Zarembo called the meeting to order at 5:02pm.

Council members present: Mayor Igor ZAREMBA, Deputy Mayor Mary LEITH, Michael PRESTEGARD, Lance STRICKLIN, Pete HALLGREN, Stormie MITCHELL, Travis RIESNER

City staff present: City Administrator Lori Roberts, Finance Officer Kaylee Reiersen, Library Director Tiki Levinson, City Clerk Pat White

Public present: 131 members from the community (including 35 on Zoom) were present at the start of the meeting. Several stayed for the entire meeting. The meeting was broadcast over KDHS 95.5 FM radio.

AMENDMENTS ~ APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: Leith moved to approve the January 21, 2025 agenda as presented; Stricklin seconded.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

AMENDMENTS ~ APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Motion: Prestegard moved to table approval of the minutes from December 17, 2024, January 7, 2025, and January 8, 2025 for the purpose of training in Roberts Rules of Order, particularly executive sessions; Mitchell seconded.

Motion failed with two in favor (Mitchell, Prestegard) and five opposed (Stricklin, Hallgren, Leith, Riesner, Zarembo).

Motion: Leith moved to approve minutes from the December 17, 2024 regular meeting, January 7, 2025 regular meeting, and January 8, 2025 special meeting; Stricklin seconded.

Motion passed on a roll call with six in favor (Prestegard, Hallgren, Riesner, Leith, Stricklin, Zarembo) and one opposed (Mitchell).

PUBLIC COMMENTS / REQUEST TO SPEAK

[Instructions for attending Council meetings via Zoom are located in the top right corner of every agenda (email finance@deltajunction.us for link and access code before 4:00pm). Information is not to be shared or posted to other social media outlets.]

Zarembo acknowledged the large audience. Recalling misconduct on Zoom during the April 2, 2024 Council meeting, he said comments from Zoom participants are muted. If unable to attend meetings in person, he encouraged sending comments to the City (PO Box 229, 99737) or calling staff (895-4656).

John Lyons, a retired firefighter and medic, asked the Council to do what is necessary to not take funding from EMS services and infrastructure.

Carol Austin referred to talk about establishing a 501(c)(3) and going back to a volunteer-run ambulance service. It took over a year for Delta Junction Trails Association to establish as a non-profit. She expressed concern with someone in need of medical attention being denied an ambulance transport.

Zarembo reported State of Alaska insurance rules have changed. They no longer insure volunteer ambulance services. The City has been working as a municipality, which is tax exempt, to eliminate a lapse in ambulance services. Roberts was successful in reestablishing the City's Medicare provider ID, but not the Medicaid number yet. He reported accusations about the Council trying to enforce borough formation and taxation are simply not true. City Administrator Lori Roberts contacted the Local Boundary Commission to inquire about creating a fire district (in her research to jointly fund fire and EMS). The Council has been transparent regarding merging Delta Junction Volunteer Fire Department (DJVFD) and Rural Deltana Volunteer Fire Department (RDVFD). Rural Deltana cannot get insurance because it lapsed for at least seven years. The City leased some RD vehicles for \$1.00/year to insure them and put them into service. Deltana firefighters joined DJVFD for the same reason. They will become ALCAN End Fire District (if/when the two departments merge). Zarembo reported rumors that are circulating about him stepping down as mayor were also false. Facebook posts are lies, labeled as facts. They are misleading and manipulative, designed by people who live outside the City limits who wish to destroy what little

local government exists. Zaremba encouraged area residents to get involved in helping find a way to afford ambulance services; that it is a communitywide concern, not just the City and not just Rural Deltana.

JW Musgrove offered to help, if someone in charge or someone from Delta Medical Transport would contact him.

Yevgeniy Chenkov offered to volunteer in any way that is helpful.

Ryan Capporelli encouraged people to get involved. He said, “No matter what happens, we need volunteers. We cannot let things go by the wayside ...” He asked people to contact Rural Deltana’s Facebook page via messenger. He will teach CPR and first aid to anyone willing to learn.

Discussion followed regarding bringing the community together to keep ambulance services from lapsing, whether funds can be diverted within the City budget, and bringing input to the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting (January 28, 2025 at City Hall).

Amber White, owner of Delta Medical Transport (DMT), read a letter of resignation, dated January 21, 2025, ending the Contract for Professional Services between the City and DMT at 11:59pm on February 21, 2025. (The contract’s Term of Agreement clause requires a 30-day written notice by either party.) White addressed the community and explained how DMT started (as a franchise on February 5, 2013) and its 12-year struggles. She recalled overwhelming support from the community to maintain an ALS (Advance Life Support) level of service during a public hearing on September 29, 2022. Medics are required to carry certification. They are trained and skilled to administer lifesaving or life ending drugs. They are not part-time volunteers. She explained frustration with a group of naysayers whose objective is to undermine, disrupt, and dismantle local government. She asked to “Take back our community ... push for a structured plan that guarantees professional EMS coverage ... advocate for funding, community-driven initiatives, and for leadership that prioritizes public safety.” White reported Council member Stormie Mitchell filed a protective order against her husband, Fire Chief Tony White. [Clerk note: The case was dismissed during a January 27 court hearing.]

Discussion followed regarding DMT unable to pay employees for the first seven or eight months (2013), still operating at a deficit, degrading Facebook attacks designed to destroy DMT and instill fear, but failure to mention medics’ professionalism, patient care, or response time, DMT being the only private ambulance company in Alaska’s history to receive an outstanding ambulance service award, and not allowing negativity to distract from focusing on strengthening EMS and moving forward.

Tod Chambers, currently serving as Assistant Chief of Operations and Training with the North Pole Fire Department, reported he received a call on January 9 from Council member Stormie Mitchell who was looking for information about how EMS operates. Ambulance services are governed by a host of regulations, which can be complicated. The North Pole Fire Department staffs two ambulances and, along with fire services, they operate 24/7/365. Most of their \$3.2 million dollar budget pays for staffing. Ninety percent of their call volume is EMS related, and they recover maybe one-third of their expenses. Chambers said he has engaged in educational outreach with many elected officials during his 30-year career, but too often conversations are misrepresented or taken out of context. He offered to share a summary of his conversation with Mitchell because he did not want it tweaked.

Hallgren reported DMT had not received adequate recognition for their service, of which he had never heard a complaint. The two bids, received for emergency medical and transport services in November 2023 (\$995,000 and \$3,363,926), would consume most of the City’s FY25 budget (\$2,797,155). Hallgren touched on funding options, area residents opposing taxation, when Delta’s volunteer Rescue Squad failed after 40 years, three-quarters of the community residing outside of the City and raising landfill rates in July 2024 to allocate 3¢ of the 4¢ increase to EMS services (estimated \$206,000/year). He thanked DMT for their dedication and professional service.

Al Edgren proposed a 3% fee on all federal projects in Delta, i.e., Fort Greely, State bridge projects, etc. The suggestion was nixed by previous legislators, but maybe new leadership (Nick Begich) would pursue it if they received an onslaught of emails requesting the proposal.

Hallgren called to recess at 6:41pm.

Zaremba called to resume the meeting at 6:51pm.

Zaremba asked for any objection to move *Hess Property* to the next item of business. None were offered.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Hess Property

Zaremba explained concerns that Hess property owner, Bogdan Koval, was building commercial cabins on residential lots and that well and septic separation might be an issue with neighboring properties. Koval is sacrificing one of his two lots, so water and sewer separation is in compliance.

Debbie Joslin, Joslin Realty, reported Koval is building three two-bedroom cabins. Hutto's Apartments, two churches, and fourplexes are commercial businesses already in the residential zoned area. Koval is providing longterm rentals, which are a current necessity.

Koval reported public water requires a distance of 200 feet and private water requires 100 feet. His wells were certified by M2C1 Engineering and do not interfere with neighboring properties.

Discussion followed regarding Koval's three cabins and two lots using one address, widening the driveway to allow fire access to the third cabin, and whether there is room to replace septic systems in the future.

Prestegard reported one foundation for a single dwelling or a duplex for two families complies with City Code 4.20.020(b), but three foundations do not.

Hallgren referenced the section of City Code (4.20.015) that was added to allow neighborhood businesses in the residential area. It requires contacting owners of property within 500 feet of new construction. Thereafter, a Conditional Use Permit (Ordinance 2011-09) was drafted and Timbercrest Dental was built on Nistler Road.

Leith suggested postponing discussion to the February 4 meeting.

REQUEST TO SPEAK

Roberts explained her involvement in CAC meetings as a member of the public and progression of the meetings with Agnew::Beck consultants, which included researching revenue to pay for ambulance services, sustainability, and input from speakers with experience in the EMS field. She talked about several items. Fort Greely's mission, to serve their soldiers, being restricted from providing mutual aid if Delta does not have the same ALS level of service. Deltana Community Corporation (DCC) had \$95,000 as a potential source of revenue, but only to a non-profit organization. Roberts met with personnel from the State Supplemental Emergency Medical Transport (SEMT) Program who encouraged the City taking over ambulance billing. They provided that SEMT information to the public and afterwards, Roberts received death threats. At the October 28 meeting, a participant asked about establishing a fire and EMS district, which she followed up on. CAC meetings stopped thereafter (when Roberts was publicly accused of trying to expand City boundaries to create a borough). Without EMS presence, the local school district cannot host school-sanctioned sports. Contractors may opt to commute instead of relocating their families to Delta. Imposing fees on federal projects would require a two-meeting process to expand the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction (City Code 7.01.010) and include verbiage to set parameters, i.e., limiting a company's number of employees.

Discussion followed regarding the two main hotels located within City limits generating \$250,000/year in bed fees, recovering alcohol tax on liquor sold locally, an overall sale "tax," and earmarking the multiple streams of revenue for EMS and fire only.

NEW BUSINESS

Purchases over \$1,000.00

CK #23430 – PERS - \$4,470.31 for retirement payroll, 10-25-24

CK #23431 – PERS - \$4,539.73 for retirement payroll, 11-08-24

CK #23432 – PERS - \$4,447.18 for retirement payroll, 11-02-24

CK #23433 – PERS - \$4,505.46 for retirement payroll, 12-06-24

CK #23434 – Alasconnect - \$3,166.55 for January IT contract

CK #23435 – ACS - \$1,093.65 for February telephone and Internet

CK #23436 – Guess & Rudd - \$1,335.00 for December legal services

CK #23437 – Siemens - \$10,809.56 for library boiler repair

CK #23438 – Vitus - \$12,872.72 for December heating and equipment fuel

CK #23439 – Delta Eastside Truck & Auto - \$2,202.43 for 2008 Dodge inspection (brakes, battery, and differential fluid)

Motion: Leith moved to approve checks #23430 through 23439 as presented; Riesner seconded.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call.

Finance Report

Roberts reported Altman Rogers (awarded audit contract on December 17, 2024) is unable to process the FY23 audit without previous year's audits. Nothing for FY23 was documented by Alliance CPAs and both FY21 and FY22 audits were not reconciled. Altman Rogers recommended hiring an external accountant to complete an audit prep. Roberts solicited emergency bids from three companies, but only one could complete the work before Altman Rogers conducts the audit for FY23 on February 24, 2024.

Reierson reported Altman Rogers expects to complete the FY23 audit by February.

Discussion followed regarding problems possibly linked to switching software from Cougar Mountain to QuickBooks (early 2022), FY22 audit reported finalized in April 2024, and concerns with discrepancies.

Motion: Hallgren moved at 8:01pm to extend the Council meeting another 15 minutes; Mitchell seconded. Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Hallgren expressed concern with having honest audits, especially with recent knowledge of theft in RDVFD. He said government has a bad reputation at all levels and audit protection is a necessity.

Reierson reported she was confident in moving forward once a misentry is located.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Matters Concerning Personnel

Zaremba reported the purpose of the executive session was to address Council member Stormie Mitchell's formal complaint delivered at the end of the meeting on November 5, 2024.

Motion: Reisner moved to go into executive session to discuss subjects that tend to prejudice the reputation and character of any person, provided the person may request a public discussion; Stricklin seconded.

Motion passed on a roll call with four in favor (Leith, Stricklin, Riesner, Zaremba) and three opposed (Mitchell, Prestegard, Hallgren).

Council members Igor Zaremba, Mary Leith, Stormie Mitchell, Michael Prestegard, Lance Stricklin, Pete Hallgren, Travis Riesner, and City Clerk Pat White exited the Council chambers at 8:15pm to a closed-door meeting in the City Administrator's office.

Zaremba called to reconvene the Council meeting at 8:30pm.

Motion: Riesner moved to extend the Council meeting another 15 minutes; Stricklin seconded.

Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Motion: Riesner moved to adopt Mayor Zaremba's response letter to Stormie Mitchell's complaint, dated November 5, 2024, as directed by City Attorney Mike McLaughlin; Stricklin seconded.

Motion passed on a roll call with six in favor (Hallgren, Stricklin, Riesner, Prestegard, Leith, Zaremba) and one opposed (Mitchell).

Discussion followed regarding treating fellow citizens with respect and civility, Mitchell unhappy about not being able to share information about alcohol taxes from the Department of Labor, and whether Council members need to be authorized to act on the Council's behalf.

ADJOURNMENT – 8:46pm

Agenda items not addressed during the January 21 meeting would be carried over to February 4, 2025.

Igor Zaremba, Mayor

CITY
SEAL

Pat White, City Clerk

Approved: February 4, 2025