



FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES, NOVEMBER 18, 2024
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 located 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 (CFO)
 Andrew Coccaro, Fire Chief
 Ron Dupee, Police Chief (remotely)
 Kristi Merideth, FECC Manager (remotely)
 Jeremiah Cotter, Public Works Director
 Jake Merritt, Human Resources Director
 Robert Pristash, City Engineer
 Brenda McFarlane, Crisis Now Coordinator (remotely)
 Brynn Butler, Housing Coordinator (remotely)

INVOCATION

The invocation was given by City Clerk Danyielle Snider.

FLAG SALUTATION

At the request of Mayor Pruhs, **Ms. Sprinkle** 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.]

Jeanne Ringstad – J. Ringstad spoke in support of the Fairbanks Fire Department (FFD) and Ordinance Nos. 6291 and 6295. She discussed the importance of public safety and stated that she would like to see action taken on both items.

Russell Dennis, Fire Captain at FFD – R. Dennis spoke in support of Ordinance No. 6291 and noted that the Mayor's proposed budget already includes these nine additional FFD personnel. He indicated that this would solve a lot of problems and claimed that certain misinformation has been shared in the past. He encouraged the Councilmembers to ask questions of himself and other members of the department who were present at the meeting.

Ms. Tidwell pointed out that Ordinance No. 6291 includes hiring six firefighters and three captains. She asked if adjusting it to nine firefighter positions would be prudent. R. Dennis explained that past conditions in the Captain ranks had changed and he would encourage amending the Ordinance to just nine firefighters. He stated that doing so would reduce more overtime.

Quinten Johnson, Firefighter at FFD – Q. Johnson Spoke about forced overtime at FFD that the issue would be greatly remedied through the hiring of nine additional firefighters. He described how few options they have for backup coverage to meet their minimum staffing requirements anytime someone is on leave, sick, or injured.

Ms. Sprinkle asked if he agreed that the three Captain positions in the Ordinance should be revised to regular firefighter positions. Q. Johnson replied that he does not necessarily agree but acknowledged that R. Dennis, being a Captain, would have a better perspective. He noted that additional personnel in each of the ranks helps ensure options are available in any given situation.

David van den Berg, Executive Director of Downtown Association of Fairbanks – D. van den Berg reported that the Downtown Association of Fairbanks had just held its annual meeting where a City department had received an award. He shared history, going back to 2010, of other times the Association had awarded City departments or individuals for their contributions and achievements. He noted that this year's award had gone to the Fairbanks Police Department (FPD) in recognition of security and policing efforts in the downtown area in 2024. D. van den berg stated that they had also given an award to the owner of the former Alaska Motor Inn for taking swift action in demolishing his building after it had caught fire earlier in the year, rather than leaving it as an eyesore for years to come. He stated that their annual awards are meant to highlight positive efforts of individuals and groups who strive to improve the downtown Fairbanks region each year.

Ms. Sprinkle noted that Deputy Police Chief Richard Sweet had been involved with the award. D. van den Berg confirmed that R. Sweet had been invited to receive the award on behalf of FPD.

Zuzanna Bobinski – Z. Bobinski stated that she does not live within the City but believes communities needs to sufficiently fund firefighters and enable them to respond to any emergency.

Nick Clark, Battalion Chief at FFD – N. Clark encouraged the Council to advance Ordinance No. 6291 to a second reading. He acknowledged that the Mayor's proposed budget included nine additional FFD personnel and declared that the sooner the ordinances are moved forward, the sooner they can begin the hiring process. He confirmed that it would be feasible to change the

approach to nine firefighters and later determine if some positions should be converted to captain roles, noting the cost savings with that approach. He also spoke in support of the Public Safety Employees Association (PSEA) contract and expressed hope that Ordinance No. 6299 would also be advanced.

Mr. Marney recalled having several conversations with FFD members and expressed confusion to hear this sudden change of pace regarding not needing the captain positions as was previously expressed. N. Clark stated that it was a numbers game and that, in looking ahead to a potential contract with a four-platoon system, it would give the City some flexibility with staffing. He acknowledged that the change in messaging might seem like the crisis is lesser than conveyed but clarified that it is simply an option to be considered. **Mr. Marney** stated that it would have been beneficial to hear that information before the Council completed its budget recap, noting that the salary difference between the two ranks could have increased the number of funded positions. N. Clark asserted that the amount saved would be relatively small in the grand scheme of things. He indicated that the Fire Chief would likely be more suited to discuss the differences in approach.

Ms. Sprinkle suggested that there may be an opportunity to rework some numbers. N. Clark agreed that there was still time to consider changes after the first reading of the ordinance.

Mr. Ringstad asked how management would be affected by each option for the nine positions. N. Clark reiterated that whichever option is chosen, the department would have more personnel to pull from when schedules are set. He spoke about how Ordinance Nos. 6291 and 6295 are complimentary, noting that the issue could be revisited if adjustments need to be made once things have settled and there is a clearer picture.

Ms. Therrien asked if the FFD is currently fully staffed for captains. N. Clark confirmed that all nine captain positions are currently filled. **Ms. Therrien** asked if another captain would be needed if the four-platoon system is implemented. N. Clark stated it depend on what level of service the Council and Fire Chief wanted to provide.

Dominic Lozano, Battalion Chief at FFD – D. Lozano spoke about the need for nine new FFD positions. He suggested that the 13-person minimum was a significant factor but that it was the correct number for the level of services that everyone agreed was appropriate for the community. He recounted how the City pursued a grant to cover the new positions, but the grant fell through. He stated that the need to fund additional spots was never readdressed, which led to the current overtime crisis. D. Lozano outlined issues of turnover and injuries in the captain ranks which exacerbated the situation. He stated it would have been better to start the process of adding new positions in August. He pointed out that even if the Council approves the new contract, the City will not automatically hire 16 more people. He acknowledged that there are several layers to the situation, but the clearest path forward included hiring nine more personnel. He added that the 16 additional positions in the proposed contract would be even better.

Cameron Gladowski – C. Gladowski shared that he used to work for FFD, and he voiced support for hiring additional firefighters. He stated he still has friends at FFD, and he is aware of the stress caused by spending so much time at work and away from family. He expressed hope that the City Council would put the needs and safety of the community first and move the ordinance forward.

Mayor Pruhs, hearing no requests for additional comments, declared Citizens' Comments closed.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND CONSENT AGENDA

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

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

Clerk Snider read the consent agenda into the record.

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
4530	Blue Flame Bar & Grill	Beverage Dispensary	Midnight Sun Catering Services, LLC	95 10th Avenue
4174	Big Daddy's Bar-B-Q and Banquet Hall	Beverage Dispensary	RTG, LLC	107 Wickersham Street

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

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

Ms. Therrien asked if the license holders had been contacted about their renewal applications being on the agenda or if that process was not yet in effect. Clerk Snider confirmed that the recently adopted ordinance regarding notification of applicants was in effect and that the license holders for all applications on the agenda had been contacted.

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

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

NAYS: None

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

- b) The Fairbanks City Council held a public hearing and considered the following marijuana license application for renewal:

Lic. #	DBA	License Type	Licensee	Address
15800	Baked Alaska, LLC	Marijuana Product Manufacturing Facility	Baked Alaska, LLC	2745 Hanson Road, Unit B

Ms. Therrien, seconded by **Mr. Marney**, moved to WAIVE PROTEST on the marijuana license application for renewal.

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

Ms. Sprinkle asked for clarification on an attachment to the application. Clerk Snider explained that it was a screenshot of the search result screen indicating that no Fairbanks Emergency Communications Center (FECC or “Dispatch”) reports had been found.

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

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

NAYS: None

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

- c) The Fairbanks City Council held a public hearing and considered the following alcohol license application for transfer of location and ownership:

Type/License: Beverage Dispensary, License #328
To DBA: Lat 65 Brewing Company
To Owner: Latitude 65 Brewing Company, LLC
To Location: 150 Eagle Avenue, Fairbanks
From DBA: Drop-In Lounge
From Owner: N & P Enterprises, LLC
From Location: 1420 S. Cushman Street, Fairbanks

Ms. Sprinkle, seconded by **Mr. Marney**, moved to WAIVE PROTEST on the alcohol license application for transfer of location and ownership.

Mayor Pruhs called for public testimony.

Michael Rice – M. Rice shared that he lives down the street from Latitude 65 Brewing Company and that he has watched the neighborhood and traffic change over the years as the building went from a fitness center to an alcohol establishment. He expressed safety concerns over the conversion of the establishment from providing only beer sampling to full-fledged liquor service. He reported having visited the zoning office to learn more about the area, acknowledging the mix of residential and business properties which have not been a risk to children and families over the years. M. Rice stated that he believes it is a dangerous move and spoke against the transfer.

Mr. Marney asked M. Rice if he was sure the business intended to serve hard liquor. He explained that another business, HooDoo Brewing Company, recently had a similar transfer, but they indicated they did not plan to change their core business operations. M. Rice pointed out that HooDoo is in a completely commercial area whereas Lat 65 is in a mixed use neighborhood.

Ms. Sprinkle suggested that Lat 65 may intend to keep its operations relatively unchanged. M. Rice pointed out that the license being transferred is not for entertainment for but selling alcohol. **Ms. Sprinkle** acknowledged nuances of different license types and admitted the owner's plans are yet unknown. M. Rice stated that the Council should check that out before authorizing the transfer.

Ms. Therrien noted the overlap in the area for the existing and transferring license.

Zeb Mabie, co-owner of Latitude 65 Brewing Company, LLC – Z. Mabie shared that the comparison of his business to HooDoo Brewing Company was correct and that the primary reason for seeking a full liquor license was not to serve spirits. He affirmed that the goal is to be able to have entertainment with extended hours, which is not permitted under the current tasting room license. He confirmed that while the new license would allow it, serving hard liquor is not in their business model or plans. Z. Mabie expressed his belief that they have worked hard to create a good, safe establishment and that people often bring their children. He asserted that they would continue to strive to maintain that atmosphere. He recognized the concern from the previous speaker but noted that the license transfer is within all legal parameters.

Mr. Marney thanked Z. Mabie for attending and addressing concerns, pointing out that notifying business owners that their application is being considered has already proven to be helpful. Z. Mabie stated that he was happy to answer questions from any Councilmember or the community.

Ms. Therrien asked whether a future owner of the business and the license could potentially change the business plan and begin serving spirits. Z. Mabie admitted that was a possibility. **Ms. Therrien** asked Z. Mabie if he would be willing to sign an agreement to not serve spirits. **Mayor Pruhs** stated that would be a matter for the State of Alaska. **Ms. Therrien** stated she was just curious if it was something the owners would be willing to do. Z. Mabie stated that something like that would require a discussion with his business partner and their management team.

Ms. Sprinkle asked how they currently handle any safety or security issues. Z. Mabie affirmed that they do not serve anyone who exhibits signs of intoxication. He pointed out that the existing license limits patrons to consuming no more than 36 ounces, and they often have to refuse service to patrons, even without signs of intoxication. He explained how customers, especially tourists, are often confused by the limits and added that there is full food service available at the location.

Jeanne Ringstad – J. Ringstad admitted that when she first heard years ago that a business with an alcohol license was being considered for approval in her neighborhood, she was disgruntled. She shared that she could not be happier with the addition of the business and that the owners of Lat 65 are honest and do a great job running a safe business. She stated that the place is lighthearted, without the same angst that one might see with other bars. J. Ringstad reported that her concerns had long since been erased and that she loves the food and atmosphere at the establishment.

Mayor Pruhs declared Public Testimony closed.

Mr. Cleworth asked if the Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Board had already acted and approved the application. Clerk Snider stated that she is unsure of the current status but that she believes Z. Mabie may know. **Mayor Pruhs** invited Z. Mabie to respond. Z. Mabie shared that he

believes everything with the ABC Board has been approved and that they are just waiting on local municipality input to finalize the transfer. **Mr. Cleworth** spoke to the idea of restrictions as suggested by Ms. Therrien. He indicated that he believes the Council is permitted to put certain conditions in place when approving an application, and he gave examples of such in the past. He pointed out that the Council still needs to address the timing issue with the ABC Board.

Ms. Sprinkle shared that when she represented the Council at the last Borough Assembly meeting, the Assembly considered the application. She noted that the same had occurred with HooDoo and asked if the City was the last in line to have a say on licenses. Clerk Snider explained that after receiving an application, the City has 60 days to respond, which in this case would be by December 16, 2024. She noted that the City was only 30 days into that window and that the Borough and City receive notice at the same time. She suggested that the difference in timing could simply be due to the varying meeting calendars of the two governing bodies.

Mayor Pruhs, hearing a request, reopened Public Testimony.

Andrew Roe, co-owner of Latitude 65 Brewing Company, LLC – A. Roe stated that his business partner, Z. Mabie, had done a good job conveying their goals. He pointed out that they had weathered the storm of a large highway and road infrastructure project at the nearby intersection shortly after they opened a few years ago. He noted that the roundabout at 3rd Avenue and Eagle Avenue is only about 200 feet from their property and that the project had greatly improved the traffic flow and safety in the area. A. Roe stated that the majority of their customers leave the premises turning north, drive 200 feet, and exit the neighborhood through the roundabout. He reported that staff is very diligent about enforcing the rules for their existing license, even if it requires them being tough on a customer who orders a second beer and passes it to someone who has already reached their 36-ounce limit. He asserted that diligence will not change and that they intend to maintain a culture of responsible service.

Mayor Pruhs, hearing no more requests, declared Public Testimony closed.

Mayor Pruhs called attention to the trend of alcohol licenses being repurposed and consolidated across the City in an effort to evolve business models and have creative events for the community.

Mr. Ringstad expressed support for businesses choosing to invest and grow.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO WAIVE PROTEST ON THE ALCOHOL LICENSE APPLICATION FOR TRANSFER OF LOCATION AND OWNERSHIP AS FOLLOWS:

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

NAYS: None

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

MAYOR'S COMMENTS AND REPORT

Mayor Pruhs addressed the heavy workload of the last couple months as the City prepared its 2025 budget and worked through two complex labor contracts, among other challenges. He thanked Councilmembers for their dedication.

COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS

Mr. Ringstad agreed that it had been a long month and a half.

Ms. Sprinkle concurred, stating that she recently had her first good night of sleep in a long time.

Mr. Marney discussed the recent loss of the last televised local news program. He stated that the news is now based in Anchorage and that almost nothing about Fairbanks is reported. He expressed disappointment and stated that local businesses are still advertising on the Anchorage broadcast, which may change as more Fairbanksans choose to stop watching.

Ms. Therrien spoke to the concerns from M. Rice regarding traffic and other impacts of the alcohol license transfer. She expressed appreciation that the Lat 65 owners had attended the meeting and shared their plans. She stated she believes the owners are sincere in their intent to not sell spirits and invited M. Rice to come back to the Council if there are issues in the future.

Ms. Tidwell and **Mr. Cleworth** each indicated that they had no comments.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a) Ordinance No. 6291 – An Ordinance Increasing Staffing in the Fairbanks Fire Department by Six Firefighter and Three Captain Positions and Amending the 2024 Operating Budget. Introduced by Councilmembers Tidwell and Sprinkle.

Note: Ordinance No. 6291 was introduced at the Regular Meeting of September 23, 2024, with a motion to ADVANCE made by Ms. Sprinkle, seconded by Ms. Tidwell. Advancement was POSTPONED. If advanced, a second reading and public hearing will be held.

Ms. Tidwell stated that even though the nine new positions are included in the proposed 2025 budget, she wanted to see the ordinance advanced. She recounted the report that the hiring process could not begin until something is approved by the Council.

Ms. Sprinkle asked if there was any thought given to changing the makeup from six firefighters and three captains to just nine firefighters. **Ms. Tidwell** stated that since it would reduce the fiscal note and that members of FFD had stated that they would have flexibility to move people around, she would be in favor of making that change.

Ms. Therrien concurred that it would be prudent to get people hired as quickly as possible. She added that she also supports the change in position makeup and asked for a revised fiscal note.

Mr. Marney asked how the ordinance would be tied to the 2024 budget. Chief Financial Officer Margarita Bell confirmed that Human Resources cannot post job listings until funding is approved and that Ordinance Nos. 6291 and 6297 may both be up for second readings at the next meeting.

Mr. Ringstad stated that Ordinance No. 6291 seems redundant given that the earliest it could be adopted is the same time as the 2025 budget which includes the same positions. He indicated that the ordinance would not expedite the hiring process.

Mr. Cleworth concurred that the ordinance is redundant and that the upcoming budget ordinance covers the needs of all departments, though it still needs some work. He stated that it does not make sense to look at one department before all the others, and he spoke against advancing Ordinance No. 6291.

Ms. Sprinkle asked for clarification on when the hiring process could begin. HR Director Jake Merritt explained that he could begin advertising positions with a January 1 start date after funding is approved. He stated he was unsure if Ordinance No. 6291 would change the hiring timeline.

Ms. Tidwell asked for more details on the City's ability to hire for positions and whether that would be for January or February. J. Merritt stated that in the prior week he had been given the authorization to open recruitment with a posted start date of January 1. He noted that any job offers would be contingent upon inclusion of the necessary funding for the positions in the 2025 budget.

Ms. Sprinkle explained that her desire for moving forward with the ordinance was to ensure the positions would be created in the event the budget is amended to eliminate them.

Ms. Therrien asked for clarification on the authorization that was given regarding the job postings. J. Merritt explained that the Mayor had authorized HR to open recruitment. He gave details about typical application trends and timelines and noted that given the steps in the process, any new personnel would likely start on January 16, 2025. **Ms. Therrien** pointed out that like the budget, the Council does not know how the ordinance to ratify the firefighters union contract will go. She stated the Council should support Ordinance No. 6291.

Mr. Marney noted that the Council is now being told that the three captain positions are not needed and thus the fiscal note is incorrect. He asked how many firefighter positions could be added for the same amount of money. CFO Bell confirmed that the fiscal note would need to change anyway, because it was from October when the ordinance was introduced.

Mr. Ringstad suggested that the with start dates in January, the fiscal note for 2024 would be zero. CFO Bell stated that was correct.

Ms. Sprinkle conveyed that Ordinance No. 6291 allows the conversation to begin and asked if the Fire Chief could speak on the matter. **Mayor Pruhs** declined to have the Fire Chief address the Council on the matter, indicating that his part in the discussion was over. **Ms. Sprinkle** expressed confusion on how the hiring process is affected by the various ordinances if the positions were already authorized to be posted. **Mayor Pruhs** clarified that he had directed HR to begin the hiring process with the stipulation that offers could not be made until the positions were funded. **Ms.**

Sprinkle asked if, without Ordinance No. 6291, they would still be moving forward with nine to ten new positions. **Mayor Pruhs** confirmed that the positions were still included in the proposed budget. He pointed out that J. Merritt shared that on average the City receives four to five qualified applicants a month for FFD, noting how much greater that is than the number of applicants the City receives for FPD, FECC, or Public Works. **Ms. Sprinkle** repeated her question as to whether the Council could still expect to see nine to ten new positions added in 2025, should Ordinance No. 6291 fail. **Mayor Pruhs** stated that they could, so long as a budget is approved to fund the positions. **Ms. Sprinkle** expressed concern that that would not happen. **Mayor Pruhs** explained that if the Council does not pass a budget, his proposed budget is implemented, which includes the nine new positions. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked Mayor Pruhs to confirm that the Fire Chief could not speak. **Mayor Pruhs** stated that the Council already had lengthy public discussions on the matter and stated that Ms. Sprinkle likes to “drone on for fifteen minutes on things.” **Ms. Sprinkle** stated that she took exception to the Mayor’s comment. **Mayor Pruhs** asked if there were questions for the Fire Chief that had not already been asked in previous discussions. **Ms. Sprinkle** stated that she would like to hear the Chief’s thoughts about getting things started sooner rather than later. **Mayor Pruhs** invited Fire Chief Andrew Cocco to speak, with a time limit of one minute.

Chief Cocco stated that it may be best to keep the three captain positions in the ordinance as they never know when another injury may occur within that rank, which was the situation that created problems earlier in the year. He acknowledged that they may not use it but suggested that taking it out this early in the process might prove to be a mistake. Chief Cocco shared that despite the perceived redundancy of the ordinance, he could not advocate for it to be scrapped given that there was no guarantee of funding in the 2025 budget. He stated that the ordinance is a safety net to hold the positions that are vital to helping the City get out of the overtime spiral. He reminded the Council that any scenario that does not include increasing personnel will lead to more overtime.

Mr. Ringstad pointed out that the title of the ordinance references amending the 2024 budget but that the fiscal note would be zero. He added that the City has already started the hiring process.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO ADVANCE ORDINANCE NO. 6291 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Therrien, Sprinkle, Tidwell

NAYS: Ringstad, Marney, Cleworth, Pruhs

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION FAILED and Ordinance No. 6291 FAILED TO ADVANCE.

- b) Ordinance No. 6295 – An Ordinance Ratifying a Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the City of Fairbanks and the Fairbanks Firefighters Union, IAFF Local 1324. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs. SECOND READING AND PUBLIC HEARING.

Ms. Therrien, seconded by **Ms. Sprinkle**, moved to ADOPT Ordinance No. 6295.

Mayor Pruhs called for Public Testimony.

Andrew Fowler – A. Fowler shared that he works at FFD and is aware of the negotiation process between the City and Fairbanks Firefighters Union (FFU). He acknowledged that a deal was not reached over the last year, so a mediator had helped both sides come to the agreement that is before the Council. He discussed the importance of using taxpayer money efficiently and offered details on three FFD employees' wages and salaries starting with Travis Kulp, who retired as a Battalion Chief after 29 years at FFD. A. Fowler stated that T. Kulp made \$270,000 in his last year, of which \$162,000 was overtime wages. He discussed Cacy Wilfur, who has worked at FFD for five years and who, due to overtime, will be the highest paid employee at the City in 2024 at \$276,000, \$180,000 of which was overtime. He claimed that C. Wilfur will have worked 3,000 hours of overtime in 2024 with an average work week of 155 hours. A. Fowler shared that he himself was hired in 2005 and has a reputation for not taking overtime as he prefers to spend his days off with his three young children. He stated his normal schedule would have him earn \$113,000 in 2024.

Ms. Tidwell asked how much he is forecasted to make in 2024. A. Fowler stated that he will make about \$160,000 in 2024, noting that forced overtime is two times the regular wage.

Mr. Marney asked if he is a fan of the four-platoon system. A. Fowler stated that likes the idea for the sake of efficiency, having more fresh people on duty each day, and allowing for more days off. He acknowledged that the approach would cost money in terms of hiring more personnel but would save money by reducing overtime. He discussed other costs of the current system in terms of retention and the logistics of filling positions to maintain minimum staffing requirements. He stated that having enough experienced people to fill in where needed will eliminate overtime. **Mr. Marney** stated that it would not eliminate overtime 100%. A. Fowler concurred and stated that it would drastically cut overtime.

Ms. Therrien asked what the attitude was at FFD in terms of comradery and support. A. Fowler shared that support for each other is good, but morale is bad. He discussed the impacts on family life, for him and others, when forced overtime occurs. He pointed out that Councilmembers have agreed that forced overtime is bad and stated that the answer is to hire more staff.

Zachary Rittel – Z. Rittel stated that approving the contract would dramatically improve the FFD's retention rate. He noted that while HR's claim of four to five qualified applicants per month may be technically correct, the level of experience with new hires has been diminishing. He discussed challenges with new hires going through the training process only to leave for better opportunities. He stated that the contract will make the City more competitive, increase the overall experience level at the department, fix the overtime problem, and begin to mend the relationship between the City administration and firefighters. Z. Rittel shared that many have asked how things got to this point, and he discussed how the FFU contract was non-funded shortly after he was hired. He suggested that the path they are heading down is bad, and it will cause more attrition and the cycle to worsen. He stated that the best solution is the contract, and the second is adding more personnel.

Ms. Sprinkle asked Z. Rittel how he felt about the four-platoon system. Z. Rittel suggested that he may be the single biggest advocate for it. He shared that it began catching on in fire departments across the west coast and that over time even more traditional departments on the east coast have adopted the approach. He noted that the system addresses quality-of-life concerns for firefighters, particularly in situations where departments have a high call volume.

Sergio Cuellar – S. Cuellar shared that he is a 23-year-old firefighter/paramedic who has earned 362.5 hours of overtime so far in 2024. He stated that he would like to be able to go home to his dog during what should be his four days off. He expressed his desire to have a family and establish a life outside of work but explained that being stuck at the fire station makes that difficult. He stated he loves his job and hopes to remain at the City, but he would leave if things do not change.

Ms. Therrien thanked S. Cuellar for helping her father during a call to her own home.

Quinten Johnson – Q. Johnson shared that about a year ago he left FFD for a job outside of Alaska. He stated that one of the things that appealed to him at other departments was the four-platoon schedule. He explained that he returned to Fairbanks to be closer to family and the people he enjoyed working with previously. He reported that since his return he has noticed increased instances of burnout and how FFD personnel are home with their families less and less. He noted that in the nine weeks since returning to the department, he has worked about 380 hours of regular overtime and about 100 hours of forced overtime. He echoed the warning that without approving the contract and hiring more people, the City will likely see more people leave. He reiterated that the number of calls in relation to staffing levels has everyone feeling overworked and burnt out.

Charles Doelker – C. Doelker shared that he has been with FFD for two years and initially considered it a steppingstone towards something better. He reported that since then, he has found himself in a serious relationship with goals to start a family in the near future, which has changed his perspective and given him a desire to make a career at FFD. He shared that other people he has spoken with, particularly those nearing completion of training, view FFD as a lesser opportunity, noting the intimidating high call volume and better benefits elsewhere. He added that certain aspects of the proposed contract will attract more people. He concluded by discussing retention and the need to hire people with more than the minimum qualifications who will stay long-term.

Mr. Marney thanked C. Doelker for sharing his thoughts and stated that the goals he shared are the same as the Council's. He acknowledged the lengthy negotiations and recalled that when the idea of a fourth platoon had been presented in May, the Council supported it, only to see it get declined by the FFU. He stated that the process could have been complete if not for that.

Allan Johnson – A. Johnson shared that he heard Councilmembers discussing the stress they experienced recently with early morning and late evening meetings and asked the Council to consider that as they listen to the stories from FFD members.

Dominic Lozano – D. Lozano noted that the fiscal note for the ordinance includes 16 firefighters, but the reality is that it would take a quite a while to get that many qualified people hired. He stated that although it was reported that the City receives four to five applicants per month, the applicants are not always the caliber needed to get the job done. He asserted that it would be a disservice to hire 16 firefighters that are not paramedics and that hiring only nine would be a better approach to start the year and see how the four-platoon system plays out. He indicated that he has spoken to the Council many times in his 25 years at the City, and he hopes this is his last contract discussion. He shared that he knows personally how morale is impacted by seeing a contract ratified at first vote or failed entirely. He stated that the four-platoon system intrigued him, but he did not think

the Council support it. He pointed out that the FFD would be the first in the state to implement a four-platoon system, and it has a chance to improve recruitment and greatly help with retention.

Ms. Therrien asked D. Lozano how he thinks recruitment for the fourth platoon would go. D. Lozano stated that he thinks it would go well and that they would likely get qualified people from other local departments and throughout the state. He expressed hope to see the experiment succeed. He reiterated his suggestion to focus on hiring nine people right away.

Russell Dennis – R. Dennis stated that his intention was primarily to dispel misinformation about the proposed contract as he believes incorrect perceptions exist among Councilmembers. He stated the annual raise proposed in the contract is 5% in the first year and 2% in years two and three. He stated that the notion of a 29% raise has been thrown around, but that only happens if the City does not hire the additional firefighters. He explained that “debit days” as referenced in the contract are an additional 10 days of work that staff could be scheduled for without triggering overtime rates. He noted that is a method that can be used to avoid overtime, depending on how many new people are hired, and declared that it is a benefit to the City. R. Dennis indicated that “non-binding arbitration” had been previously referenced, which he had never heard of, and he suggested that the Council ask the City Attorney about it. He asserted that FFD overtime will stay in the multi-million-dollar range if more personnel is not hired. He indicated that hiring just eight people will solve virtually all the problems being discussed, and he advocated for eventually staffing a third ambulance and another platform truck. He suggested that the idea of hiring 16 new firefighters was only being used to scare the Council and inflate the fiscal note. He pointed out that the FFD does not need 16 more people to make things work, although he believes he will get in trouble for saying so. He reiterated that, in his opinion, the number 16 was only there to make the fiscal note look crazy.

Mr. Marney stated that one item the Council feels strongly about is for the Fire Chief to have more control over the management of the department. He shared that he has read section 6.3 of the contract a dozen times and that the language that would allow the Chief such control is not there. He asked R. Dennis to speak to the issue. R. Dennis urged the Council to ask the Chief how he would like to staff the FFD. He suggested that if the Council truly wanted the Chief to have that authority, they would not limit him to one minute of speaking time. He stated that Chief Coccoaro believes 13 people per shift is the right number to ensure the appropriate level of service to the community. He asserted that in order to provide a contract the Council would approve, FFU had to cut out something important and agreed to grant the Fire Chief the ability to staff at 11 instead of 13, as needed. He claimed that was a big concession by the FFU that he does not believe is being acknowledged. **Mr. Marney** indicated that he does not.

Ms. Tidwell expressed appreciation for the chart that analyzed the number of staff and days of the year. She spoke to R. Dennis’ statement that hiring eight people would be sufficient and asked if that would allow for staffing a third ambulance at times. R. Dennis explained that if they hired eight people and proceeded with the four-platoon system, two shifts would have 12 people and two would have 13. He explained that two shifts would have total coverage for potential leave every day, resulting in no overtime, and that the two shifts with 13 would also have leave covered and be able to staff the third ambulance. He acknowledged that overtime will never be completely eliminated but stated that the new approach would guarantee a significant reduction in overtime.

Ryan Holland – R. Holland shared that he is a captain and paramedic with FFD and that the FFD goes on a lot of calls with Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances. He noted that he has run thousands of calls during his time at the FFD and discussed how the ALS vehicles are outfitted with drugs that can stop or start a patient's heart, electricity that can reset a heart, tubes to go down someone's throat to allow them to breathe, needles that can be inserted into a chest to relieve pressure, and more. He explained that equipment and drugs are stocked for individuals of all ages and sizes and that the details matter. R. Holland stated that it is hard work, sometimes within the first ten minutes of coming on shift, and that there have been situations where a regular work schedule of two days has turned into four. He asserted that being on hour 90, which may be at 3:00 a.m., makes an already difficult job much harder; he added that is too long for paramedics or any person staffing an ambulance to be working. He declared the four-platoon system a good thing, noting that it would require a maximum of only two days of work. He asserted that brains would function much better in 24- to 48-hour work periods rather than 96.

Mr. Ringstad expressed appreciation for R. Holland's comments and agreed that he would not want a surgeon working on him if they had been awake for 96 hours. He recalled being told that 80% of the department's calls are medical-related and asked why the organizational chart does not include any Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) positions, noting that the chart shows only firefighters. He stated that it seems that the focus is not where it should be if the majority of calls are medical. R. Holland explained that the FFD has made that a focus by advocating for the third ambulance and ensuring a paramedic is scheduled for each ambulance at all times. He noted that all firefighters at FFD are EMTs with medical training. He stated that when a fire happens, more personnel is needed than when an ambulance is called, which requires them to staff accordingly.

Erik Winkler – E. Winkler reported that 80% of FFD's calls are medical, with fire-related calls being the second most common. He reported on the other types of rescue calls they receive and explained that the community expects them to be ready, knowledgeable, and trained. He shared that the EMT aspects of the job are important and frequent, but so much more is asked of them and the list constantly increases. He noted that the Community Service Patrol (CSP) is no longer around and that those duties have fallen to FFD. He reiterated that the scope of their job continues to grow and that after the first 24 to 48 hours of work they struggle, though the community expects them to be ready and capable when they call 911. He pointed out that after a difficult call they are expected to be back on the rig and ready for the next call. He stated that it is mentally exhausting and straining, which can cause problems at home and require therapy. He indicated that there is much more to the job than just being a firefighter or a paramedic and that the proposed contract would go a long way in helping support the FFD in the work the community expects of FFD staff.

Ms. Sprinkle asked E. Winkler if he liked the four-platoon system. E. Winkler stated that he is a fan of anything that will help the mental health of FFD staff and that the system would do that.

Sean Silva – S. Silva shared that she came to FFD after 10 years working in the emergency medical field in another state. She reported that because of forced overtime, she will have been on duty as an ambulance driver and paramedic for 96 straight hours as of when she leaves work the following day. She noted that for two of those days she is also cross staffed to drive the platform, if needed. She stated that as much as she and her colleagues need the contract, the City needs it in order to

ensure that FFD members are at their best and ready for calls. She shared that her hometown, which she has the option to return to, works their paramedics in 12-hour-maximum shifts because they cannot afford emergency responders to be exhausted. She pointed out that with current call volumes, each paramedic runs 600 to 1,000 patient contacts each year. She expressed support for the four-platoon system and stated it would be an attractive approach for recruitment and retention.

Allan Heineken – A. Heineken shared that he is a captain at FFD. He stated he was not planning to speak but was getting emotional as he listened to others. He asked to be paid less in exchange for seeing the contract signed. He explained that due to forced overtime he was paid a lot in the past year but never really wanted it. He suggested that he may have the most forced overtime hours of anyone at the department for the year and that he also has the highest hourly rate. A. Heineken stated that his wife would also be present to voice support but she is nine months pregnant. He reiterated that he just wants to be able to be home and enjoy the arrival of their firstborn son. He acknowledged that the contract would result in him making less money and that he gladly accepts those terms. He asserted that virtually all of his coworkers would say the same.

Nick Clark – N. Clark thanked the Council for hearing all the testimony and thanked his fellow firefighters for sharing their thoughts. He affirmed that the recruitment and retention benefit of the four-platoon system is a huge part of the plan. He expressed support for the process, noting that the mediation experience was interesting but necessary given the deadlock between the parties. He pointed out that through mediation, a third party helped the parties arrive to this point and got both sides to move to places they were not previously willing to go. He reported that from the FFU side, concessions were made relating to staffing that they previously considered nonstarters. N. Clark declared that the contract before the Council is a product of good compromise and noted that per the existing contract and Alaska Statutes, if the contract did not pass, it would go to binding arbitration. He reiterated that the impact on morale for not funding a contract is significant and that the Council can be proud of the proposed agreement.

Ms. Therrien asked N. Clark how much overtime he has worked in 2024. N. Clark shared that it was around 800 hours. He stated that he has a wife and two kids and that he can relate to his coworkers who say it is too much. He added that his wife recently had to change her job and leave work in the public school system due to his scheduling constraints at FFD.

Hunter McDonald – H. McDonald shared that he is a firefighter with FFD and came to Fairbanks five years ago to complete training at the University Fire Department. He stated he has been with FFD for one year. He stated that it could be the best job in the world but that he cannot keep going with the current schedule. He reported that in his first year he made over \$100,000, but he stated that if things do not change in the next year or two, he will have to leave because it is unsustainable.

Mayor Pruhs, hearing no more requests for comment, declared Public Testimony closed.

Mayor Pruhs asked how they arrived at this point. He shared that when the negotiation process began in October 2023, he predicted that the City would not be able to come to an agreement with FFU, and it seemed as though the union's goal was to go to arbitration all along. He recalled that in the last work session he referred to the last 12 months as a wasted year. He declared that at this point the Council needs to put on the record for any potential arbitrator the fiscal impact the

contract would have on the City and to show that the City could not afford it. He asserted that the union gave no middle ground. **Mayor Pruhs** reviewed the actions the City has taken to support FFD and increase services for the community, such as funding a third ambulance. He added that a new position for a Community Paramedic had been approved by the Council but because of more union-related issues, it took a whole year to get the position posted for hiring. He pointed out that the proposed contract includes a four-platoon system but requires the City to fully staff it within a six month timeframe – otherwise there would be penalties to the City. He declared that when the City inevitably fails to meet that expectation, the fiscal retribution would be innumerable. He noted that his proposed budget included nine new positions for FFD, including three captains and six firefighters, with the Council adding a Fire Marshal position during its budget work sessions. **Mayor Pruhs** stated, “Let us never hear again that we do not take manning the fire department seriously,” affirming that the Council is doing just that through the budget process. He suggested a review of the timeline of events that led to this point, recalling 15 total Council Executive Sessions on the topic of FFU/City contract negotiations. **Mayor Pruhs** reported that on January 22, 2024, FFU asked for a retention tool similar to what had been established for FPD, an annual permanent life insurance plan payment of \$10,000. He shared that the City figured out a way to make that benefit possible and offered it to FFU on February 12, only to have it systematically rejected with a response that they wanted the money as a pay raise instead. He expressed sadness in realizing that the request had ultimately been about getting a pay increase rather than actually creating a mechanism for retention. **Mayor Pruhs** noted that on February 28, FFU proposed a four-platoon system, which the City at first did not think was feasible, but the Chief of Staff and Fire Chief put in considerable time to find a way to make it work. He shared that on March 25, the City agreed to the new approach as well as to a 1.16% pay increase across the board based on the savings from overtime reduction. He indicated that on April 19, FFU rejected the four-platoon system but still wanted a 16% pay increase as well as a 4% annual increase based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI). He pointed out that all other bargaining groups at the City take two to three months with four to five Executive Sessions to negotiate a contract, and the FFU process was far beyond the norm. **Mayor Pruhs** recalled that in the first Executive Session, he predicted what would happen; he repeated that the year had been wasted. He suggested that if he was a member of FFU, he would be angry at the union leadership because of their negotiators’ strategic blunder. He reminded the Council that also on their agenda was the first reading of the PSEA labor contract ordinance, which includes a \$1.2MM fiscal note for the 70 City employees in that bargaining group, compared to the several millions of dollars proposed for the 50 employees in the FFU bargaining unit. He noted that the contracts are on the floor at the same time as a proposed, sustainable budget, which the Council will soon review. **Mayor Pruhs** reported that his initial proposed budget included a \$2.6MM reserve while still adding nine positions at FFD. He discussed how even with Councilmember-initiated changes from work sessions, a \$1.9MM reserve remained in the draft budget for 2025. He acknowledged that the PSEA contract, if passed, will leave \$700,000 in reserves but that the budget would still be sustainable. He stated that the FFU could have gotten in front of the situation but it is now behind. He reminded the Council that in six months the City will be in negotiations with the AFL-CIO bargaining group. He spoke of the hierarchy of vital positions across the City, with Dispatch being a top priority, followed by police, grader operators, and heavy duty mechanics. He discussed the important roles of engineers, building officials, and the City Attorney. He affirmed that firefighters are absolutely needed, but they already have a hiring pool from the training program at UAF. **Mayor Pruhs** reiterated that this was all happening in the middle of the Council’s budgeting process for the coming year where

the Council must review and plan with fiscal certainty what the City can afford. He declared that the City could not afford the multi-million dollar increase in the FFU contract, suggesting that while the City could possibly survive one year of the fiscal impact, it would eventually have to decimate the police force, public works, or another department, in order to sustain the expense. He asserted that slashing one entity for the sake of another was not something the City could consider. He predicted that the FFU will say that the City can always raise taxes to fund the increased expenses but pointed out that it is not easy to raise taxes, with six votes of support by Councilmembers required just to put a proposition before voters. He shared that at the same time the City worked to draft a budget that included nine new firefighters, the City also was facing a \$1.4MM loss in revenue over the prior year. **Mayor Pruhs** noted that was even after an increase in taxes during the same period, explaining the reality of a loss in other income streams. He indicated that despite the City's declining revenue forecasts, there were still many needs that had to be funded. He proclaimed that FFD is by far the best fire department in the greater Fairbanks area but explained that there comes a time when the City must look at what it can afford. He recalled how Mr. Ringstad, in the past week's budget work session, pointed out that \$1.2MM of the remaining \$1.9MM reserve would be eaten up by the PSEA contract. He affirmed that PSEA members are also critical personnel for the safety of the City and that police officers put on bulletproof vests every day they go to work. He extended an invitation to visit FECC and see what dispatchers go through on a daily basis. He concluded by acknowledging everyone's importance but stated that the Council has to keep in mind what the City can afford. He indicated that the proposed budget is affordable, but the FFU contract is not.

Ms. Therrien shared that she had asked CFO Bell to provide a number for what would go back into the budget for unfilled positions. CFO Bell stated that based on her target, there would be about \$3MM going back into the fund balance. She noted that this did not include the actual amounts for the months of November and December, nor did it include the cost of the Employee Capital Incentive Program (ECIP). **Ms. Therrien** expressed her belief that the Council must advance the ordinance based on the clear communication from FFD regarding burnout and the strains on personal and family lives. She pointed out that Ordinance No. 6291 would have gotten things started if it had advanced. She stated that the Council should be listening to the firefighters and that she does not understand where the tension between the department and City management originated. She suggested that if there is \$3MM being returned to the fund balance, the City could afford the contract. **Ms. Therrien** asserted that the Council should advance the ordinance at the very least to get clearer numbers from the CFO. She reminded the Council that arbitration will be binding and that the result of arbitration is unknown. She noted that Mayor Pruhs had referred to the arbitration as non-binding and asked for the City Attorney for clarification on the matter. City Attorney Chard explained that the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) calls for binding arbitration and clarified that the arbitrator would have to rule within their scope of authority in order for it to be binding. **Ms. Therrien** stated that she would assume an arbitrator would only give a decision that had been verified as within the scope of their authority. She noted that the cost for an arbitrator is \$2,500 per day and that it would cost a lot of money. She added that the department could also be at a point where it would not have enough employees to make the contract work. She acknowledged that she was not on the Council at the time when the four-platoon system had been discussed but that it seems clear it is viewed favorably by the Council, the City's negotiating team, the firefighters, and FFU representatives, not to mention the mediator. She stated that she believes the Council has no choice but to advance the ordinance.

Mayor Pruhs clarified that the motion on the floor was to adopt the ordinance, not advance it.

Mr. Ringstad reported that he put a lot of time into reading the contract and that ever since he joined the Council two years ago it has been clear that the FFD is run by the CBA, not the Fire Chief. He shared that his primary concern is that the City pays someone to manage who does not have the opportunity to manage and as a result, overtime is out of control. He explained that the problem with using the \$3MM in leftover 2024 funds to justify adopting the contract is that those are one-time funds, and the contract spans multiple years. He noted that pay raises are forever and that the long-term effects of increased expenses tied to non-recurring revenues have gotten the City into trouble in other situations. **Mr. Ringstad** recounted how a federal grant a couple years ago added four more positions at FFD and when that grant funding went away, the positions did not and are funded by the City's general fund. He stated that the Council must come to terms with what the City can afford. He spoke of the issues at FECC that have been raised numerous times and that the FECC is so short-staffed that dispatchers sometimes have to put 911 callers on hold, which is unacceptable. He asserted that the FECC had to be a priority and that the PSEA contract, which he believes the Council supports, has to be factored into the 2025 budget. **Mr. Ringstad** spoke of the budget forecasting work done by the Finance Committee which looks at the past, present, and future as far as five years out. He reported that every analysis the committee has done shows that the City will be in the red within four to five years. He reiterated that ongoing expenses like increased salaries and benefits are not the same as one-time purchases for large equipment. He cited great potential for the parameters set in the FFU contract to not go perfectly, which would trigger major financial consequences to the City's budget. **Mr. Ringstad** added that the concern for negative cashflow within the next four years would mean that the City would have no choice but to dip into reserves and eventually find the fund balance to be below the minimum amount required by the Fairbanks General Code (FGC). He indicated that it would be unlikely that voters would approve an increase to the tax cap and how at that point the City would have no choice but to cut the budget of another department just to fund the increases implemented by the FFU contract. **Mr. Ringstad** asserted that no Councilmember believes that the current amount of forced overtime is appropriate, and they all agree the issue needs to be resolved. He shared that when the Council agreed to the four-platoon system and additional positions back in the spring, the process was close to wrapping up; however, surprisingly, it somehow blew up. He acknowledged the testimonies with the common theme that the FFD needs help. He noted that the City has added five positions to the FFD in the last two years and that the proposed 2025 budget will add up to 10 more. He stated that the City cannot sustain the current overtime situation and that no firefighters want it. **Mr. Ringstad** stated it is apparent after studying the 95-page CBA and having many conversations with those associated with the contract that there are significant differences in interpretation for a variety of items. He asked how the Council could approve an agreement, with its fiduciary responsibility to the City, when the parties cannot even agree on definitions. He asserted that the process should have been a partnership in which the two parties work together to come to an agreement on interpretations. He affirmed that it has been good to listen to the voices of FFD personnel and that they all can agree on the need for more help. He pointed out that the draft 2025 budget clearly shows that the Council is answering the call for help by funding more positions. He concurred that no one should be in the position of doing medical work while exhausted. He reiterated that he could not sign something when he does not know what it says or if parties cannot agree on meanings. He stated that the contract simply is not ready to be signed.

Ms. Tidwell stated that what she believes Mr. Ringstad is saying is that he wants less services, because hiring more people would mean spending more money. She pointed out that the fiscal note for 16 positions does not mean the City has to hire 16 people and that the note shows how four positions would only cost \$673,000. She stated that the City has spent over \$2MM in overtime so far in 2024 and that if the Council does not say it wants to reduce services, the City will spend that much in overtime again. She highlighted that the contract lowers minimum staffing and allows the Fire Chief managerial authority. In response to some of Mayor Pruhs' earlier comments, she stated that what he described was not what she witnessed. **Ms. Tidwell** shared that she was present for almost every negotiation session, sitting quietly, not part of the negotiation team. She stated it was true that the FFU gave up something major which they had previously considered a nonstarter, something that was exactly what the Council had asked for. She explained that the contract gives the Fire Chief managerial control to only run two ambulances instead of three on select days as a way to avoid overtime, if needed or appropriate. She recounted the considerations in moving to the four-platoon system, which sounded like the answer to virtually all the issues until something unknown blew up the process. She stated that as a result the City's negotiating team was switched out, and the process started almost completely over. She stated that Attorney Chard had done an amazing job, that both sides had made concessions, and that while the CBA was not perfect, it took huge steps in the direction the Council has said it wants to go. **Ms. Tidwell** expressed appreciation for those who came to speak and recognized the thousands of hours of overtime being worked. She pointed out that four or five employees stated that if the contract did not pass, they would be leaving the City. She asked what the City would do then. She admitted that she does not want to spend \$2MM on overtime but that she would love to spend \$2MM on hiring 16 more positions. She stated that if the City could not afford that right now, the Council should add as many positions as it could afford. She pointed out that the contract did not say that 16 people have to be hired and expressed frustration that the fiscal note to the ordinance used that number. She shared that she has two other fiscal notes showing the cost of only hiring four people for \$673,000 as well as eight people for \$1.1MM, which is half of what the City has already spent in overtime.

Ms. Sprinkle stated that the contract had been mediated, and both sides gave things up. She noted that the room was full of people who are overworked and losing family time. She acknowledged that the City will be hiring up to 10 people with the 2025 budget, that the Fire Chief will have greater management capacity, and that the four-platoon system will be implemented. She highlighted the point that had been made about the loss of the CSP and the additional burden that put on the FFD. She stated that she is not looking to go to arbitration and that while the CBA is not perfect it would not make sense to say no to the agreement.

Mr. Cleworth thanked the CFO for the work she put into the fiscal note and said it was the longest he had ever seen and very complicated. He asked CFO Bell if she was comfortable with the numbers cited in the fiscal note. CFO Bell responded that she was not. She stated that while Ms. Tidwell was correct that the City could reduce the number of staff for the four-platoon approach, her main concern was that if the City is not able to implement or maintain that system the cost to the City to return to a three-platoon system would be an additional \$1.2MM to \$1.34MM. **Mr. Cleworth** cited language in the fiscal note that the City should anticipate additional costs and asked CFO Bell to explain. CFO Bell indicated that when wages are increased, employee benefits and the cost of workers' compensation insurance increases. **Mr. Cleworth** referenced another ordinance on the consent agenda requiring a funding source to be identified for the duration of any

multi-year contracts, the obligations that funding be included in the proposed budget for each year of the agreement, and the prohibition on violating the established minimum fund balance. He asked if there was an identified funding source for all three years of the FFU contract. CFO Bell reported that if approved, the impact would likely fall into the 2025 budget. She explained that the Mayor would have to present a balanced budget for 2026 and thus be forced to cut expenses in other areas to fund the remainder of the contract. She noted that the fiscal note is based on 16 new positions, and an added cost of \$1.2MM to \$1.34MM should be expected if the four-platoon system fails.

Mr. Cleworth asked to confirm that if the Council approves the CBA, with the current proposed budget, the City will end up about \$1.3MM in the hole for 2025. CFO Bell confirmed that if adopted, the City would fund the additional expenses with the fund balance. **Mr. Cleworth** asked if that meant the City would have to dip into savings or cut other departments to make the contract work. CFO Bell confirmed that Mr. Cleworth was correct. **Mr. Cleworth** expressed his belief that such a situation would defeat the purpose of a balanced budget. He pointed out that the Council would be in violation of at least two parts of the FGC by doing so and reminded Councilmembers that they had each taken an oath to uphold the Code. He asserted that there really is not an identified funding source for all three years of the contract, and it is not appropriate to say that the City would pay for it out of the fund balance, as that was neither sustainable nor the purpose of those funds. **Mr. Cleworth** pointed out that the current year's budget paid for a new ambulance but that nothing was being set aside for any platform, ambulance, or other equipment in FFD's budget for 2025, although those items cost millions of dollars and take years to afford. He stated that he was going to wait to raise the issue during budget discussion, but if the Council intends to fund labor contracts with the City's fund balance, that will affect the City's ability to meet infrastructure needs. **Mr. Cleworth** shared that the concept of forced overtime bothers him and that he had brought that up at the last meeting. He recounted that the City has forced overtime only because of a letter of agreement (LOA) the City and FFU signed a year and a half ago, which he voted against. He discussed minimum staffing requirements and reviewed how things have changed over the years, with the last contract being set at 11, only to be increased by the LOA to 13. He pointed out that the proposed CBA drops minimum staffing from 13 to 11 and asked why it could not be lowered right now, with or without the contract, to drastically reduce overtime.

Ms. Tidwell pointed out that hiring even just two more people allows the department to transition to the four-platoon system. She stated that hiring even more staff only makes it that much more feasible. She stated that the astronomical numbers in the fiscal note are based on the hypothetical shift back to three platoons, but they would never go back to that system after moving to the fourth platoon. She added that minimum staffing of 11 makes it even easier to maintain the new system.

Mr. Ringstad discussed how adding people in the contract does not help anything if the positions are not approved in the budget and that, conversely, funding new positions in the budget can be done regardless of whether or not the Council adopts the CBA. He stated that claims of FFD not getting help if the Council does not approve the contract were false because approving a budget with several new FFD positions would mean extra people in as little as six weeks.

Ms. Therrien pointed out that with Ordinance No. 6291 failing to advance, the funds tied to that would go back into the general fund and could be used for the contract. CFO Bell clarified that those funds would have come from the bottom line for the year and thus the end result would be

the same. **Ms. Therrien** addressed the reality that the Council still had a mediated contract and needed to decide what to do with it. She noted that if it is not approved, there would be forced arbitration with potentially astronomical figures.

Ms. Sprinkle indicated that although the Council had discussed capital funding for equipment, none of that would help if the FFD lost another half a dozen staff. She expressed her belief that for the sake of morale the Council should move forward with the contract. She indicated that she too would like to avoid arbitration.

Mr. Cleworth asked what the funding source would be for the contract. **Ms. Sprinkle** stated that the Council may have to consider less common funding methods and pointed out that there is at least enough to cover the first year of the contract. **Mr. Cleworth** shared that the Council went through this same problem in 2017 when it did not have a funding source for an approved contract. He cited the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner article from that time which discussed the Council's obligation to know how it would pay for agreements it enters into. He asserted that the Council does not know how to pay for the FFU contract and that the solution being offered is to use savings, which robs the capital fund and affects other essential needs of City operations. He shared that in this past scenario, the Council decided, after approving the contract, to ask voters to approve a tax increase, which was strongly rejected. **Ms. Sprinkle** admitted that she did not know but that she would like to try something. **Mr. Cleworth** reiterated that if the Council wanted to do something like this, it must identify a funding source in advance.

Ms. Therrien stated that the same argument could be used to say that the City does not have a sustainable funding source for the PSEA contract. She pointed out that the PSEA contract would cost \$1.2MM, but the Council seems unwilling to put anything towards FFD which does not seem fair or right. She stated the Council should use the fund balance and hope for overtime savings.

Mr. Ringstad noted that the Mayor left the Council about \$2.5MM in reserves in his 2025 proposed budget in order for it to be able to do some of these things.

Ms. Sprinkle stated that the City reportedly had \$3MM in unspent funds from unfilled positions in 2024 and asked if that was correct. CFO Bell explained that the amount was based on her target numbers from October 31. **Ms. Sprinkle** indicated that the budget numbers from unfilled positions and overtime budgeted-for but not used seem to be brought to light after the fact. She stated that it is difficult to understand what funds are really available and suggested that the City has the money.

Mayor Pruhs explained that City budgets include funding for all positions regardless of vacancies, and unused funds can be made available later in the year. He shared that the Council knew at the start of 2024 that it would have two large contracts to tackle: FFU and PSEA. He recounted how he and his staff spent a month going through every department in order to create a \$2.6MM reserve to present to the Council. He noted that the reserve has dropped down to \$1.9MM, and there is a proposed, negotiated contract for PSEA that will use \$1.2MM of the reserve. He declared that there is \$700,000 left to work with and that the Council cannot claim unspent funds from unfilled positions as a funding source for a labor contract. He stated that if the Council approves the FFU contract without a funding source, he will have to cut positions in the City's largest departments, which would probably start with FFD, moving to FPD, FECC, and Public Works.

Ms. Tidwell spoke to the remaining \$700,000 reserve and the fiscal note that showed the cost of four positions at about \$630,000 which, combined with the Mayor's budget, could fund 12 new people at FFD.

Mr. Ringstad stated that he disagreed with that assessment, noting that the Mayor had carved out a few million dollars while adding numerous new positions at FFD. He asserted that cuts had already been made elsewhere to pay for more firefighters.

Mayor Pruhs reminded the Council that the \$2.6MM reserve was created while simultaneously absorbing \$1.4MM in lost revenue. He asked how much revenue the Council thinks the City might lose in the next year and reminded Councilmembers that the only thing they can hope for in terms of increased revenue is a high CPI.

Ms. Sprinkle argued that if 10 people are being added through the 2025 budget and nothing else happens, the FFD should still be able to manage the four-platoon system. **Mayor Pruhs** responded that CFO Bell had given her calculations on the actual and potential fiscal impacts. **Ms. Sprinkle** countered that the numbers were based on hiring more people than they determined is necessary. CFO Bell confirmed that the fiscal note is based on hiring 16 people.

Ms. Tidwell asked what the fiscal note would be if only the 10 people in the proposed budget are hired. CFO Bell indicated that such a scenario would come to about \$300,000, but that the clause would remain that if the City failed to implement the fourth platoon within six months, or cannot maintain it after implementation, then the additional \$1.2MM cost would be triggered. She noted that once that happens, the City would have to pay the higher rates regardless of whether or not the four-platoon structure was restored. **Ms. Tidwell** asserted that she was aware of the parameters but asked why it is assumed that the City would fail to implement or maintain the new four-platoon system. She pointed out that the Fire Chief would be managing the department to ensure things worked out. **Mayor Pruhs** interjected to clarify that both the union and Fire Chief would have to work those details out and that recent history with the FFU has shown how difficult it can be to implement something as simple as a new Community Paramedic position. **Ms. Tidwell** stated that everyone in the room supports the new approach, claiming that it is what they want and a good reason to stay with the City. She recalled testimony that others from around the state would also be drawn to the system. She expressed her strong belief that both parties would come to the table and work out the plan. **Mayor Pruhs** suggested that Ms. Tidwell had not sat through as many sessions as she claimed. **Ms. Tidwell** asserted that she had attended many of the meetings. **Mayor Pruhs** discussed the negotiation process and shared that after the FFU rejected the idea of the four-platoon system back in April, they had also called the Chief of Staff a liar and refused to work with the City's negotiating team. He explained that after that, he and the City Attorney met with the FFU in May to hear what the new reset would look like. He noted that Ms. Tidwell was present for that meeting. He shared that the reset lasted one month, and the FFU asserted they would not agree to the fiscal components of the negotiation but would focus instead on other aspects of the contract. He stated that was when he stopped attending the sessions. **Ms. Tidwell** reported that everyone at that meeting agreed that the City needed to hire more people for FFD, settling on nine people. She stated that a week later, the Mayor changed his mind and stated that the City would no longer do that. She asserted that she witnessed fair negotiations where both sides conceded on

various aspects. She expressed her belief that the City has the capacity to make something great for the department with a four-platoon system, which is something the Council already stated it wanted to do. She added that it can be done with the new positions already in the proposed budget.

Mr. Marney asserted that they are aligned and that the FFU and City want the same things. He suggested they get rid of the six-month clause, which is tied to things beyond the City's control, work together to create the fourth platoon, and hire the 10 people personnel proposed in the budget.

Mr. Ringstad agreed that the Council is already budgeting for the positions the FFU is asking for and that the 10 new jobs would happen with or without the contract. He reiterated that entering into an agreement when it is unclear what it says is wrong. He spoke to factors out of the City's control triggering additional long-term costs of \$1.2MM. He pointed out that the City can barely afford what it is trying to do now and that getting hit with that clause would be devastating. He said that managing risk is one of the Council's most important responsibilities and that this was a big risk. He pointed out that the Council's only option is to vote the ordinance up or down.

Mr. Cleworth addressed Ms. Tidwell's earlier comments that everyone was in favor of the four-platoon system and clarified that he had not supported the idea. He shared that he had advocated for keeping three shifts and keeping the negotiations as simple as possible. He expressed his belief that this issue is one of the reasons why the process has taken over a year. He suggested that a lot of City departments could come before the Council and argued many of the same points for more staffing. He noted that has happened many times over the years and that the Council has done a good job balancing the requests while working within the budget. He stated it was ironic that they got into this situation because of forced overtime and a minimum staffing level of 13 while the proposed contract has a minimum staffing level of 11. He suggested that if the Fire Chief had the management rights he deserves, he could make decisions about whether to run two or three ambulances on a given day and help control overtime expenses. **Mr. Cleworth** asserted that contracts should allow for some leeway, but the FFU contract offers none. He stated that is wrong, and no other union at the City has that kind of agreement, including other departments that are below the national average for staffing. He pointed out that FFD is above the national average for staffing for the size of the community's and that if one was to look at the last few years of budgets it would show that significant funding had gone to the department. He reiterated that the Council must keep in mind the other City departments, and he expressed frustration that for two years so many resources have been focused on FFD while infrastructure needs have been ignored.

Ms. Therrien spoke to Mr. Ringstad's comments about the uncertainty with interpretations and language. She reminded the Council that when the negotiations went to mediation, the City was represented by Attorney Chard. She suggested that if the City Attorney thought the language was unclear, he would have resolved it. She reiterated that if the contract is not passed, the City would be stuck with binding arbitration. She stated the Council could trust the City Attorney's work.

Mr. Ringstad noted that when he joined Council two years ago, he was told that FECC, with a budgeted staff of 25, had six or seven vacant dispatcher positions. He expressed how vital those workers are to public safety and that they were often staffing just two people during a shift due to vacancies, despite being budgeted for four per shift. He shared that the FECC Director had disclosed having worked 21 consecutive 12-hour shifts without a day off because of being

understaffed. **Mr. Ringstad** stated that he quickly realized that the FECC was in crisis and that the Council needs to remember the other City departments by striving to be fair and balanced with priorities that address all vital services for the community. He pointed out that there are still several vacancies at FECC and that they are paid five dollars less per hour than other dispatch call centers across Alaska. He asserted that the City is doing a lot for FFD but that everything will fall apart if the Council does not remember to balance all legs of the stool.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO ADOPT ORDINANCE NO. 6295 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Tidwell, Therrien, Sprinkle
NAYS: Ringstad, Marney, Cleworth, Pruhs
Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION FAILED and Ordinance No. 6295 FAILED.

NEW BUSINESS

- a) Resolution No. 5144 – A Resolution Authorizing the City of Fairbanks to Apply for Funds from the United States Department of Transportation for the FY2025 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Discretionary Grant Program for Island Homes Subdivision Reconstruction. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs.

APPROVED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- b) Ordinance No. 6296 – An Ordinance Amending Fairbanks General Code Section 2-118.1 to Add an Additional City Councilmember to the Council Finance Committee. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs.

ADVANCED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- c) Ordinance No. 6297 – An Ordinance Adopting the 2025 Operating and Capital Budgets. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs.

ADVANCED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- d) Ordinance No. 6298 – An Ordinance Amending Fairbanks General Code Chapter 2, Section 655, Multiyear Contracts, Clarifying Requirements for Amendments to Multiyear Contracts. Introduced by Councilmember Cleworth.

ADVANCED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- e) Ordinance No. 6299 – An Ordinance Ratifying a Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the City of Fairbanks and the Public Safety Employees Association. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs.

ADVANCED on the CONSENT AGENDA

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS TO THE CITY COUNCIL

- a) Appointment to the Fairbanks Diversity Council

APPROVED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- b) Recommendation for Appointment to the FNSB Planning Commission

APPROVED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- c) Discretionary Fund Committee Meeting Minutes of February 6, 2024

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- c) Fairbanks Diversity Council Meeting Minutes of October 8, 2024

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- c) Clay Street Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes of October 9, 2024

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS

Ms. Ringstad summarized the events of the evening by acknowledging that more people are needed at FFD and that the Council is committed to providing the positions through the 2025 budget. He suggested that they could not say that this was all negative and that the notion of voting down the CBA and providing support for FFD are not necessarily connected.

Mr. Marney, Ms. Tidwell, and Ms. Sprinkle each indicated that they had no reports or comments.

Ms. Therrien stated that she was disappointed.

Mr. Cleworth expressed his belief that if the Council had approved the FFU contract, it would have been in violation of the FGC in two different ways. He stated that he cannot understand how the Council can make light of the Code when it is sworn to uphold it. He explained that, if need be, the Council can change the Code, and he asserted that the Council cannot approve any labor contract it wants and hope for a miracle down the road to make it work. He pointed out that such an approach does not work in real life nor in business. He reiterated that the City has the budget to live within its means. He complimented the Chief of Staff's work on the packet produced for the PSEA contract. Chief of Staff Sanders clarified that while he participated in the negotiations, credit for the packet should go to Mayor Pruhs' Executive Assistant, Lauryn Schloemer.

CITY CLERK'S REPORT

Clerk Snider stated she had nothing to report.

CITY ATTORNEY'S REPORT


Attorney Chard stated he had nothing to report.

ADJOURNMENT

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

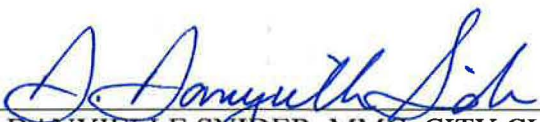
Mayor Pruhs called for objection and, hearing none, so ORDERED.

Mayor Pruhs declared the meeting adjourned at 9:24 p.m.



DAVID PRUHS, MAYOR

ATTEST:



D. DANYIELLE SNIDER, MMC, CITY CLERK

Transcribed by: CC