



FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES, AUGUST 10, 2026
FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
800 CUSHMAN STREET, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

The City Council convened at 6:30 p.m. on the above date to conduct a Regular Meeting of the Fairbanks City Council via Zoom webinar and in the City Council Chambers at 800 Cushman Street, Fairbanks, Alaska, with Mayor Mindy O'Neill presiding and the following Councilmembers in attendance:

Councilmembers Present: Jerry Cleworth, Seat A
 Valerie Therrien, Seat B
 Sue Sprinkle, Seat C
 Crystal Tidwell, Seat D (remotely)
 Lonny Marney, Seat E
 John Ringstad, Seat F

Also Present: D. Danyielle Snider, City Clerk
 Thomas Chard, City Attorney
 Michael Sanders, Chief of Staff
 Margarita Bell, Chief Financial Officer
 Ron Dupee, Police Chief
 Richard Sweet, Deputy Police Chief
 Andrew Coccaro, Fire Chief
 Jake Merritt, Human Resources Director
 Brenda Geier, FECC Operations Manager
 Jennifer Payan, Grants Administrator (remotely)

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Mayor O'Neill read the land acknowledgement.

INVOCATION

The invocation was given by City Clerk Danyielle Snider.

FLAG SALUTATION

At the request of Mayor O'Neill, **Mr. Cleworth** led the flag salutation.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS

Olivia Rodriguez – O. Rodriguez stated that she had dedicated her career to projects related to improving downtown Fairbanks and that she loves the community. She discussed growing up downtown, participating in all the fun that one would expect from an urban childhood; she stated she and her friends always felt safe. She asserted that things had changed over the last 10 years, with safety long gone and neighbors being constantly harassed by a small but significant group of bad actors. She added that they were now called “brave” for choosing to live there and that defending that choice was becoming more difficult. O. Rodriguez shared that she now lives on the

opposite side of downtown but visits her parents multiple times a week, and that the difference between the two areas is remarkable. She stated that her childhood neighborhood now experiences persistent crime, indecent exposure, public intoxication, and open drug and alcohol abuse. She reported that she questions whether her dream of raising children next to her parents is even possible. O. Rodriguez stated that her neighborhood is among Fairbanks' oldest, most established, and most significant, and that it is highly visible to visitors. She asked whether the future the City Council envisions for the area involves continued investment or allowing a small group of individuals to treat the end of the street as a base for criminal activity at the expense of everyone else. She predicted that what happens in the neighborhood would not be contained there and that the vision they all have for a positive downtown is directly impacted by these concerns.

Ms. Therrien asked where the childhood home she had referred to was located. O. Rodriguez shared that it was 124 Fifth Avenue, at the end of the dead-end street next to Clay Street Cemetery.

James Rodriguez – J. Rodriguez shared his experience of witnessing a SWAT-like law enforcement response in the neighborhood of his future wife five years earlier on their first date. He stated he was surprised to learn that was not a one-time occurrence, and he indicated that the area had gone downhill over the last decade. He stated that he could not believe how much criminal activity could occur so regularly in a neighborhood near City Hall and that he eventually convinced his wife to move from the area she loved out of fear for their safety. J. Rodriguez reported that instead of giving up, they invested by buying properties nearby with the hopes of preserving the vibrancy of the area. He explained that with greater investment came greater problems. He declared that conditions were getting even worse despite countless efforts from homeowners to document problems and communicate with the City. He suggested that continued inaction is failing the community and that while they want to continue to invest, build, and raise a family in the area, the City must do its part with a clear plan for enforcement with measurable accountability. He stated if that could not be provided, the City Council owes residents an explanation as to why. He added that they cannot accept another decade of deteriorating conditions and that they must act before more people realize that investing in downtown Fairbanks is not worth the risk.

Ms. Therrien asked J. Rodriguez if he had interacted with the Fairbanks Police Department (FPD) on any of the issues and, if so, what the response had been. J. Rodriguez reported that he had experienced a mixed bag of responses, noting that perpetrators with previous criminal charges or convictions, sometimes with active probation or upcoming court dates, are given just a slap on the wrist. He shared that people have passed out, drunk, on his property multiple times and that many reported issues get no response at all. **Ms. Therrien** asked how far he is from the problem property. J. Rodriguez stated that both of his properties are only three houses away from that property.

Dana Smoke – D. Smoke expressed concerns for her neighborhood and shared that she and her four children live next door to 109 5th Avenue, which challenges the sanity and safety of her family due to 24/7 traffic and violent behavior. She reported multiple instances of family or friends visiting but leaving early out of fear when the house next door erupted in fighting. She stated that she is afraid to enjoy her own backyard out of worries that firearms will eventually be brought out next door. D. Smoke shared that they have called police many times and that it was not okay for her son to grow up thinking the situation was normal or acceptable. She cited problems such as public urination, loud music, violence, drama, and loud vehicles, occurring at all times of day. She reiterated that there is no peace in the neighborhood and that it had gone on far too long. She asserted that she only wants to feel safe and asked for the City's help.

Ms. Sprinkle asked D. Smoke if she knew of other neighbors who may be fearful to speak to the City Council or call the police about similar issues. D. Smoke stated that she believes others do not like what they see but have been hesitant to speak up. She explained that she also has been afraid to come forward and risk being labeled as a cop-caller by those at 109 5th Avenue. She added that she decided to do what she had to for her children's safety. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked if there was also a concern about a dog running free in the neighborhood. D. Smoke confirmed that a scary dog runs freely and had injured someone so severely they needed to be medevacked out and receive plastic surgery. She added that the dog also tried to attack her tenant's three-year old and that the owner continues to assert that the animal is dead. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked D. Smoke to confirm that she knew the person living in the house in question. D. Smoke stated that she knows the name of the owner and has known of them for many years but has no relationship with them.

Mr. Marney asked D. Smoke if she has a video security system on her property. D. Smoke stated she does and that footage is deleted after 30 days unless it is saved. She stated she has not shared recordings with others. She explained that speaking to the Council was her first step.

Ms. Therrien asked D. Smoke if anyone had called Animal Control about the loose dog and, if so, what the response had been. D. Smoke confirmed that Animal Control had responded, asked for evidence, which was provided, and determined that it was past the point for them to take action.

Mr. Cleworth asked D. Smoke if the owner was living at the property in question. D. Smoke stated that he was, along with a lot of other people.

Ms. Sprinkle asked D. Smoke if she had witnessed people living in tents or RVs on the property. D. Smoke shared more details about the overall party atmosphere at the property, due to individuals who have no respect or concept of appropriate behavior towards others—especially children.

Lyle Ludwig – L. Ludwig shared that while recently housesitting for his daughter, D. Smoke, he witnessed a disturbance outside the house referenced by others, which is owned by Kevin Pease. He reported that a woman was screaming, and George Frese came out and began to smash the woman's vehicle windows with a hammer. He stated the same man was shortly thereafter seen standing in the middle of the street, naked from the waist down. L. Ludwig confirmed that he had called the police but was still concerned about retaliation and for the safety of his daughter and grandchildren. He added that he would like G. Frese trespassed from the property. He shared that their neighbor, Victoria Dowling, had reached out to him regarding her concerns over how the City was handling complaints. He suggested that the City was either blind or not doing its job, predicted that something bad was bound to happen if the situation was not resolved soon, and recommended that a police car be parked on the street to deter criminal activity. He stated that it was intimidating to come forward in a public setting out of fear for his name being added to a hit list, but he acknowledged that the problems had persisted for far too long.

Mr. Ringstad asked L. Ludwig how many people he sees at the house daily. L. Ludwig reported that people come and go at all hours, at least six to eight people at any given time. He suggested using available security cameras to confirm complaints.

Ms. Sprinkle asked L. Ludwig if anyone had ever knocked on the door of his daughter's home or tried to enter. L. Ludwig reported that when his daughter was moving in, he was doing some

plumbing work when a man just walked into the house. He added that people have come in, uninvited, on multiple occasions and that, just the week prior, his daughter opened the door to find several unknown individuals right outside her entrance. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked L. Ludwig if he considered G. Frese a danger to the children. L. Ludwig indicated that he did.

Ms. Therrien asked L. Ludwig if he would be willing to pursue the matter via the court system if the City was unable to issue a trespass. L. Ludwig shared that the owner, K. Pease, was recently in the hospital, and problems continued while he was gone. He confirmed that he would probably take the matter to court for relief.

Phillip Dowling – P. Dowling shared that he lives on 5th Avenue and that problems had been tearing at his family for at least 15 years, causing considerable stress and constant fear. He stated that he carries bear spray while mowing his lawn in case the aforementioned dog, which still lives at 109 5th Avenue, attacks again. He described the various weapons he has seen individuals carry and the dozens of bicycles—clearly stolen—that disappear at the property. He stated he had been told there were not enough reports for the concerns to be addressed, which means either the system is failing or the records are incomplete, as he is personally aware of an incredible number of reports provided by his family and other neighbors. P. Dowling asserted that they have done everything the City has asked of them in terms of documentation and reporting, yet nothing has changed. He noted that the City installed a new privacy fence on the side of the property that faces the Clay Street Cemetery, and diverted positive pedestrian traffic away from the street, both of which had actually made the situation worse. He discussed the stress of having visitors, never knowing when another violent episode, drug overdose, or other dangerous situation may occur. He stated that guests did not deserve that kind of exposure. P. Dowling declared that this was not what downtown living should be like, that it is not what visitors should expect, and that families should not be left to tolerate such issues year after year. He asked that the City Council take accountability and seek real results, stating that they need help and action after many years of waiting for answers.

Mr. Ringstad asked P. Dowling how long he had lived in the area. P. Dowling shared that he had lived in the Fairbanks area for about 20 years and gave a brief history of ownership and occupancy of the problem property.

Mayor O'Neill, hearing no more requests for comment, declared Citizens' Comments closed.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND CONSENT AGENDA

Ms. Therrien, seconded by **Ms. Sprinkle**, moved to APPROVE the agenda and consent agenda.

Mr. Cleworth pulled item 14(a), Resolution No. 5226, from the consent agenda.

Mayor O'Neill called for objection to the motion to APPROVE the agenda and the consent agenda, as amended, and hearing none, declared the motion CARRIED.

Clerk Snider read the consent agenda, as amended, into the record.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

- a) Regular Meeting Minutes of July 13, 2026

APPROVED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- b) Regular Meeting Minutes of July 27, 2026

APPROVED on the CONSENT AGENDA

MAYOR'S COMMENTS AND REPORT

Mayor O'Neill invited Scott McCrea, President and CEO of Explore Fairbanks to present.

S. McCrea gave a presentation on year-to-date visitor industry considerations, such as airport traffic, hotel occupancy rates, short-term rental occupancy rates, Alaska Railroad ticket sales, visitors to the Morris Thompson Cultural & Visitors Center, crossings at the Canadian border, visitor profile trends, bed tax revenue, and visitor feedback. He shared that there had been a significant increase in recent months, more than they had ever seen, of concerns regarding the behavior of homeless individuals in the Golden Heart Plaza and the overall safety of visitors and locals alike. He discussed current happenings and upcoming projects at Explore Fairbanks and thanked the City for its support of the visitor industry.

Ms. Sprinkle referenced the increase in bed tax revenue and asked S. McCrea if it was a result of higher hotel prices. S. McCrea confirmed that was a contributing factor but pointed out that the average daily rates were not much higher than those of past years. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked S. McCrea if he had any updates on businesses. S. McCrea shared that the owner of SpringHill Suites is planning to open a new restaurant in early 2027 and that the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum had reopened in its new, expanded location.

Ms. Therrien asked S. McCrea if Explore Fairbanks had discussed financial support for the new warming center. S. McCrea stated that his board of directors had not discussed the matter. **Ms. Therrien** requested that he bring the matter to his board's attention.

Mayor O'Neill asked S. McCrea how many of Explore Fairbanks' members are within city limits. S. McCrea stated that he was unsure but would follow up within with the information. He provided details about their membership levels.

Mayor O'Neill shared that the Co-op Market Grocery & Deli had formally declined to move forward with the lease of the log cabin on First Avenue, and because they were the only responder to the request for proposals (RFP), the City was back at square one. **Ms. Therrien** asked if a reason was provided. **Mayor O'Neill** stated that the Co-op leadership sent out a communication to its members explaining that the financial analysis ended up not working out for them.

COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS

Ms. Sprinkle shared that she had walked downtown with a local group from the American Institute of Architects, where they discussed the success of the Storefront Improvement Program.

Ms. Therrien spoke of the many testimonies about neighborhood concerns and expressed hope that the Mayor and staff could come up with a proposal for what could be done.

Mr. Cleworth thanked those who testified. He suggested that the Fairbanks General Code (FGC) has deficiencies as to how it addresses nuisance and blighted properties. He shared that he had spoken with the City Attorney and that he and other Councilmembers have some ideas that could be discussed in upcoming meetings. He asserted that the City needs more tools for enforcement.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a) Ordinance No. 6353 – An Ordinance Amending the Local Amendments to the 2018 International Fire Code Adopted by Reference at Fairbanks General Code Section 30-32, Creating Appeal Procedures. Sponsored by Mayor O’Neill. Second reading and public hearing.

Mayor O’Neill called for testimony and hearing none, declared Public Testimony closed.

Ms. Sprinkle, seconded by **Mr. Ringstad**, moved to ADOPT Ordinance No. 6353.

Mayor O’Neill asked City Attorney Thomas Chard to provide a staff report on the ordinance.

Attorney Chard reviewed the proposed appeal process, noting that instances involving the State Fire Marshal (SFM) would be rare. He discussed the importance of having clear appellate procedures written in Code and asserted that the ordinance would improve due process for citizens.

Mr. Ringstad expressed appreciation for Attorney Chard’s clarifications and asked if Fire Chief Andrew Cocco was happy with the ordinance. Chief Cocco indicated that he was.

Mr. Cleworth stated that while he liked the first part of the ordinance, he was not comfortable with the SFM being used for appeals of inspections performed by the Fire Chief. He expressed support for the appeal process already in place through the Building Department and the Building Code & Landscape Review & Appeals Commission, as well as appeals to the Borough Planning Commission. He suggested using a similar approach with fire inspections and explained that if he was an appellant, he would prefer to appeal to someone outside the system. He recounted that in the past when they had issues at the Fire Department, there was an internal review process. He acknowledged that while the reviews seemed to go well, people could have doubts about an entirely internal system.

Mr. Cleworth moved to AMEND Ordinance No. 6353 by replacing the second paragraph on page two with the following: “If an order is made by the fire chief, the owner or occupant may, within seven days after receiving the order, file a written appeal to request a hearing to the City Mayor or City Council, but not both.” The motion died for lack of a second.

Mr. Ringstad asked where the SFM is located, physically and organizationally. Chief Cocco explained that the office falls under the Department of Public safety and works out of Anchorage and Juneau, with a local office of two deputies located in the State Troopers facility on Peger Road.

Mr. Marney expressed confidence that appeals would be satisfactorily handled internally, as outlined in the first paragraph. Chief Cocco confirmed that they are striving for compliance while working with the community to avoid being heavy-handed. He expressed appreciation for the City Attorney's assistance in drafting a process that mirrors that of the State.

Attorney Chard clarified that the process for appeals would only go to the SFM if the initial order was issued by the Fire Chief. He added that an individual would always have the option to take their appeal to the Superior Court and have a judge make a ruling.

Ms. Sprinkle stated that she could not support the earlier amendment as she did not have the technical expertise to make a judgement on such matters. She stated she would rather leave it to the professionals. Chief Cocco expressed agreement that the extensive experience of those within the system was the best resource for resolving issues. He pointed out that the ordinance was primarily to fill in a gap in the Code and tidy up language in the unlikely event of an appeal.

Mr. Cleworth asked why the same approach was not used in the Building Department if it was considered a better process for appeals, citing again the Building Code & Landscape Review & Appeals Commission. **Mayor O'Neill** noted that various seats on the referenced Commission do have requirements for professional experience and expertise.

Mr. Ringstad asked how many appeals the City gets each year that would employ the proposed appeal processes. Chief Cocco stated that they have had none in his time at the Department and reiterated their commitment to working with individuals to find solutions and reach compliance.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO ADOPT ORDINANCE NO. 6353 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Marney, Ringstad, Tidwell, Therrien, Sprinkle

NAYS: Cleworth

Mayor O'Neill declared the MOTION CARRIED and Ordinance No. 6353 ADOPTED.

NEW BUSINESS

- a) Resolution No. 5226 – A Resolution Awarding a Contract to Braun Northwest Inc. to Remount an Ambulance in the Amount of \$275,014. Sponsored by Mayor O'Neill.

Mr. Cleworth, seconded by **Ms. Sprinkle**, moved to APPROVE Resolution No. 5226.

Mr. Cleworth pointed out that the fiscal note cited the Capital Fund as the funding source but that the narrative referenced the General Fund. Chief Financial Officer Bell indicated that this was an error and that the source was indeed the Capital Fund.

Mr. Marney asked to confirm that the funding had been included in the budget. CFO Bell confirmed that it was and that they had overestimated at \$290,000.

Mr. Ringstad noted that the reference to the General Fund in the fiscal note narrative was for the operation and maintenance costs of the equipment—not the purchase. CFO Bell acknowledged

that she misspoke earlier and that the fiscal note was correct as written. **Mr. Ringstad** asked how many ambulances the City has. Chief Cocco stated that there are six units in the fleet, with another decommissioned one sitting at Public Works. **Mr. Ringstad** asked if that meant the City would be adding an eighth ambulance. Chief Cocco clarified that an existing unit scheduled for replacement in 2027 had been involved in an accident. He pointed out that the funding was for a remounting of that unit rather than purchasing a new one, which would save the City up to \$100,000 and bring the total available units back up to six. He explained that the department staffs three ambulances at all times, keeping a fourth unit completely stocked and ready for immediate use. He stated the two units in cold storage only require restocking.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO APPROVE RESOLUTION NO. 5226 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Sprinkle, Cleworth, Ringstad, Marney, Tidwell, Therrien

NAYS: None

Mayor O'Neill declared the MOTION CARRIED and Resolution No. 5226 APPROVED.

- b) Resolution No. 5227 – A Resolution Establishing the City of Fairbanks Risk Appetite Statement. Sponsored by Mayor O'Neill.

APPROVED on the CONSENT AGENDA

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL

- a) 2026 Quarter 2 Sole Source Procurement Report

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- b) Permanent Fund Review Board Meeting Minutes of April 15, 2026

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- c) Chena Riverfront Commission Meeting Minutes of April 22, 2026

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- d) Clay Street Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes of July 1, 2026

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS

Mr. Cleworth stated that the submission deadline had passed for the 123 Lacey Street RFP and that he had heard the City received only one proposal. He asked when the Council would hear more about the matter. **Mayor O'Neill** confirmed that only one proposal had been submitted and that evaluations should be back from the review committee by the end of the week.

Ms. Therrien asked who had submitted the proposal. **Mayor O'Neill** asked Chief of Staff Mike Sanders to share any details that were disclosable. M. Sanders reported that it was a joint proposal from the Urban Coalition, Fairbanks Neighborhood Housing Services (FNHS), and Bettisworth North, that it is currently with the evaluation committee, and that the administration will share details once the review is complete. **Ms. Therrien** discussed her involvement with the Alaska Municipal League (AML) Legislative Committee and the upcoming local AML conference. She asked Mr. Ringstad to consider attending as well. She expressed condolences for the family of recently passed local attorney, David Call, who had worked in Fairbanks for several decades. She shared that Chance Dooley, who works for the Alaska Railroad, helped her with a flat tire on the highway the previous weekend. She thanked him and stated that he had refused compensation.

Ms. Sprinkle stated she appreciated all those who had shared concerns about their neighborhood, and she recognized the difficulty in speaking up about such things. She expressed her intent to be involved in efforts to seek resolutions to the issues. She expressed disappointment that the log cabin proposal had been withdrawn and encouraged everyone to vote in the State Primary Election.

Mr. Ringstad expressed appreciation for those who had spoken earlier. He recounted the progress that had been made over the last few years but acknowledged the public safety concerns that remain in certain neighborhoods, such as the one around the cemetery. He spoke of the proposal for 123 Lacey Street and disclosed that he is on the board of directors for FNHS. He stated he was not aware that FNHS would be involved with a submission as a local housing partner for the project. He indicated that he is unsure what his role would be in either side of the matter but that he would potentially need to declare a conflict of interest as things move forward.

Mr. Marney stated that he found the public testimony about the problem property shocking and that he did not realize the extent of the problems. He asserted that he had a passion to see things resolved and that he would like help from the Council and administration to organize an event to gather affected parties and discuss solutions for this neighborhood and others.

Ms. Tidwell stated that she would like to be involved also and that she has shared concerns with the neighborhood as a nearby property owner. She shared that she will be traveling during the Regular Meeting of August 24, 2026 and asked to be excused.

Mayor O'Neill called for objection to excusing Ms. Tidwell's absence for the next Regular Meeting and heard none.

Ms. Tidwell shared that the Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation (FAST) Planning Policy Committee would meet soon and that she would provide a report to the Council soon.

Ms. Therrien spoke of the numerous complaints about the lack of maintenance of Birch Hill Cemetery by its new owners, Legacy Funeral Homes. She commented that she is not sure what the City can do. She noted that Legacy had not been keeping up the grounds and that she believes the City should do something to help out since the City already maintains the Clay Street Cemetery. **Mayor O'Neill** shared that she was aware of Legacy's staffing challenges and that there was a community effort to hold workdays to tidy it up. She confirmed that the City owned Birch Hill Cemetery long ago but that it is no longer City property.

Mr. Marney asked to hold a Council discussion about the future of the downtown log cabin.

CITY CLERK'S REPORT

Clerk Snider stated that her office would communicate with Mr. Ringstad if he was interested in attending the AML conference reference by Ms. Therrien.

CITY ATTORNEY'S REPORT

Attorney Chard stated that he had nothing to report.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Ms. Sprinkle, seconded by **Ms. Therrien**, moved to ENTER into Executive Session for:

- a) IBEW/COF Labor Negotiations: Guidance from Council [permissible under State law, including the provision at AS 44.62.310(c)(1)]

Mayor O'Neill called for objection on the motion to ENTER into Executive Session and, hearing none, declared the motion CARRIED.

Mayor O'Neill called for a recess at 8:05 p.m., then the Council reconvened in Executive Session.

The Executive Session began at 8:15 p.m. Those present were Mayor O'Neill; Councilmembers Cleworth, Therrien, Tidwell (remotely), Marney, Ringstad, and Sprinkle; Clerk Snider; Attorney Chard; Chief of Staff Sanders; CFO Bell; and Human Resources Director Merritt. The session concluded at 8:25 p.m.

Mayor O'Neill stated the Council met in an Executive Session for IBEW/COF Labor Negotiations: Guidance from Council. She affirmed that no action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor O'Neill declared the meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.


MINDY O'NEALL, MAYOR

ATTEST:



For D. DANYIELLE SNIDER, MMC, CITY CLERK

Transcribed by: CC