

City Council Minutes
Regular Meeting
February 18, 2025 ~ 5:00PM
City Hall, Delta Junction, Alaska



CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE / PRAYER

Mayor Igor Zarembo called the meeting to order at 5:01pm.

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

Council on Zoom: Pete HALLGREN, Lance STRICKLIN (joined at 5:22pm)

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

Public present: Approximately 50 people, plus 35 on Zoom, and two guest speakers, Todd McDowell and Aaron Reinert (on Zoom). The meeting was also broadcast over KDHS 95.5 FM radio.

AMENDMENTS ~ APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Zarembo reported issues with grader tires were resolved but will be brought up again during the next budget cycle.

Prestegard asked to remove *Two Letters of Concern* under *Correspondence* because the author was not identified.

Roberts reported there was a misunderstanding in publicizing the letters. They were addressed to the Council.

Jessica Bay (in the audience) identified herself and said she is awaiting a response from the City Council.

Mitchell, addressing Mayor Zarembo, said, "As Chair, you should not allow the letters to be put out like this."

Motion: Hallgren moved to amend the agenda by removing the letters; Prestegard seconded.

Motion passed on a roll call with six in attendance.

Motion: Leith moved to remove *Grader Tires* from *New Business*; Riesner seconded.

Motion passed on a roll call with six in attendance.

[Agenda topics were later shuffled to accomplish business before running out of time in the three-hour meeting.

What was not addressed was carried over to the March 4 Council agenda.]

AMENDMENTS ~ APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Motion: Leith moved to approve the February 4, 2025 minutes as presented; Hallgren seconded.

Motion passed on a roll call with six in attendance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Amber White read a letter to the community, extending Delta Medical Transport's termination (February 21, 2025) to March 31, 2025 because of receiving a massive show of support and overwhelming concern about potential loss of ambulance services. The extension will enable continuation of mutual aid with Fort Greely while DMT works with other partners, Alaska EMS, City of Delta Junction, Rural Alaska Emergency Services (RAES), and local fire departments, toward a realistic long-term plan to keep local Advanced Life Support (ALS) services.

Dawn Frazier encouraged Council to use savings to extend DMT's contract for a year. She asked the community to show commitment by contributing \$100/month to RAES, with or without the \$6 processing fee. Contributions can be made online (<https://emsalaska.org>).

Julia Phelan read a Letter of Intent, dated February 17, 2025 and issued by RAES, supporting DMT as the local EMS provider. Of four proposals, DMT proved to be the most qualified and most cost-effective. Struggles to cover expenses are due to shortfalls in Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement, a high percentage of MCR/MCD patients, and added operational costs. The sole purpose of RAES, a non-profit formed to help support EMS in Interior Alaska, is to provide financial assistance that is solicited from area residents, corporate sponsorships, and grants. RAES, partnering with the City to offset expenses, will contract with DMT for 30 days and negotiate the contract for another 6-12 months thereafter.

Chris Morley said the community needs to uncouple DMT from the City and form a community-owned EMS.

REQUEST TO SPEAK

Sherman Stebbins said he agreed with extending DMT's contract so they can separate themselves from the community in 8-10 months. His calculations for a non-profit or community-run ambulance service would cost

roughly one million dollars and he will donate \$10,000 toward it. He offered to help the City put together a business plan, starting with a “Bud Light” version instead of “champagne” ALS (Advanced Life Support). He said it is not unlikely that the community could come full circle and depend on volunteers again. Referencing the EMS brochure (from February 4), Stebbins suggested several changes, including no requirement for standby ambulances at school sport events.

Roberts reported the brochure was a dead issue. It was created in October, not discussed until February 4 because of abnormally long meetings, but nonetheless outdated.

Todd McDowell, Alaska EMS Director, reported:

- He has tremendous respect for volunteers, but volunteerism is going away in every state of the union.
- The State EMS office will partner with the Delta community to find answers about how to sustain an ambulance service. They contract with Safe Tech to facilitate meetings and conduct assessments.

Aarron Reinert, Owner of Safe Tech Solutions, reported:

- First to be determined is what kind of EMS (full time, part time, volunteers, ALS, BLS, part time ALS). How much will it cost? How will the gap be filled between revenue generated from fees and the expense of providing services? What is the community willing to pay for ambulance services? Reinert explained they will be on site for several days gathering information and will spend time analyzing it before presenting observations, findings, and recommendations via a public forum. Referring to the ballot (survey), he said the community has already presented a lot of ideas about raising funds. Regarding the project’s timeframe, Reinert reported the process typically takes four to six months, depending on how quickly they can access data. Safe Tech has done approximately 100 assessments across the United States.

- Part of the assessment is to find the right structure. Should the City operate the EMS? Reinert said he can share organizational history and knowledge to reach a sustainable, reliable, and viable EMS system. He has been a paramedic for 34 years and now conducts individual, regional, and statewide assessments across the country. He is also the Chief Executive Director of an ambulance company that averages 10,000 calls per year and serves 1,000 square miles in rural parts of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

- There are specific wage and hour rules regarding minimum wages paid to volunteer EMS and volunteer firefighters (Waiting to Work, Working to Wait).

- An average ambulance in today’s market runs \$347,000 to \$425,000. Heart monitors alone cost \$45,000. The cot and mechanism to lift patients in and out of ambulances costs \$50,000.

- ALS operating expense with a paramedic or advance practitioner plus an EMT costs around \$1.4 million and includes a 5% to 25% capital reserve that is set aside to replace ambulances, defibrillators, portable radios, suction machines, stair chairs, cots, etc. Reinert explained necessary start up fees (\$750,000) and other details to stand up an ambulance service. Revenue received from insurance is not included in the \$1.4 million. Ambulances usually last three to five years. Ambulances under 150,000 logged miles will cost around 38¢ per mile to operate. Over 150,000 miles will cost 98¢ per mile.

A lengthy discussion followed regarding struggles to build EMT programs and provide hands-on experience and every EMS system needing EMTs, aka first responders, who are often volunteers.

EMS Business Proposal

Motion: Leith moved to move *EMS Business Proposal* from *Unfinished Business*; Stricklin seconded.

Motion carried by unanimous consent.

Cody White, President of Rural Alaska Emergency Services (RAES), reported they started as a non-profit two years ago with the intent of fixing funding issues in multiple areas. Copper Center was failing. Copper River EMS (CREMS) stepped in. DMT has provided services (since 2011). RAES solicited bids in 2023 to get a baseline for what it would cost to fund an ambulance service. DMT had the lowest bid out of three other bids (Alaska Medical Transport, Guardian, CREMS). Necessary funds for an ALS ambulance are the same, whether operated by the City or the community. Area residents need to help fund the gap, which is the only shortfall necessary for a sustainable ALS service. RAES can fund DMT for the next six months, and in the interim, will review its structure to maintain

an ALS level that can be handed down to our kids. He asked the community to support them in standing up an ambulance service.

Julie Phelan reported that RAES depends on the community for funding. If every person donated \$25/month, it would be enough to fund the entire ambulance service. If only one third of the local population contributed, it would come close to half a million dollars. Corporate sponsors are waiting to see commitment from the community before they contribute.

Discussion followed regarding how to donate; for RAES, scan a QR Code from advertisement in the local newspaper or drop off a check at Wells Fargo (specify Delta or Glennallen), and for the City, scan the QR Code to donate to the dedicated EMS account.

Motion: Hallgren moved to fund the existing contract with DMT through March 31, 2025 and to consider other options, possibly a one-year final extension; Stricklin seconded.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call (Mitchell, Hallgren, Riesner, Leith, Stricklin, Prestegard, Zaremba).

Discussion followed regarding most recent estimate for ambulance services (\$103,000/month), 50% of all ambulance transports nationwide requiring ALS level of care, mutual aid intact with Fort Greely Garrison, RAES finalizing contract negotiations, current trend showing more communities contracting with an EMS provider (PUM or public utility model), the City reestablishing its provider ID numbers for billing, a key component to run an ambulance service, the public's overwhelming support to keep the ALS level of care (town meeting September 2022), community-wide ballot/survey compiled from public input about ways to raise revenue to pay for ambulance service (February 4, 2025), and support for the State EMS office to conduct an assessment.

Roberts reported the City has a contract with DMT through March 31. There is funding (\$46,000/month) through May and possibly June, the end of the fiscal year, depending on revenue from the landfill. The goal is to work with RAES to carry the contract through the next three months (end of September) and six to twelve months thereafter. Both the City and RAES would solicit funds from the community.

Hallgren referred to City savings (\$1.8 million built up over 26 years) and said the City cannot afford to operate a \$1 million/year ambulance service. He asked if sustainability could come from the 4,500-5,000 area residents?

NEW BUSINESS

Purchases over \$1,000.00

CK #23449 to Bank of America - \$1,313.48 for credit card charges (\$25 approved on Feb. 4)

CK #23462 to Alasconnect - \$3,166.55 for IT services, February contract

CK #23463 to AT&T - \$1,612.25 for Fairbanks dispatch and Donnelly Dome power

CK #23464 to ESRI - \$2,000.00 for 2025 mapping software

CK #23465 to GVEA - \$9,480.00 for January electricity

CK #23466 to Vitus - \$8,419.54 for January heating and equipment fuel

Motion: Prestegard moved to approve checks #23449 and #23462 through 23466 as presented; Mitchell seconded.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call (Stricklin, Prestegard, Mitchell, Leith, Riesner, Hallgren, Zaremba).

Quarterly Transfer of Donations into Respective Investment Accounts

Reierson asked for permission to make quarterly deposits into library, firefighters, and EMS perspective accounts.

Motion: Leith moved to approve moving donations to investment accounts on a quarterly basis; Mitchell seconded.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call (Hallgren, Riesner, Leith, Stricklin, Prestegard, Mitchell, Zaremba).

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Second Reading, Public Hearing and Adoption of Ordinance 2025-02, Amending City Code §3.21.100,

Sanitary Landfill Fees [8¢ to 12¢ increase, effective July 1, 2024, to be revisited October 2024 and January 2025]

Motion: Leith moved to hold the public hearing of Ordinance 2025-02; Stricklin seconded.

Zaremba called for public comments with none being offered.

Motion: Leith moved to close the public hearing portion of Ordinance 2025-02; Riesner seconded.

Motion: Stricklin moved to adopt Ordinance 2025-02, Amending City Code §3.21.100; Leith seconded.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call (Prestegard, Stricklin, Riesner, Hallgren, Mitchell, Leith, Zaremba).

Employee Policy Plan Revisions

Mitchell handed Mayor Zaremba a copy of the Doyon manual and said there are too many changes to the City *Employee Policy Plan* to discuss tonight. She presented changes that she wanted to make to the policy plan.

Zaremba asked Mitchell to make copies and distribute them to Council members so they can review them. Revisions to the policy plan would be put off to the March 4 Council meeting.

Resolution 2025-01, Renewing Visitor Center Lease with Delta Farm Bureau

Roberts reported there were no changes to the contract with the Delta Farm Bureau (DFB), other than the lease dates (February 18, 2020 / December 31, 2024 changed to January 1, 2025 / December 31, 2029).

Motion: Leith moved to approve Resolution 2025-01, renewing the agreement with the Delta Farm Bureau to lease the Visitor Center; Riesner seconded.

Mitchell questioned the cost of maintenance for the building compared to charging \$500/year to lease it.

Reierson reported \$950 was paid last year for supplies, repairs, and water testing, plus \$2,000 for insurance.

Roberts reported DFB paid for parts and maintenance of the boiler.

Leith reported that the City did not want to staff or operate the Visitor Center (after the Chamber folded in 2019).

Paul Tappan (in the audience) reported he attends DFB meetings. They are given regular reports that show their profit margins are small. He suspects they would not want to renew the lease if the rental rates were altered. He suggested talking with them.

Leith moved to extend the meeting another 15 minutes; Hallgren seconded. Motion carried.

Discussion followed regarding the lessee responsible for upkeep and revisiting the contract in one year.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call (Hallgren, Riesner, Leith, Stricklin, Prestegard, Mitchell, Zaremba).

REPORTS

Airport - Mike Prestegard reported an airplane flipped over during the windstorm in January.

Landfill – Igor Zaremba reported one of the loaders is experiencing issues with leaking hydraulic fluids.

Finance – Kaylee Rierson reported all books were reconciled on February 6. The FY23 audit will begin next week.

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENTS

ADJOURNMENT – 8:04pm

Igor Zaremba, Mayor

CITY
SEAL

Pat White, City Clerk

Approved: March 4, 2025