



FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES, AUGUST 11, 2025
FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
800 CUSHMAN STREET, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

The City Council convened at 6:30 p.m. on the above date, following a 5:00 p.m. Work Session on Target-Based Budgeting, to conduct a Regular Meeting of the Fairbanks City Council via Zoom webinar and in City Council Chambers at 800 Cushman Street, Fairbanks, Alaska, with Mayor David Pruhs 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
 Lonny Marney, Seat E
 John Ringstad, Seat F

Absent: None

Also Present: D. Danyielle Snider, City Clerk
 Thomas Chard, City Attorney
 Michael Sanders, Chief of Staff
 Margarita Bell, Chief Financial Officer
 Jake Merritt, Human Resources Director
 Richard Sweet, Deputy Police Chief (remotely)
 Nathan Werner, Police Captain
 Andrew Coccaro, Fire Chief
 Kristi Merideth, FECC Manager (remotely)
 Jeremiah Cotter, Public Works Director
 Bob Pristash, City Engineer
 Jarrod Zerbe, Code Compliance and Safety Specialist

INVOCATION

The invocation was given by City Clerk Danyielle Snider.

FLAG SALUTATION

At the request of Mayor Pruhs, **Ms. Therrien** led the flag salutation.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS

[Clerk Note: Names of citizens who provide comments may not be spelled correctly if their name was illegible on the physical sign-up sheet.]

Robert Shields – R. Shields stated that he had previously spoken before the Council as well as emailed copies of adopted resolutions and letters of interest regarding his group's vision for redevelopment ideas. He expressed disappointment that those things had not led to a City Council Work Session, as he had hoped and requested. He acknowledged that the concept of regenerative economics is complex and shared that they have drafted an ordinance which they hope will be adopted to facilitate a conversation about unique design processes. R. Shields asserted that the Polaris Building property is just one piece of an overall idea for how cities can be redesigned and that he had recently brought private equity investors to Fairbanks to show those locally what could be possible. He claimed that a message about Fairbanks not having a bright future has been repeated often, and that does not have to be the case. He expressed his desire to work with the City to explore opportunities and sponsor his group's Tour of Future Cities, which is scheduled for October. He reviewed funding sources and explained that he is trying to advocate for viable solutions to lower the cost of living and improve the quality of life for all of Fairbanks.

Ms. Therrien asked if he had seen the proposed substitute ordinance regarding the Polaris Work Group. R. Shields indicated that he had not. **Ms. Therrien** asked if he would like time to review it. R. Shields stated he would be happy to look at anything the Council was willing to share and that he would love the chance to have a more detailed discussion with any or all Councilmembers.

Victor Buberger – V. Buberger shared that he had missed the last few Council Meetings due to being ill. He stated that he moved to Fairbanks in 1975 and has never seen anything implemented like the new bicycle lanes on Barnette Street. He asked about the overall purpose of the bike lanes and who was responsible for them, noting that he has not seen a single cyclist using the lanes all summer, although he has still seen cyclists on the adjacent sidewalks. He posed the question of whether these types of lanes are needed somewhere else instead of or in addition to Barnette Street.

Mayor Pruhs indicated that later in the meeting he would invite the City Engineer to speak on a few items, including the bicycle lanes.

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND CONSENT AGENDA

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

Mayor Pruhs pulled item 12(a), Resolution No. 5182, from the consent agenda.

Mayor Pruhs called for objection to the APPROVAL of the agenda, as amended, and hearing none, so ORDERED.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

a) Regular Meeting Minutes of July 28, 2025

APPROVED on the CONSENT AGENDA

SPECIAL ORDERS

- a) The Fairbanks City Council held a public hearing and considered the following alcohol license applications for renewal:

Lic. #	DBA	License Type	Licensee	Address
426	The Bakery Restaurant	Beverage Dispensary	The Bakery Restaurant, Inc.	44 College Road, Suite A
4314	Gallo's Mexican Restaurant	Beverage Dispensary	Northern Lights Business, Inc.	60 College Road
556	International Hotel and Bar	Beverage Dispensary	Hard Work, LLC	122 N. Turner Street

Ms. Tidwell, seconded by **Ms. Sprinkle**, moved to WAIVE PROTEST on the alcohol license applications for renewal.

Mayor Pruhs called for testimony and hearing none, declared Public Testimony closed.

Mayor Pruhs stated he reviewed call reports from the Fairbanks Emergency Communications Center (FECC) for each location and had no cause for concern with any applicant.

Ms. Sprinkle asked if the rumor she had heard about The Bakery Restaurant closing had any truth to it. City Attorney Thomas Chard confirmed that, to the best of his knowledge, that was a rumor.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO WAIVE PROTEST ON THE ALCOHOL LICENSE APPLICATIONS FOR RENEWAL AS FOLLOWS:

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

NAYS: None

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

MAYOR'S COMMENTS AND REPORT

Mayor Pruhs shared that while in Washington, D.C. he had spoken with Senator Lisa Murkowski regarding the City's second application for an ambulance bus and that she confirmed that a request for \$815,000 had been submitted though not yet funded. He discussed scenarios where having such equipment would be vital. He invited Jarrod Zerbe, Code Compliance and Safety Specialist, to provide a report on abatements and efforts to take care of blighted properties.

J. Zerbe discussed the learning curve from the past year since his position was created and the work between him and various department heads to ensure understanding and proficiency with the process of abatement and efforts to address blighted properties. He acknowledged each property's unique situation in terms of history and ownership. He reviewed the number and types of clean-ups that had taken place year-to-date. J. Zerbe stated that the first major clean-up will be done later in the fall and would result in a structure needing to be vacated, which would mean some individuals would lose housing. He explained that there would likely be up to 12 roll-off containers

of waste removed from the property and that the owners had been unwilling to comply. He indicated that it was not a pleasant situation but that important steps must be taken to resolve the issues. He thanked Public Works Director Jeremiah Cotter for assisting with labor coordination and acknowledged that a crew from the Fairbanks Rescue Mission would also be heavily involved. J. Zerbe provided an update on the progress to resolve a blighted property on Willow Street which was moving forward in terms of the actual work to clean it up, although the process of the City acquiring the property was stalled due to waiting for appropriate Power of Attorney documents to be produced. **Mayor Pruhs** gave an additional explanation on the steps that would occur, with the Council's involvement once the documents were received and the property was ready to be deeded to the City. He noted that it was a unique situation that would require careful, deliberate action every step of the way. J. Zerbe reported that there are three remaining properties deemed blighted but have an approved clean-up plan in place. He discussed a plan to have a monthly, collaborative meeting between all departments involved with the various aspects of Code Enforcement, to ensure they are on the same page as to what issues exist and which properties should be prioritized.

Ms. Therrien asked J. Zerbe if he had filed court paperwork to have the individuals removed from the property he referenced. J. Zerbe stated that he had not and that the hope is that the inhabitants would be willing to vacate voluntarily. He stated that, preferably, the issues, specifically the water being disconnected, would get resolved by the owner so no one would have to leave.

Attorney Chard clarified that, to his knowledge, the Building Official intends to declare the structure as a dangerous property that is not fit for human occupancy, and that once that designation had been made, it would be considered a misdemeanor for anyone to live there. He agreed that the preference is voluntary vacation but reiterated that the designation of the structure by the Building Official is why the City is not pursuing the civil court route Ms. Therrien had referenced.

Ms. Sprinkle asked J. Zerbe which situation he is finding more issues with: renter-occupied properties or owner-occupied properties. J. Zerbe stated that it depends on the situation but that most instances involving hoarding or the collection of debris are owner inhabited. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked if he is working on creating a tool that allows department heads or the Council to see the current status on any properties on the abatement/blight list, to assist with efforts to avoid information being siloed. J. Zerbe shared that he has gotten to a good place with knowing who to talk to about various issues. He stated that information is flowing to him, then he initiates conversations. He explained that he would like to see all parties meet to have thorough, open discussions about every property. **Ms. Sprinkle** expressed the desire for J. Zerbe to have an effective tool to help facilitate his work, considering the complexity. J. Zerbe stated that software is being adopted by the Public Works Department to handle projects, tasks, etc. and that they have discussed how this, or a similar tool, could be implemented for his work.

Ms. Tidwell asked for more details on the three properties which J. Zerbe mentioned have clean-up plans in progress and how he is doing with funding for the overall program. J. Zerbe reported that he has about \$125,000 available in the budget and that the clean-ups so far had been done very frugally thanks to cooperative property owners. He stated that of the remaining three, two are fairly small and one has an October deadline, which means the City will likely not take action until the spring, should the owner fail to complete their approved plan. He reviewed the communication process with property owners.

Mr. Ringstad discussed the progress made in the year and a half since the City began taking this work more seriously. He noted that three properties had been cleaned up in 2024, four had been completed so far in 2025, and that, according to J. Zerbe, another seven were underway.

Ms. Sprinkle asked for more details on how J. Zerbe receives information about vacant properties that need to be addressed [*see Ordinance No. 6283, as Amended, adopted June 9, 2025*]. J. Zerbe stated that no owners had reached out directly yet but that he was working with the Fairbanks Fire Department (FFD) to create an online form that will help build a database of properties. **Mayor Pruhs** explained that the typical process is that he receives a phone call about a property concern, he asks for the matter to be sent to him in writing, then he passes the information along to J. Zerbe or the City Engineer. **Ms. Sprinkle** indicated she hopes for a simple way for owners to register their property if they leave town for the winter, as an example. J. Zerbe added that the online form will include an easy way for an owner to indicate if they would like a no trespass designation to be automatically generated for their property.

Mayor Pruhs invited City Engineer Bob Pristash to provide a report on streetlights. B. Pristash discussed lighting problems being addressed across the City, particularly several on the east side of town which they learned are tied into a State of Alaska Department of Transportation load center, which the City does not have access to. He stated the issues have since been worked out between the parties. He reported that some remnant lights across town are still being controlled by the City's outdated photocell, which causes delays in turning on or off. He indicated that many problems were resolved this year and that they will keep an eye on certain issues going into winter.

Mayor Pruhs asked for an update on the bicycle path pilot project. B. Pristash recounted that the City had nominated a project of this type four years ago and that the overall scope and ideas evolved significantly after local planning groups were involved. He noted that the original request included numerous bicycle lanes across much of the downtown area but that the City rejected the larger scale approach and opted to undertake a pilot project of just two streets: 10th Avenue and Barnette Street. He explained that the project will end in September to allow time to remove the temporary traffic devices and repaint the roads. **Mayor Pruhs** asked if there has been any community input on the project. B. Pristash stated that they have not had any formal feedback but that he has been focusing more on keeping track of any accidents that could be tied to the bicycle lanes. He reported that there was one incident where a northbound cyclist on Barnette Street had not been paying attention, missed a green light for cross traffic, and hit a vehicle. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked if there was any system in place to track usage, similar to the devices used to count vehicles in other road projects. B. Pristash reported that no such system had been in place but that he had heard that a manual count was being performed by Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation (FAST) Planning.

Mayor Pruhs reported on two recent meetings to work on the letter of interest (LOI) regarding the Polaris Building property. He shared that the meeting participants included him, the Chief of Staff, the City Engineer, two Councilmembers, and local architect C.B. Bettisworth. He added that the City Attorney would have been included had he not been out of town at the time. He stated that B. Pristash is working on the LOI, which will be reviewed at the Council's next meeting. **Mayor Pruhs** explained that the next step would be a public open house in mid-September to include a presentation on the overall process, including the LOI period, and the eventual request for proposal (RFP) window, which will take place over five months. He asserted that they are trying to make

the process as open and as detailed as possible. He pointed out that because the City owns the property, the Council will ultimately decide what happens next and that it will do so via a thorough public process.

Ms. Therrien asked if the LOI would be reviewed at their next Work Session or Council Meeting or if it will be split into multiple meetings. **Mayor Pruhs** stated that it can all be done in a single meeting but that he was unsure if the City Engineer would have it ready by the next Work Session. **B. Pristash** indicated that he could prioritize it to have at least an initial draft available for review. **Mayor Pruhs** suggested that the Council may need a resolution to formally approve the LOI.

COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS

Ms. Tidwell shared that the Fairbanks Economic Development Corporation (FEDC) had officially submitted its application to the State of Alaska Department of Commerce to become the Alaska Regional Development Organization (ARDOR) for the Fairbanks area. She discussed how that might impact future discussions related to budgeting and economic development initiatives.

Mr. Marney stated he had no comments.

Mr. Ringstad discussed seeing an increase in assaults as reported in the newspaper's Public Safety Report. He declared that there is no simple fix for the problem but that it would take a combined, concerted effort by the City, law enforcement, the Department of Corrections, the District Attorney's Office, and potentially the State Legislature. He shared details of recent assaults in the downtown area as well as issues with trespassers at his own property.

Ms. Sprinkle spoke of the bicycle lane pilot project and expressed disappointment with the general attitude about trying new things. She stated that the pilot project was disparaged and disregarded despite not having any data regarding actual usage. She stated that she has heard positive things from some people and that she has personally seen the lanes used.

Ms. Therrien shared that she recently saw a handful of youth using the lanes, as well as the adjacent sidewalks. She gave a land acknowledgement. She asked if the Council could have a 10-minute recess before addressing Resolution No. 5182. **Mayor Pruhs** asked if there was a specific reason. **Mr. Therrien** stated that she had not had a chance to speak with Ms. Tidwell regarding the amended, proposed substitute of the resolution that had been hand-carried to the meeting. **Mayor Pruhs** asked if the intent was to take a 10-minute recess for Ms. Therrien to receive an explanation of the resolution instead of doing so during the meeting. **Ms. Tidwell** indicated that she was open to having the conversation on the floor. **Ms. Therrien** suggested that five minutes would be sufficient. **Mayor Pruhs** stated that he would grant a five-minute recess.

Mr. Cleworth spoke to Mr. Ringstad's comments regarding increasing crime rates. He noted that many individuals who cause problems downtown turn out to have lengthy arrest records already. He shared that the same people are often back on the street in a short time, and it makes one wonder what it takes to actually get prosecuted by the District Attorney's Office. **Mr. Cleworth** explained that any decisions regarding new bike lanes in the city will ultimately be at the discretion of the Council – not outside planning organizations or committees. He shared that during his travels, he has noted many approaches to bicycle paths, most of which are fairly simple, yet effective. He

discussed less complicated methods, such as adjusting fog lines in various areas to accommodate cyclists while leaving room for snow in the winter. He reiterated that the design process of the “Complete Streets” approach is intended to be simple, following the example of other states.

Mayor Pruhs called for five-to ten-minute recess. He asked to speak directly with Ms. Therrien and Ms. Tidwell in his office.

The Council resumed with New Business after a ten-minute recess.

NEW BUSINESS

- a) Resolution No. 5182 – A Resolution Requiring That the Polaris Working Group Meetings Be Publicly Noticed and Open to Public Participation. Introduced by Councilmembers Therrien, Tidwell, and Marney.

Mayor Pruhs asked if there was a motion to APPROVE Resolution No. 5182 and heard none. He asked if anyone wanted to discuss the resolution. **Mr. Marney** asked if the discussion would be on the original resolution or the hand-carried, proposed substitute. **Mayor Pruhs** indicated it would be on the original version. **Mr. Marney** asked if the Council could amend it by replacing it with the proposed substitute. **Mayor Pruhs** stated that he would rather the Council not do that.

Ms. Therrien stated that she would like to WITHDRAW Resolution No. 5182 in order to give it more thought and reintroduce it within the next four weeks.

Mayor Pruhs asked if any Councilmember objected.

Mr. Cleworth stated that he would like to discuss the whole concept. He noted that the only way for the Council to have a discussion on Resolution No. 5182 would be for it to first be placed on the floor through a motion. He expressed that he was not in favor of either version of the resolution and that he would give his reasonings when appropriate. **Mayor Pruhs** asked if he could do so during Councilmembers’ Comments. **Mr. Cleworth** stated that he would if the Mayor preferred.

Mayor Pruhs called for any other discussion on the matter and, hearing none, declared Resolution No. 5182 FAILED due to the lack of a motion.

- b) Ordinance No. 6322 – An Ordinance Funding the Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the City of Fairbanks and Fairbanks Firefighters Union and Amending the 2025 City Operating Budget. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs.

ADVANCED on the CONSENT AGENDA

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS TO THE CITY COUNCIL

- a) Permanent Fund Review Board Meeting Minutes of April 30, 2025

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- b) Clay Street Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes of July 2, 2025

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS

Mr. Cleworth stated that this is not the first time the City has been through a process of taking ownership of a large property. He stated that in the past, when the City inherited an entire city block, the City made both good and bad moves. He explained that the City has learned from those mistakes, and he would like to avoid repeating some mistakes with the Polaris property. He expressed his view that, for decisions related to the property, the Council should serve as the work group, with City staff aiding in the process. He discussed the major issues needing consideration moving forward and suggested that an LOI is less effective, as some developers prefer to not show their hand and would rather outline details through an actual RFP process. He recommended going straight to an RFP with the Council setting clear parameters. He explained common pitfalls of ranking proposals and spoke against the practice.

Ms. Therrien gave a report of the Permanent Fund Review Board's last meeting. She reviewed fund performance details and shared info about some actions and opportunities being considered by the Board. She noted that there had been no compliance issues from recent audits.

Ms. Sprinkle and **Mr. Ringstad** each indicated they had no reports or further comments.

Mr. Marney shared that he would be attending a Fairbanks Diversity Council meeting later in the week and that he looks forward to meeting the new members. He reported having been asked to assist with judging applications for Explore Fairbanks' Community Engagement Grants and spoke highly of positive changes taking place with the organization.

Ms. Tidwell expressed agreement with Mr. Cleworth's comments regarding the City Council being the only decision-making body regarding the Polaris property going forward. She shared that she spoke with an individual who works for another local fire department who had heard about, and was intrigued by, the City's new recruitment bonus for paramedics, noting that it was a sign that the City's efforts to get the word out were working.

Mayor Pruhs stated that he also concurred with Mr. Cleworth's statements and that his experience with similar processes will be valuable to the rest of the Council. He reiterated that there is not a strict timeline and that the Council will have total discretion with how to proceed.

Ms. Sprinkle asked what the status was with the final phase of demolition. **Mayor Pruhs** reported that the contractor is removing the last of the debris from the large hole where the structure had been and that they will soon start backfilling and compacting the surface. He noted that a total of 160 storage containers had been brought in to be filled with the remaining contaminated materials being removed for disposal. He reiterated that the Council would have ultimate discretion in what happens but declared that it will not be turned into a parking lot.

CITY CLERK'S REPORT

Clerk Snider shared that a resolution was passed in 2019 that she believes is relevant to the Council's discussion about the Polaris property. She indicated she would send it to the Council.

CITY ATTORNEY'S REPORT

Attorney Chard expressed appreciation for the continued commitment, professionalism, and civil conversations of the Council as it wrestles with large issues and ideas.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Cleworth, seconded by **Ms. Therrien**, moved to ENTER into an Executive Session to discuss AFL-CIO Labor Negotiations.

Mayor Pruhs called for objection and, hearing none, so ORDERED.

Mayor Pruhs called for a brief recess at 7:56 p.m., after which the City Council, excluding Ms. Tidwell, reconvened in Executive Session.

- a) AFL-CIO Labor Negotiations [permissible under State law, including the provision at AS 44.62.310(c)(1)] (*ended at 8:25 p.m.*)

Mr. Cleworth stated that the Council met in an Executive Session to discuss AFL-CIO Labor Negotiations. He affirmed that no formal action had been taken.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Sprinkle, seconded by **Mr. Ringstad**, moved to ADJOURN the meeting.

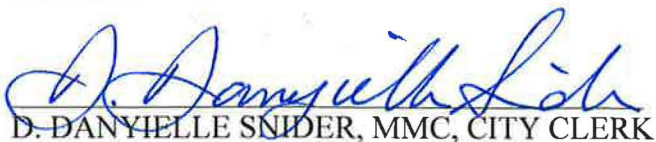
Mayor Pruhs called for objection and, hearing none, so ORDERED.

Mayor Pruhs declared the meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m.



DAVID PRUHS, MAYOR

ATTEST:



D. DANYELLE SNIDER, MMC, CITY CLERK

Transcribed by: CC