

City Council Minutes
Regular Meeting
March 4, 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, Stormie MITCHELL

Council present via Zoom: Pete HALLGREN, Travis RIESNER, Lance STRICKLIN

City staff present: City Administrator Lori Roberts, Finance Officer Kaylee Reiersen, City Clerk Pat White

Public present: Approximately 80 people, including State EMS Director Todd McDowell and 37 others on Zoom.

AMENDMENTS ~ APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Zarembo asked to swap Todd McDowell and Chris Morley under *Request to Speak*.

Motion: Leith moved to approve the March 4, 2025 agenda as amended; Stricklin seconded.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call.

AMENDMENTS ~ APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Motion: Leith moved to approve the minutes from the February 18, 2025 regular meeting; Stricklin seconded.

Motion passed unanimously on a roll call.

Motion: Riesner moved to approve the minutes from the February 26, 2025 special meeting; Leith seconded.

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

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Sherman Stebbins complained that he did not receive response to emails he sent to City Administrator Lori Roberts on February 18 and February 25. He reported that Representative Rebecca Schwanke told him the City of Delta Junction has not put in for capital projects "in quite some time" and asked if it was because audits were not current. Roberts reported:

- Stebbins' emails, addressed to Flower Cole, Admin Assistant, were not forwarded until February 21. She responded on February 25.
- Communities with families who would benefit from capital projects must be 51% low to moderate income. Neither the City of Delta Junction, currently classified at 47%, nor Deltana, 32.6%, qualify.

Julia Phelan reported that Rural Alaska Emergency Services (RAES) issued a letter of intent, dated February 17, 2025, to continue supporting the current EMS. The community has responded with donations and RAES is now working to get corporate sponsors and possibly setting up endowment funds, which could help fund EMS in perpetuity. An accountant, CPA firm, and legal counsel have joined the RAES Board. Their main goal is to stabilize EMS in the community for the next 12 months, which is adequate time to develop long-term plans (goal #2), whether it is through a private contractor, a city-owned service like Chris Morley's plan, or a separate non-profit. Donations are accepted on the RAES website (<https://emsalaska.org>).

Jonathan Potter shared research about wages for medics and standing up an independent nonprofit.

REQUEST TO SPEAK

Todd McDowell – EMS Assessment

Todd McDowell, State EMS Director, reported he looks forward to partnering with the City to find a long term sustainable, reliable, and viable EMS system. A one-year contract will allow time for a thorough assessment. Meetings will be facilitated by Safe Tech owner Aaron Reinert and will include McDowell, staff from his office, and two regional directors. The public must be clear in what system to focus on (City-owned, non-profit, or contracted). What the public expects must be defined. McDowell suggested setting an initial virtual meeting on March 19 or 21 to define the scope of work and what type of service the community wants.

Chris Morley – EMS Plan

Chris Morley distributed and explained his five-page city-owned EMS plan with a five-year (2026/2030) operating budget that is ready to roll on January 1, 2026. Needed personnel would include a director at \$100,000/year with a

2.5% annual raise, two medics at \$85,800/year, two medics at \$68,640, and a part-time office administrator at \$15,000. He explained line by line, touching on various points: outsourcing billing to a third party, estimating \$125,000 from State Supplemental Emergency Medical Transport (SEMT), benefits for medics, dependency on fundraising, setting aside \$10,000/month to grow a dedicated savings to replace equipment, first year expenses (\$1,056,277 including \$650,000 in start up), training responders, etc. Morley asked the City to budget \$70,000 annually. His gas station, Oh Morley's, is currently pledging 2¢ per gallon, which equates to \$1,200/month. He will increase it for the first three years to \$18,000/year. Additionally he pledged \$30,000 to outfit two ambulances that he recently purchased. Leasing them for \$6,000/month is included in his plan.

Discussion followed regarding dependency on the federal government and concerns about losing PILT funds, estimating \$400,000 annually from insurance reimbursement, Morley prepared to utilize the Public Works building and the fire station to stand up an ambulance service, no complaints about services provided by Delta Medical Transport (2013/2025), and the lone City-owned ambulance expected to cost a lot to put back in service.

Hallgren reported everyone agrees on the cost (\$1,000,000/year) and level of care (Advanced Life Support). He thanked Morley for his proposal, which might be the cheapest, and for moving closer to resolving the dilemma.

Prestegard asked to draft a plan to downsize the City government should it become necessary.

Zaremba said owning the ambulance service would put the City in a better position if funding is lost.

Morley suggested the City renew mutual aid with Fort Greely for several years because it will not matter who operates the EMS, the City or a contractor. He asked to also establish a mutual aid with Dry Creek, Copper River EMS, and Whitestone. Morley explained his plan for the City to set up an interim Board of Directors to hire a Medical Director (sponsoring physician) by the end of the second month. The Medical Director would be responsible to set up a permanent four-member board to run the operation and report back to the mayor. The Council would adopt a comprehensive EMS budget, ensuring transparency and proper allocation of funds.

Roberts expressed challenges and concerns with coding and billing, difficulties with Federal Drug Administration (FDA) and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) certifications, and possibly hiring more staff.

Stricklin reported Aaron Reinert, Safe Tech Solutions, said contracting ambulance services is more cost effective (February 18, 2025). He suggested raising money locally and utilizing Safe Tech Solutions to design a fiscally responsible long-term ambulance service.

Zaremba asked Council to review Morley's EMS plan and provide feedback at the March 18 meeting. A special meeting will be called (March 10, 2025) to address mutual aid with Fort Greely (expires March 11) and interim ambulance services (DMT contract expires March 31). Zaremba met with Rural Alaska Emergency Services (RAES) about negotiating with DMT to avoid a lapse in ambulance coverage. Once an agreement is drafted, he will call a special meeting.

Hallgren justified contracting with DMT in the interim because of bids from November 2023 (\$995,000 from DMT and \$3,363,926 from LifeMed). Soliciting bids is unnecessary at this time.

Mitchell said circumstances have changed and she was uncomfortable signing a contract.

Zaremba reported the contract has a termination clause, but if there is no contract, no services are guaranteed.

CORRESPONDENCE

Alaska DOT&PF STIP Amendment #2 for Public Review and Comments

Zaremba reported the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities 2024-2027 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Amendment #2 is available for public comments through March 20, 2025. More information is available online (dot.alaska.gov/stip, <https://dot.alaska.gov/links/pdp/>, or <https://dot.alaska.gov/comm/pressbox/arch2025/PR25-0007.shtml>).

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Fire Department Merger

Roberts reported the City Attorney is reviewing merger documents and will hopefully have the contract ready by the March 18 meeting.

Jonathan Potter expressed concern about the merger becoming permanent and asked for a public meeting to solicit input before the merger takes place.

NEW BUSINESS

Employee Policy Plan Revisions / Stormie Mitchell Request (moved from *New Business*)

Mitchell reported she had information that relates to discussion about the *Employee Policy Plan*. As of July 1, 2025, the City falls under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). There will be “major changes in doing business with employees. It will affect bookkeeping, record keeping, position descriptions, hiring practices, wages, everything.” The Attorney General is still “working out bugs” with the Department of Labor. Mitchell recommended throwing out the *Employee Policy Plan* and researching compliance with the federal government.

Discussion followed regarding why Alaska Municipal League (AML) has not alerted municipalities, whether changes apply to municipalities with 16 or more employees, and the pros and cons of making changes versus focusing on the current *Employee Policy Plan*.

Motion: Leith moved to approve the revisions to the *Employee Policy Plan* as presented; Riesner seconded.

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

Introduction and First Reading of Ordinance 2025-04, Amending Sections of City Code Title I, Legislative, Judicial, and Administrative

Hallgren reported Ordinance 2025-03 was on the agenda since January 21 and failed on its first reading (Feb. 4).

Motion: Leith moved to introduce Ordinance 2025-04, hold the first reading, and set the public hearing and adoption date for March 18, 2025; Stricklin seconded.

Motion passed on a roll call (to set the public hearing, second reading, and possible adoption to March 18, 2025) with five in favor (Stricklin, Leith, Hallgren, Riesner, Zaremba) and two opposed (Prestegard, Mitchell).

Purchases over \$1,000.00

CK #23473 to Aetna - \$18,920.54 for March group health insurance

CK #23474 to Airport Equipment Rentals - \$1,114.00 for grader cutting blades

CK #23475 to Bank of America - \$3,975.85 for February 11 statement

CK #23476 to Carmen Jackson CPA LLC - \$13,612.00 for FY23 audit prep

CK #23477 to Delta Medical Transport - \$46,000.00 for March 2025 ambulance contract

CK #23478 to Guess & Rudd - \$8,442.50 for January legal services

CK #23479 to Vitus – \$12,819.97 for February heating and equipment fuel

CK #23480 to Delta Medical Transport - \$11,500.00 for second half of February contract

Mitchell asked about fees for legal services (ck #23478).

Zaremba reported the biggest expenses dealt with a barrage of baseless accusations and Mitchell’s November 5 complaint letter. Legal fees between November and February were \$8,600.

Motion: Stricklin moved to approve checks 23473 through 23480; Leith seconded.

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

Community Center Renovation Bids

Roberts reported two bids to renovate the Community Center were received for the bid opening on December 17. She is waiting on word about a (\$150,000) grant and is concerned with contractors lining out their summer jobs.

City Logo

[City Code 1.05.010 reads, “The description of the seal of the City shall be a circle upon which shall be printed the words CITY OF DELTA JUNCTION, ALASKA and across the face the inscription INCORPORATED DECEMBER 1960.]

Roberts reported the City logo was trademarked January 1, 2016, renewed April 14, 2025, and will expire April 14, 2030. City Code reads, “incorporated in 1960” but the City logo mistakenly reads, “established in 1960.” Roberts asked whether it was necessary to change “established in 1960” to “incorporated in 1960.”

Motion: Stricklin moved to use “established” instead of “incorporated” on the City trademark; Reisner seconded.

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

REPORTS

Mayor / Landfill - Igor Zaremba reported that the larger loader is experiencing problems (leaking hydraulic fluid into the engine), so they may rent equipment in the interim.

Riesner asked to contract local mechanics, i.e., Eugene Chenkov, instead of renting equipment.

City Administrator - Lori Roberts reported:

- She is scheduled to meet with Forestry personnel to update the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). They are taking the lead because of getting the grant.
- The Hazard Mitigation Plan (expired in 2022) must be updated to qualify for grant applications. She is working with the State to find funding. They want the plan to encompass the entire community, and since Deltana Community Corporation (DCC) is not interested, she asked if Rural Deltana firefighters could.
- The five-year sanitary survey is due in July. She is getting information to solicit proposals.
- She is researching the Sullivan Roadhouse survey with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Finance - Kaylee Reiersen reported:

- The FY23 audit is almost done. Altman, Rogers & Co. are preparing financial statements, which take four to six weeks to process. Reiersen logged 90 hours in the past two weeks while working on the audit. The FY24 audit is scheduled the first week of June.
- The annual donation of \$200,000 was received from Pogo / North Star.
- Capital Assistance Program (CAP) funding will be received once the FY23 audit is finalized.

City Clerk - Pat White reported:

- The City processed 5,117 passport applications since October 2003.
- Fairbanks residents travel to Delta because there is presently a 6-8 week wait to schedule an appointment. Currently, the turnover to process routine applications is 4-6 weeks or 2-3, if expedited.
- Trust only the U.S. Department of State (travel.state.gov or 1-877-487-2778) and be cautious of fraudulent websites that make money off passport applications.
- The requirement to have a federally approved ID was first advertised in October 2020. That Real ID compliance (to board domestic flights and access federal facilities) will be enforced starting May 7, 2025. More information is available online (dhs.gov/real-id) or at the local Division of Motor Vehicles office (895-4424).

Library – Mary Leith reported:

- Library Director Tiki Levinson submitted a grant application with the Alaska Community Foundation, which helps with summer reading and day camp activities.
- The library is very busy on Tuesdays because of Story Hour and Baby Laptime. The average number of patrons who visit the library is 118/day. Library staff help people prepare for exams, assist with legal documents, print educational material, help with group projects, and deliver books and materials to homebound people.

Health & Safety – Stormie Mitchell cautioned residents about hazardous conditions caused by spring thawing and freezing and also about a flu virus that is making its way through town.

Public Works / Airport - Mike Prestegard reported taxiways need plowing now that airport activity is picking up with the warmer weather.

Emergency Services - Lance Stricklin reported Fort Greely has been hosting joint firefighter training. He encouraged people to get certified as an EMT or firefighter and volunteer for a year, using that training and experience on job applications. The State is recruiting High School graduates and college students to fight forest fires. Dry, hot, and smokey weather is predicted for the upcoming fire season. Stricklin recommended clearing debris and dead grass away from homes and getting control burn permits from the Forestry office.

Emergency Preparedness - Travis Riesner asked to repair the chimney cap at the Liewer-Olmstead Ice Arena. Roberts reported Chris Phelan's Eagle Scout Project, restoring the Kiwanis Pavilion (built in the City Park in 1989) was approved by the City Council on October 15, 2024. It is presently awaiting approval at the Eagle Scout level.

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENTS

Dave Neuberger encouraged the Council to act on an EMS plan and, regarding the *Employee Policy Plan*, he suggested doing better at tracking changes.

Stricklin disagreed, stating he received the same emails with highlights.

Mitchell advised tracking everything that was changed.

ADJOURNMENT – 7:42pm

Pat White, City Clerk

CITY
SEAL

Igor Zaremba, Mayor

Approved: March ---, 2025