



FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES, SEPTEMBER 23, 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
 June Rogers, 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
 Brynn Butler, Housing Coordinator (remotely)
 Marsha Oss, Reentry Coordinator (remotely)

INVOCATION

The invocation was given by City Clerk Danyielle Snider.

FLAG SALUTATION

At the request of Mayor Pruhs, **Mr. Cleworth** 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.]

Mayor Pruhs informed the Council that 33 individuals were signed up to provide Citizens' Comments and reminded them that the allotted period for such was only 30 minutes.

Mr. Cleworth, seconded by **Ms. Rogers**, moved to EXTEND the Citizens' Comments period by an additional 30 minutes.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO EXTEND THE CITIZENS' COMMENTS PERIOD BY AN ADDITIONAL 30 MINUTES AS FOLLOWS:

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

NAYS: None

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

Clerk Snider noted that the Citizen's Comments period would end at 7:32 p.m. unless further extended by the Council.

Jodi Blakley, Owner of Mecca Bar – J. Blakley apologized for not attending the last Council meeting when her alcohol license renewal application was being reviewed. She noted that in the past, she had received notification if the Council wished her to be present and that she had not been contacted this time. She clarified that she had also not been present two years ago when her license was last renewed and that it was approved without an issue. She shared that she has spoken to several other bar owners and learned that none of them knew they were responsible for finding out when their license renewals would be on the Council's agenda.

Ms. Sprinkle asked J. Blakley if she creates a calendar reminder for herself that a Council meeting would occur during her license renewal process. J. Blakley explained that her renewal notice came in October of 2023, at which time she submitted all necessary paperwork. She pointed out how that illustrates how far backed up the Alcohol and Marijuana Control Office (AMCO) is.

Mr. Marney asked J. Blakley if she is a fan of tourism. J. Blakley stated that she is. **Mr. Marney** asked how she supports tourism. J. Blakley indicated that her establishment is open to all customers, welcomes photographs, sells merchandise, enjoys hearing stories, and offers to give tours to anyone interested. **Mr. Marney** asked if she considers herself a good neighbor. J. Blakley shared that she certainly tries, given the strings that are attached to the tools she can utilize. J. Blakley addressed the dispatch report from the Fairbanks Emergency Communications Center (FECC), showing 33 calls in the last year.

Mayor Pruhs highlighted the fact that J. Blakley's last renewal in 2022 included six pages of calls and congratulated her on bringing that call volume down to just over one page. He added that the Fairbanks North Star Borough's Transit Center downtown had far more calls and affirmed that the Mecca Bar is a much lower concern than other locations. J. Blakley expressed her belief that a large portion of calls were related to a single individual with mental health challenges, whom they have had difficulties with since 2021. She added that 13 of the calls also show as self-initiated stops by the Fairbanks Police Department (FPD). She shared that as a business, they try to be a good neighbor, that they want to be able to call the police any time there are issues, and that they desire to see the space in front of the business cleaned up. J. Blakley stated that they struggle with the idea that they have to answer for the number of calls during a renewal process, which forces them to be careful about when and why they make a call to the police. She noted that it is a problem to feel like the business cannot utilize the services available without jeopardizing their future.

Ms. Rogers asked J. Blakley to share details about her work on the Smokefree Workplace initiative. J. Blakley shared that her business went smokefree two years prior to it becoming a state

law and that she, along with another bar owner in town, worked closely with the American Cancer Society to help see it through. She acknowledged that it is inconvenient for people to be outside smoking on the sidewalk but that it is better than having it occur inside her or any place of business. She expressed pride in being part of that work.

Ms. Sprinkle pointed out that while the state laws prohibit smoking within 20 feet of a business's entrance, individuals are often seen smoking within 10 feet of the Mecca Bar door and an ashtray is placed outside for smokers. J. Blakley indicated that she would rather have the ashtray and smokers close to her door than that of one of the neighboring business's door. **Ms. Sprinkle** shared that she has also witnessed individuals smoking marijuana outside the entrance to the bar and going in and out of the business. J. Blakley stated that she admits to seeing some marijuana usage but that she sends those people away. She asserted that no one is permitted to come into the establishment with a lit cigarette of any kind. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked J. Blakley what hours she is typically onsite. J. Blakley shared that she is typically at the bar from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., then in and out throughout the rest of the day. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked if they have ever considered a bouncer or other security-focused employee to be posted at the entrance. J. Blakley stated that they have someone serve in that capacity on occasion for larger events but that they are generally not busy enough to require it. She noted that any employee performing those duties would not be allowed to enforce anything outside on the sidewalk but would be limited to dealing with problems inside the bar, which she reiterated were minimal. She clarified that both her insurance company and law enforcement informed her that no employees should be outside policing. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked what generally happens at a bar if an incident occurs outside. J. Blakley indicated that the police are called. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked if it was correct that she felt that calling the police and adding to their call report list created an unfair situation. J. Blakley stated they feel their hands are tied in regard to helping with problems in front of the bar, especially being open late at night when no one else is around and being unable to self-police problems outside. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked whether J. Blakley believed that problems would still occur at that location if the bar was not there. J. Blakley asserted that they would because people would still be downtown near other restaurants and other bars. **Ms. Sprinkle** acknowledged the proximity of the nearby businesses and pointed out that the same problems are not occurring in the same frequency as they are at the Mecca Bar.

Mayor Pruhs reminded Councilmembers that they may only ask questions during Citizens' Comments – not engage in debate. **Ms. Sprinkle** clarified that her original question and concern was as to why the police are not being called more often if problems are persistent.

Mr. Marney asked J. Blakley if she would be willing to work with the City to fix the problems. J. Blakley confirmed that she would be happy to. **Mr. Marney** indicated that his goal is to resolve issues with her input as well as that of neighboring business owners. He identified the recent efforts the Council undertook regarding cleaning up the downtown area and focusing on economic development. He agreed that they could put their heads together and come up with solutions.

Marge Thompson – M. Thompson discussed the challenges of being a business owner in the 500 block of Second Avenue downtown. She addressed pervasive problems with empty alcohol bottles, trash, broken glass on the ground, broken shop windows, vandalism, graffiti, altercations to include loud obscenities, vomit, urine, and blood. She discussed the unpleasant and often unsafe environment for those wishing to enjoy that part of the downtown area. She indicated that people

publicly consume alcohol and marijuana. She stated that most things are manageable in the summer but are impossible in the winter.

Mr. Ringstad asked M. Thompson how long she has worked downtown. M. Thompson replied that it has been decades. **Mr. Ringstad** indicated that he would like to pick her brain sometime.

Ms. Sprinkle asked if she had noticed any differences or a timeline of things improving or worsening over the years. M. Thompson stated that it has gotten worse over the last ten years.

Alicemary Rasley – A. Rasley stated that she has spoken on behalf of the Mecca Bar before, and things have not changed since then. She asserted that the problem is not the bar and that it is not pulling people into the City center. She shared that she was a magistrate judge for 28 years and frequently handled cases involving alcohol and substance abuse, which gave her a good idea of what was going on. She noted that she is the president of the Breast Cancer Detection Center and that J. Blakley has donated tens of thousands of dollars to nonprofits in the community. A. Rasley stated that she has worked downtown since 1979 and that the only time things were less disruptive or disturbed in the downtown area was when the City had officers regularly patrolling day and night. She discussed the impact on the number of arraignments and cases being tied to downtown law enforcement as well as the ineffectiveness of fining and jailing offenders, including the cost to the City for incarceration. She indicated that the real problems are due to mental health crises and chronic inebriation.

Ms. Sprinkle asked A. Rasley if she was aware that the City has had police officers patrolling the downtown area the last two summers. A. Rasley stated that she was aware and that the ability for that to make a difference has to be tied to having alcohol taken away from the people causing the problems. She reiterated that allegations of the Mecca Bar being the reason problems exist in the vicinity are unfounded.

Marissa Lawrence – M. Lawrence referenced an earlier comment about broken bottles on the street and sidewalk outside the Mecca Bar and pointed out that the bar does not sell bottles of alcohol, so that issue could not be attributed to it. She shared that she visits the bar every Monday morning at the same time and regularly witnesses J. Blakley's outreach to the community. M. Lawrence reported that she regularly brings clients to the Mecca Bar and that it is no different than any other establishment in town.

Mr. Marney asked M. Lawrence why she believes the front of the bar attracts individuals. M. Lawrence shared that as a former paramedic, she knows that people go where they feel safe.

Ms. Sprinkle, in response to M. Lawrence's comment about bringing clients to the bar, asked what she does for a living. M. Lawrence shared that she is an alcohol distributor.

Russell Dennis – R. Dennis shared that he works at Fairbanks Fire Department (FFD) and spoke in support of Ordinance No. 6291, which would add nine positions to FFD. He stated that he wanted to dispel the notion that the police and fire departments are fully staffed, indicating that that is misleading. He likened it to claiming that a four-wheeler missing two wheels could make an "awesome dirt bike." He indicated that he has heard it said that the police department is fully

staffed, yet there are no regular patrol officers from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. R. Dennis used a car accident earlier that day at 11:00 a.m. as an example, stating that police were called but none showed up. He cited the drastic increase in calls to FFD over the last several years and stated that they expanded to ensure every call could be answered. He stated that they have not added enough positions in order to compensate for the call increase, noting that a fully staffed department would not be experiencing \$2.1MM in overtime like it will see in 2024. R. Dennis concluded that the current situation is not working for the City, its employees, or the community. He urged the City to adopt Ordinance No. 6291.

Sean Walklin – S. Walklin shared that he is the Director of the UAF Community and Technical College’s Culinary Arts and Hospitality program. He spoke in support of the Mecca Bar and J. Blakley’s positive impact on his program through charitable donations that come from pull-tab revenue. He reported that she established a scholarship for students interested in their program as well as provided direct funding to support other needs, including emergency purchases of books and other course materials. S. Walklin reported that her actions have had a tremendous impact, enabling them to open a student-run food truck and provide quick support when needed. He expressed appreciation for J. Blakley’s efforts to improve the City.

Ms. Sprinkle asked S. Walklin if he has personally patronized the bar and if so, witnessed any problems. S. Walklin stated that after a museum fundraiser, he and a group went to the Mecca Bar and had a great time with no issues observed.

Bonnie Jo Largen – B. Largen shared that she has lived in Fairbanks all her life, lives downtown, and walks downtown daily. She reported that she never sees police on her walks but constantly sees the Fairbanks Parking Authority agents. She expressed support for the Mecca Bar, where she used to work as a janitor. She indicated that J. Blakley takes great effort to care for her staff and customers, create a safe environment, and give back to the community. She asserted that losing the Mecca Bar would hurt more than the owner – it would hurt the City as a whole. She pointed out J. Blakley’s willingness to work with the Council to address any identified concerns.

Ms. Sprinkle asked B. Largen if she had any suggestions for how to make the area less concerning or frightening to the neighbors. B. Largen stated that she does not know about the neighbors or their problems but that she has never had a problem at the Mecca Bar. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked if that meant there was nothing wrong or room for improvement. B. Largen replied that it is a local bar and that there are problems at every bar.

Charity Gadapee, Visitor and Community Engagement Director, Explore Fairbanks – C. Gadapee provided an update on visitor counts for the May through August 2024 period, which increased by 13% from 2023. She discussed a partnership with the UAF Geophysical Institute’s Science for Alaska Summer Series. She reported on their most recent Golden Heart Giving event called “Feed the Helpers” where staff, volunteers, and T’s BBQ Connection teamed up to provide meals to 355 firefighters and EMS personnel at 11 different fire departments across the Interior. She stated that it was an honor to share meals and stories with community first responders.

Brian Feldmann – B. Feldmann asked if Councilmembers realize how cultural the Mecca Bar is to Fairbanks. He recalled visiting there when he was an early teenager and stated that he believes

it was the first bar in the City to be fully integrated, with customers of all races coming together. He expressed the belief that the City is trying to kick the can down the road and that the focus needs to be on patrolling the streets and providing services to the homeless and mentally ill. He stated that the Mecca Bar shows support to the community through potlucks and gatherings after a funeral. He declared that it is a great bar with good people.

Wade Kalloch – W. Kalloch indicated that everyone knows alcohol has been an evil and destructive force against mankind since the start. He affirmed that he was neither defending nor condoning any liquor establishment but he was interested to see how the City Council works and learn how it uses its authority to make decisions. He discussed the owner not being contacted about her license being on the agenda of the last Council meeting and stated that she is otherwise in total compliance with the Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Board. W. Kalloch declared that no proprietor is responsible for what takes place on public streets and that the Council went after the Mecca Bar while another just a block away had broken three ABC Board rules over the summer. He asked why the Council was not going after that business. He stated that an economic and ethnic dichotomy exists in the world and that it occurs in downtown Fairbanks at a grand scale. He claimed that this other business is using public property to distribute liquor for a profit and while they have a right to be in business, so does J. Blakley. He urged the Council to be just, open-minded, and fair-handed in its treatment of all alcohol license holders.

Julie Jones – J. Jones shared that she works downtown and runs Festival Fairbanks, which provides upkeep and maintenance in Golden Heart Plaza (GHP). She expressed support for the Mecca Bar keeping its license. She acknowledged that colorful characters have been a part of downtown Fairbanks from the beginning and that she has never had a problem talking to people in the area. She cited a statistic from a few years back which noted only 70 individuals within the January homeless count that year had any drug or alcohol abuse problems. J. Jones discussed the reality that helping only 70 people would have changed the entire dynamic of downtown at that time. She acknowledged that free will gets in the way sometimes but that everyone is responsible for the community. She pointed out that J. Blakley's business has been paying taxes and supporting community services, having been in operation since 1946. She reiterated that the responsibility to take care of problems belongs to everyone and recounted the Volunteers in Policing initiative a year ago to help have a uniformed patrol downtown. She noted that the seasonal FPD positions at GHP have been nice, but it is not the same as the law enforcement presence that used to be there.

Ms. Sprinkle asked J. Jones if she was advocating for more policing as a viable solution. J. Jones confirmed that policing as well as community engagement are both needed. **Ms. Sprinkle** asked about the nature of her relationship with the Mecca Bar. J. Jones shared that Festival Fairbanks was on the verge of going out of business years ago until J. Blakley agreed to carry pull-tabs to support the nonprofit organization, which saved them. She stated that the financial benefit from the Mecca Bar was not her motivation to speak before the Council but rather the overall community support the business offers to many. She reiterated the importance of everyone working together.

Rhonda Montgomery – R. Montgomery expressed support for her boss, J. Blakley, and echoed the sentiments of previous speakers regarding her charitable nature. She agreed that the Mecca Bar is a safe place doing more than just serving alcohol. She affirmed that she comes to work every day feeling confident that she is in a safe place.

Ms. Sprinkle asked if she ever worries about or is afraid of what goes on outside the bar. R. Montgomery stated that she can only control what goes on inside the bar, that she is not afraid, and walks to and from her car daily.

Angelika Krinner-Croteau – A. Krinner-Croteau shared that she has owned the Arctic Travelers Gift Shop for 17 years, a neighboring business of the Mecca Bar. She stated that she had some negative experiences with the Mecca Bar the first seven to eight years and that she had provided public testimony in opposition of the license renewal before. She indicated that she changed her mind over the last decade and expressed support for the bar. She noted that J. Blakley has improved things significantly, and there has been a marked change in the clientele. She discussed the cleaner appearance of the area and the decrease in the need for her to call police for things like damage to her windows. She added that she sometimes sees police on downtown streets and advocated for increased patrol efforts – not just during the summer months.

Mayor Pruhs asked A. Krinner-Croteau to confirm that she, as the owner of the most popular tourist destination on Second Avenue, was recommending that the City Council approve the alcohol license renewal for the Mecca Bar. A. Krinner-Croteau replied affirmatively.

Mary “Rocky” Osborne – M. Osborne shared that she has lived downtown since 2008 and that the building she lives in had far more problems than the Mecca Bar until they added security in 2015. She indicated that she has met many great people with heart at the bar and that while some have alcohol problems, they all have a story. She reported that she has never seen a fight break out at the Mecca Bar and that any problems that arise in the bar are handled quickly and precisely. M. Osborne discussed how customers look out for each other but that there is much more needing done to address homelessness and mental health issues in the community. She concurred with earlier comments that open containers outside the bar are not because of the Mecca Bar.

Niki Cserni – N. Cserni shared that she is one of the Mecca Bar’s closing shift bartenders. She explained that bar’s license is limited to its indoor premises and that problems on the sidewalk and street are outside of the establishment’s control. She stated that as part of their closing duties they often sweep and clean up the area outside the bar, as well as the space in front of neighboring storefronts. She asserted that the primary reason individuals congregate outside is that the structure along Second Avenue has alcoves that trap warm air and make for a hospitable place for those seeking protection from the elements. She noted that the same feature does not exist on other streets downtown and is unique to Second Avenue. She discussed the challenge of wanting to call the police whenever necessary but about how doing so places her job at risk, given that a longer call report reflects poorly on the bar when it is time for a license renewal. N. Cserni shared that recently an irate individual, who had long been banned from the establishment, was causing a disturbance outside and law enforcement was needed. She stated that concern over the police attention for something that was unrelated to their business led her to feeling unable to call it in, so another nearby business did. She added that she told officers she did not want any part of the situation when they arrived and wanted to ask questions. She concluded that it is not fair for her to be unable to call the police and that she deserves to feel safe too.

Mr. Marney stated that he was struggling to understand why she could not call the police. N. Cserni explained that they have to defend their alcohol license which includes a report of police calls to the property. She added that every article they read about the Council's action to protest the Mecca Bar license cited calls to the police as a primary concern. She stated that she wants to be able to call the police but feels like she cannot do so. **Mr. Marney** asked if she really would feel unable to call law enforcement if outside the bar, she saw someone being assaulted or raped. N. Cserni acknowledged that she would absolutely call for matters such as assault or rape but that even those kinds of calls would show up as a negative mark against her boss's business. **Mr. Marney** stated that a change is needed.

Ms. Sprinkle commented that as a body, the Council did not believe that police were the problem. She also expressed concern with the idea that employees at the Mecca Bar felt they could not call police when police services were needed. She expressed a desire to work on resolving the conflict. **Mayor Pruhs** reminded Councilmembers that they are to only ask questions during Citizens' Comments.

Van Lawrence – V. Lawrence indicated that he was speaking in capacity as the attorney of JRB, Inc., the alcohol license holder doing business as the Mecca Bar. He cited Alaska Statute 04.11.480 which provides that if an application is protested, the ABC Board shall deny the application unless it finds that the protest was "arbitrary, capricious, or unreasonable." He described how an iconic business might be shut down and cause 10 employees to lose their jobs if the Council proceeds with its protest. He pointed out that the concerns expressed appear to be about things that happen outside the bar, not what is within the business premises. He acknowledged the discussion taking place about who is responsible for policing Second Avenue and asserted that it is the City – not the businesses on that street. He confirmed that J. Blakley accurately shared that Worker's Compensation insurance constraints prevent her, or any business, from sending any staff outside of the business to deal with problems on the sidewalk or street. V. Lawrence agreed that employees at the Mecca Bar are in a "Catch-22" situation regarding calling the police. He pointed out that J. Blakley has been commended on the shorter call report, which illustrates that point. He noted that the report that was six pages long at the Mecca Bar's previous renewal is more than enough to generate concern for employees who feel uncomfortable calling law enforcement.

Ms. Sprinkle asked V. Lawrence to confirm who he was representing. V. Lawrence explained that his client is JRB, Inc., the corporation that owns the Mecca Bar and holds the alcohol license.

Mayor Pruhs noted that the one-hour allotment for Citizens' Comments had expired and that 11 names remained on the register. He discussed the importance of allowing all who had signed up to have the opportunity to speak. He suggested the Council consider extending the comment period again, limited to the remaining names, even if it meant each would be limited to two minutes.

Ms. Rogers concurred that the Council should extend but allow the three minutes for each speaker.

Mr. Cleworth, seconded by **Ms. Rogers**, moved to EXTEND the Citizens' Comments period by an additional 30 minutes, maintaining the three-minute time limit.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO EXTEND THE CITIZENS' COMMENTS PERIOD BY AN ADDITIONAL 30 MINUTES, MAINTAINING THE THREE-MINUTES TIME LIMIT AS FOLLOWS:

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

NAYS: None

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED and reiterated that comments from citizens would be limited to the 11 remaining names on the register.

Clerk Snider noted that the Citizen's Comments period would now end at 8:04 p.m.

Nick Clark – N. Clark thanked Explore Fairbanks and T's BBQ Connection for providing meals to local firefighters. He shared that members of the FFD, the Fairbanks Firefighters Union (FFU), and the Public Safety Employees Association (PSEA) had recently come together to volunteer at The Bread Line's soup kitchen. He encouraged others in the community to consider donating their time and resources to support that organization. He spoke in favor of Ordinance No. 6291, which he recognized was currently on the Consent Agenda. He expressed hope to have a more robust conversation on the ordinance when it returns for a second reading. He concurred with the earlier sentiments of R. Dennis and agreed that the options to address the department's current situation include continuing with the status quo, cutting services, or approving the ordinance to hire more staff. N. Clark stated that continuing with the current approach is not sustainable and does a disservice to both employees and the community. He reiterated that the additional staff is needed and will make the difference. He asserted that they cannot keep operating 13 positions with shift staffing of only 14 while solving the overtime crisis. He indicated that the FFD was never meant to operate that way and that the community deserves the FFD's service.

Tresa Gillespie – T. Gillespie acknowledged that most of her thoughts had already been expressed by others and conveyed her support for the workers at the Mecca Bar. She shared that she often helps clean up the trash and debris outside along the stretch of Second Avenue that is home to the bar and its neighboring businesses. She expressed the view that the Mecca Bar is no different than the other businesses around it as far as being responsible for the problems on the sidewalk and that it is unfair to go after its license but not that of others. She noted that the Mecca is the only "Native Bar" left in Fairbanks and that it likely would not exist if not for Alaska Natives. She acknowledged that the problems being discussed are directly tied to homelessness, which should be the focus.

Jim Arpino – J. Arpino shared that he ran a business on South Cushman for many years and had similar problems to what has been described. He noted that one difference was that business owners were not trying to put others out of business and that property sizes were larger. He explained that a bar with its own parking lot, which many in town have, is in fact responsible for problems outside its entrance, provided the situation was still occurring on their property. He added that downtown many businesses open directly onto City sidewalks and streets, which means that trespassing a problematic individual from the premises would not prevent that person from remaining outside in what would be considered public space. J. Arpino shared that he now owns a business a few blocks away and that people congregate in a similar fashion outside the Midnight Mine. He asserted that it is not a Mecca Bar problem but rather a City problem, and one that could

not be solved in one evening. He recognized the historical significance of the Mecca Bar and that the desire to clean up the area up ties into tourism. He pointed out the lack of concern for similar problems in other parts of town where tourists are less present and indicated that it will take work to fix those issues. He discussed the small percentage of troubled individuals and that while their behavior is erratic, they are generally not violent. He reiterated that the problems are not isolated to downtown.

Brian McNeil – B. McNeil shared that he has lived in the downtown area for a long time and that there have been many bars over the decades, none of which have as much history as the eclectic Mecca Bar. He discussed the unique design and the extensive work put into refurbishing the interior. He acknowledged the problems that exist downtown and agreed that business owners are not the ones who are causing them. B. McNeil stated that if the bar closes, the loss of alcohol tax revenue for the City would not help address the real need, which is funding to increase police presence downtown. He discussed additional problems that occur under the bridges and walking paths in the downtown area.

Erik Yunker – E. Yunker stated that he works at the Fairbanks Rescue Mission and that a lot of the problems described outside the Mecca Bar are similar to what they deal with at the mission. He shared that he has always seen diligent work from bartenders at the Mecca Bar when it comes to checking identification and cutting people off when appropriate. He reviewed the limited options for community services available to those struggling with substance abuse and reiterated that it is a mental health problem. He noted the City's effort to clean up homeless camps and suggested that is another reason more people may be congregating downtown. He suggested that instead of closing down the Mecca Bar, the City should focus its efforts on other issues.

Gary Falls – G. Falls expressed support for J. Blakley, noting that he is also a business owner and owns an alcohol license. He indicated that the whole situation has scared him as far as what can happen to a business. He described J. Blakley's various charitable endeavors, raising tens of thousands of dollars, many of which are events he also participates in. He voiced concern about how things got to this point and pointed out the significant community support for the Mecca Bar.

Chris Miller – C. Miller shared that he is a resident, business owner, and property owner in the downtown area. He expressed his desire to see entities and individuals work together to address the obvious community issues, rather than assigning the problem to a particular business. He acknowledged that resources need to be committed, including some by the bar itself, to solve the problems. He noted that other bars have been shut down due to similar problems that went unresolved. He confirmed that he wants economic activity as well as safety for his guests, adding that sometimes it does not feel safe.

David van den Berg, Executive Director of Downtown Association of Fairbanks – D. van den Berg stated that regardless of how the Council arrived at this point, he would like to view the situation as an opportunity to discuss what is happening on the sidewalks downtown. He admitted that he is supportive of businesses downtown and therefore supportive of the Mecca Bar but called attention to the fact that no speakers had denied that problems exist on the sidewalks and streets in the area. He discussed how the Fairbanks Downtown 2040 Plan addresses public safety, both in the chapter regarding economic development as well as an entire chapter dedicated to the topic. He asserted

that the City Council has the authority to avoid protesting the Mecca Bar's license while still working to improve public safety with the owner and through other means.

Jacyn DeBaun – J. DeBaun shared that she is a fifth generation Alaskan and the Executive Director of a local nonprofit organization. She discussed the importance of community and to how J. Blakley contributes in significant ways to many programs. She reported how many professionals visit the Mecca Bar after other philanthropic events to celebrate. She addressed the concerns over broken glass and marijuana consumption taking place outside the bar and reiterated that neither item is sold by the Mecca. J. DeBaun reported that she took UAF classes at the downtown campus and carried pepper spray every night as she walked to her car, which was nowhere near the Mecca Bar. She suggested the City focus on improving safety in the entire downtown area, citing the Borough transit center as one of the worst culprits. She asked how many businesses the City will go after in an effort to fix the alcohol-related problems downtown. She encouraged the Council to give thought to efforts like Ordinance No. 6291 as a way to get more first responders and stated that she cannot fathom running a business with the same level of overtime as the FFD. She concluded with a recommendation that the Council consider checking itself for biased viewpoints given the predominantly Alaska Native component to the Mecca Bar.

Ms. Sprinkle asked J. DeBaun what nonprofit organization she runs. J. DeBaun shared that she runs the Breast Cancer Detection Center of Alaska.

Stephanie Thibedeau – S. Thibedeau stated that all who had spoken thus far had done a good job at sharing the same thoughts she has. She stated she believes this action by the Council is racially motivated. She suggested that police have never solved a homelessness problem and that she does not believe that law enforcement is the answer. She expressed her view that there is an attempt to swat away the Mecca Bar in order to gain more tourism revenue and that tourists are put ahead of locals a little too much. She added that she had read in the newspaper that the amount of police calls to the Mecca Bar had been compared to that of Tuffy's, a bar on the opposite side of town, which she found ludicrous.

Jennifer Haynes – J. Haynes suggested that J. Blakley consider hiring bouncers, possibly former military members, to provide security and alleviate problems from the inside. She acknowledged that many individuals who are causing problems downtown have mental health challenges but are worth knowing and understanding where they are coming from.

Mayor Pruhs declared Citizens' Comments closed.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND CONSENT AGENDA

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

Mr. Cleworth pulled items 12(a), Resolution No. 5136, and 12(b), Ordinance No. 6291 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 September 9, 2024

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
1059	Raven Landing Center	Beverage Dispensary	Retirement Community of Fairbanks	1222 Cowles Street
4395	The Banks Alehouse	Beverage Dispensary	Goethe, LLC	1243 Old Steese Highway
2424	Sophie Station Hotel	Beverage Dispensary Tourism	Fountainhead Development, Inc.	1717 University Avenue, S.
3074	Wedgewood Resort	Beverage Dispensary Tourism	Fountainhead Development, Inc.	212 Wedgewood Drive

Mr. Ringstad, 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.

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

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

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
22809	Airport Way Best Bud	Retail Marijuana Store	Airport Way Trade Center, LLC	3598 Airport Way

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

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

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

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

NAYS: None

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

MAYOR'S COMMENTS AND REPORT

Mayor Pruhs shared that City Hall will host a Halloween event on Thursday, October 31 and thanked Craig Compeau for sponsoring the event. He expressed appreciation for all who had provided Citizens' Comments and acknowledged that sometimes it is good to get yelled at a little. He thanked J. Blakley for representing her business and V. Lawrence for providing a legal viewpoint. He reiterated that the Council hearing what it wants to hear is not always the same as hearing what it should hear. He thanked public members for sharing their voice.

COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS

Ms. Sprinkle indicated that she had no comments.

Ms. Rogers thanked those who had provided testimony, shared history, and spoke of the needs in the community. She concurred that all parties need to come together to make strides to solve problems. She pointed out that the vote had been five to one, that only she had voted to waive protest on the Mecca Bar's application for license renewal, and that it was difficult to hear from those who were unhappy with the situation. She discussed the typical low attendance of Council meetings which often leads to a lack of awareness by the public of what actually takes place, who votes for what, and what is discussed. She spoke favorably of the collective experiences and minds of those present. **Ms. Rogers** shared that she has found her fellow Councilmembers to have great listening skills and a willingness to hear what people have to say. She noted the serious community issues raised by those who spoke and thanked them for their input. She shared that the Council greatly supports efforts to address the problems discussed through programs directly implemented by the City as well as those of other entities. She acknowledged that she is nearing the end of her Council term but committed to continuing to advocate for progress and solutions in Fairbanks.

Mr. Cleworth thanked everyone for providing testimony. He shared that in all his years of service, he has always found the City Council to be receptive to public input. He stated that Council meetings do well to have the Citizens' Comments period near the beginning of the agenda, noting that on occasion he has had to wait a long time, even as late as midnight, to testify at a Borough Assembly meeting. He expressed appreciation for the opportunity to allow additional time to hear all who had come to speak.

Ms. Tidwell thanked those in attendance and expressed her wish that every meeting involved a room full of engaged people. She acknowledged the theme across many comments of needing additional police and services. She discussed the concern that had been shared, where employees and J. Blakley felt conflicted by the need to call law enforcement but worried about adding to their call report. **Ms. Tidwell** declared that when she sees lengthy reports, she does not automatically assume the worst about any business and always seeks to understand the situation of that licensee. She affirmed that if any establishment needs to call the police, they should do so, and that she would rather see a six-page report, knowing that people were reporting problems accordingly. She stated she recognizes that the conversation may then need to shift to adequate City services. She indicated that any notion that a license would not be renewed because it was utilizing City services, especially for problems on a public sidewalk or street, was incredibly false. She spoke to the need

for the Council to figure out how to provide services the community needs, be it police, firefighters, or ambulances, including any necessary additional revenue options.

Mr. Marney shared that he has stated in the newspaper and on television that he does not believe it was the Council's intent to shut down the Mecca Bar. He noted that regardless, the situation had offered an opportunity to start an important conversation that he hopes can turn into a collaborative effort to fix certain City-wide problems. He indicated that he had learned a great deal through listening during the process and thanked those who had come out.

Mr. Ringstad corrected Ms. Rogers' recollection of the original vote on the Mecca Bar license renewal and stated it was 4-1, as he was absent that night. He pointed out that if he had been present, he would have also voted to waive protest. He agreed with Mr. Marney that the problem is on its way to being resolved. He suggested that the real issue at hand has to do more with the process of renewal applications than the actual grievances being aired but that he welcomed the healthy discussion.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a) Request for reconsideration by Council Member Marney of the motion to WAIVE PROTEST on the alcohol license renewal application for the Mecca Bar. The motion to waive protest failed on September 9, 2024, and the request for reconsideration was filed with the City Clerk on September 10, 2024. A public hearing was held on September 9, 2024.

Lic. #	DBA	License Type	Licensee	Address
710	Mecca Bar	Beverage Dispensary	JRB, Inc.	549 2nd Avenue

Ms. Sprinkle, seconded by **Mr. Cleworth**, moved to RECONSIDER the motion to waive protest on the Mecca Bar alcohol license application for renewal.

Mr. Marney stated that he believes it is a problem that license holders are not directly notified when their license renewal application is on the agenda for a particular meeting. He shared that he will be working on an ordinance to change that process so licensees will be notified in the future.

Mr. Ringstad agreed that was a key point in what had transpired, noting that it was a poor Council-level policy and in no way reflects on the City Clerk.

Ms. Sprinkle spoke in favor of reconsideration as a way to discuss how to improve the process.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO RECONSIDER THE MOTION TO WAIVE PROTEST ON THE MECCA BAR ALCOHOL LICENSE APPLICATION FOR RENEWAL AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Tidwell, Cleworth, Marney, Ringstad, Sprinkle, Rogers
NAYS: None
Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

Clerk Snider confirmed that, following the vote to reconsider, the motion on the floor was to waive protest on the Mecca Bar alcohol license application for renewal.

Mr. Ringstad indicated that this clearly is a City problem, not a business one, and that it is the Council's responsibility to work on updating internal processes while engaging with the owner on any other issues needing to be addressed. He acknowledged that the Council has often expressed the wish that owners be present when applications are considered. He spoke to the goal of improving the downtown experience, which will not be something achieved overnight. He stated that he does not believe there is a reason to protest the Mecca Bar's license and that he would like to help them to get back to focusing on their business just as the Council needs to focus on its own.

Mr. Marney expressed hope that the conversation with J. Blakley could be continued, and he extended the offer to share his phone number to anyone who would like to discuss things further. He acknowledged that J. Blakley runs a great bar and has great clientele. He indicated a desire to work towards solutions for the problems that had been highlighted.

Ms. Sprinkle referenced the police call reports included with license renewal applications and stated that the lack of detail makes the reports less and less helpful. She noted that businesses are often used as a landmark for a call even when the problem has nothing to do with the licensee. She stated that the information can be deceiving to the Council when reviewing applications and indicated that she would like to see some work on the entire process of license renewals.

Ms. Rogers pointed out that the process had come a long way during her years of service on the Council. She explained that the Council used to not get any kind of report and then, after the practice was started, the Council would sometimes hear about the tedious nature of staff preparing a detailed call list, which led to certain data points being trimmed away until settling into the format the Council sees now. She agreed that it is not beneficial in its current form and that the Council should discuss what it would like to see in the future.

Mr. Cleworth asked if J. Blakley could return to the podium. He thanked her for staying and shared that he owns a neighboring business on Second Avenue. He shared that he had spoken to J. Blakley recently about a significant improvement in the sidewalk activity over the last two weeks. He asked if employees had made any changes to their regular practices, such as asking people to not smoke outside the entrance, which is technically against the law. J. Blakley confirmed that they have been telling people outside smoking on the sidewalk that they need to leave and that they cannot smoke close to business entrances. **Mr. Cleworth** stated that it has made a notable difference and that his shop, which usually is filled with smells of cigarettes and marijuana from those outside the Mecca Bar, no longer has that issue. He noted how that one item has changed the entire environment. He acknowledged that the business is limited to what actions can be taken outside the premises and that certain things cannot be mandated, nor would he support approving the license renewal with such stipulations. He highlighted the positive change that came from such a small adjustment. **Mr. Cleworth** admitted that he does not understand why the bar is such a magnet for people meeting up to smoke, share a bottle of alcohol, yell, engage in fights, and huddle in the alcoves. He encouraged J. Blakley to continue doing whatever she has been doing the last two weeks, as that had eliminated about 80% of the problems. J. Blakley indicated that her only concern is staff safety and the lack of insurance coverage outside the premises. **Mr. Cleworth**

expressed his belief that no one needed to be injured, as the problems outside are plainly visible from inside the bar. He stated that the large glass windows are sufficient to communicate in other ways to people on the sidewalk. He recalled a former bartender at the Mecca Bar who would often monitor the issues and had no problem cracking open the door to tell people outside to “knock it off.” He noted that is essentially what he has seen over the last couple weeks and encouraged it to continue. He pointed out that the restriction of smoking within 20 feet from a business entrance means there is no legal spot along that entire sidewalk of Second Avenue where someone can or should be smoking. He recognized that no business owner can police someone smoking as they walk down the street but that the congregation of groups has been the problem. He thanked J. Blakley for her efforts. J. Blakley confirmed that they will continue to do their part.

Mayor Pruhs thanked J. Blakley for being present and willing to speak with the Council.

Ms. Rogers shared that over the decades, that area of Second Avenue has always been the place where folks from out of town would congregate due to the former presence of many shops that visitors would frequent. She expressed appreciation for the comments of J. Jones regarding the history and community aspect of the types of people who linger in the downtown area. She indicated that there are many misunderstandings that people should consider.

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

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

NAYS: None

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

- b) Ordinance No. 6290 – An Ordinance Amending the Collective Bargaining Agreement Between The City of Fairbanks and the Fairbanks Firefighters Union IAFF Local 1324 to Add Community Paramedic and Training Captain Positions. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs. SECOND READING AND PUBLIC HEARING.

Ms. Tidwell, seconded by **Ms. Sprinkle**, moved to ADOPT Ordinance No. 6290.

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

Mayor Pruhs asked Chief of Staff Michael Sanders to review the details of the ordinance.

M. Sanders explained that the ordinance was for two positions that were already funded in the current budget and will be added to the FFD. He reported that they had worked out all details, job descriptions, pay charts, and all other items needed to implement the positions once the ordinance is passed and the Letter of Agreement (LOA) signed.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO ADOPT ORDINANCE NO. 6290 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Ringstad, Tidwell, Rogers, Sprinkle, Marney, Cleworth
NAYS: None
Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED and Ordinance No. 6290 ADOPTED.

NEW BUSINESS

- a) Resolution No. 5136 – A Resolution In Support of Fairbanks North Star Borough Ordinance No. 2024-25 Amending FNSB Code Title 18 Regarding Parking and Loading Requirements. Introduced by Mayor Pruhs and Councilmembers Tidwell, Rogers, and Sprinkle.

Ms. Sprinkle, seconded by **Ms. Tidwell**, moved to APPROVE Resolution No. 5136.

Mr. Cleworth explained that at the last work session, he wanted to know if the Borough's plans were congruent with the City's own guidelines for parking in the downtown core area and had wondered if City Engineer Bob Pristash had reviewed the ordinance. He shared that he heard back from B. Pristash who stated he had identified five minor problems that would be worth discussing and could improve the proposal. He noted the goal of making it easier for people to get to businesses in the core area by eliminating certain parking requirements.

Mr. Cleworth, seconded by **Mr. Ringstad**, moved to POSTPONE Resolution No. 5136 to the Regular Meeting of October 14, 2024.

Ms. Sprinkle stated she recalled hearing the Borough's Director of Community Planning, Kellen Spillman, claim that he had spoken with B. Pristash. **Mayor Pruhs** explained that from his understanding, that conversation did occur but that B. Pristash was only given two-days' notice in which to provide feedback. **Ms. Sprinkle** thanked the Mayor for the clarification.

Ms. Tidwell pointed out that the ordinance is the Borough's and asked if the Council's plan is to send over recommendations and request that they be implemented. **Mr. Cleworth** confirmed that they would communicate the notes from B. Pristash to K. Spillman who could work with the ordinance's sponsor to determine whether to incorporate the City's suggestions.

Mayor Pruhs added that he and B. Pristash had called the Borough Mayor to discuss a timeframe for the remaining work on the ordinance at the Borough level. He confirmed that the City will have its recommendations sent well before the Borough Assembly's next meeting, which will give them time to consider the suggestions.

Ms. Sprinkle asked whether everything would take place prior to or after the change of Borough Mayor, given the upcoming election. **Mayor Pruhs** assured the Council that it would be handled appropriately and that postponing the resolution would not cause any problems in the big picture.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO POSTPONE RESOLUTION NO. 5136 TO THE REGULAR MEETING OF OCTOBER 14, 2024 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Marney, Cleworth, Ringstad, Tidwell, Rogers, Sprinkle
NAYS: None
Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

- b) 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.

Ms. Sprinkle, seconded by **Ms. Tidwell**, moved to ADVANCE Ordinance No. 6291.

Mr. Cleworth pointed out that in one month the Council will be presented with a 2025 budget and hear the needs for all departments – not just the FFD. He indicated that they will then be able to see if there is any funding available to add positions at the City and, if so, how many. He expressed his belief that the ordinance was premature.

Mr. Cleworth, seconded by **Mr. Ringstad**, moved to POSTPONE Ordinance No. 6291 to the Regular Meeting of December 16, 2024.

Ms. Tidwell stated that she was not in favor of postponement, citing earlier comments that outlined how the Council missed an important step when adding a third ambulance and approving the LOA to staff it: it failed to increase overall staffing to make the changes sustainable. She explained that every day the FFD is understaffed results in more overtime, which is already forecasted to be over \$2MM in 2024. She stated she would like to spend money on adding staff now in order to tackle the overtime crisis and added that the Council has been putting off the issue for far too long.

Mr. Ringstad stated that he does not disagree that there is an overtime problem and that something needs to be done soon. He shared his concern with going forward with the ordinance now, citing the Finance Committee's forecast of very troubling times ahead if current trends continue. He explained that the positions add another million dollars to the budget, plus annual increases, which only compounds the City's financial problems. He affirmed that public safety should be at the top of the Council's priority list but that he is not comfortable picking and choosing where to add such significant funding throughout the year, as it makes the budget process essentially pointless. **Mr. Ringstad** added that the City has been fortunate the last couple years to have some surpluses but that this has typically been due to one-time funding coming in from sources other than taxpayers, which is money that is not guaranteed for the future. He shared that a recent report showed that the only departments that are under budget in 2024 are only under budget because of position vacancies, which is a situation that may not repeat in 2025. He reiterated that the Council has a lot of issues that need to be addressed in order to prioritize where City funds go and that they cannot be making such huge long-term commitments just a month away from the budgeting cycle.

Ms. Sprinkle acknowledged the concern about the financial commitments but pointed out that throwing more and more money at the problem in the form of overtime expenses was not helping anyone either. She stated that the departments that have vacancies are also not dealing with overtime concerns like the FFD. She stated that the Council needs to do something, even if it means adding less staff than was originally proposed in the ordinance.

Mr. Marney referenced a grant that the City received in the past that supported FFD staffing and asked if the City was still receiving it. **M. Sanders** indicated that the SAFER grant had run its course. **Mr. Marney** asked if the City reapplies for it every year. **Mayor Pruhs** reported that the City has applied for it but has not received it again. He pointed out that the City has not eliminated the FFD positions hired with that grant funding.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO POSTPONE ORDINANCE NO. 6291 TO THE REGULAR MEETING OF DECEMBER 16, 2024 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Cleworth, Ringstad
NAYS: Sprinkle, Marney, Tidwell, Rogers
Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION FAILED.

Mr. Cleworth pointed out that the reason for the overtime is because a couple years ago the Council signed an LOA which originally had a deadline attached. He stated the Council learned later that the end date could not be included and meant the new positions and parameters were added to the contract in perpetuity unless renegotiated. He explained that the artificial minimum staffing level of 13 means that there will be overtime on virtually every shift, which clearly is not healthy, and he has no idea why both parties agreed to the terms. **Mr. Cleworth** referenced the FPD's stance that they will not have forced overtime and suggested that the same should be implemented at the FFD. He stated that they could return to a minimum staffing level of 11, which was in place in 2019, and provide the level of service the City can afford. He suggested that if he was the head of Public Works, Engineering, FPD, or another department, he would feel upset by what is happening. He asserted that he had never seen an effort to add such a massive, fixed cost at this point in a year and acknowledged that the Council had painted itself into a corner by approving the LOA. He discussed the mistake of allowing the minimum staffing to grow to 13 and declared that the problem would not be solved by institutionalizing it and hiring more people. He reiterated that there are more departments at the City than the FFD and that the upcoming budget process is already going to be difficult. He stated the responsible choice is to wait on the issue.

Ms. Tidwell spoke to the increased call volumes since 2019 and stated that the Council decided it wanted the FFD to answer those calls. She stated that required more people, yet the Council never gave FFD more people. She recalled the news articles at that time which discussed the call volume and wait times for people to get help. She pointed out that the LOA was signed because it was what the department needed at the time to provide the services and that the Council needs to approve the number of positions to staff shifts in a way that does not result in overtime. She indicated that she views the LOA as the right thing to have done at that time.

Ms. Sprinkle added that part of those changes included the addition of a third ambulance, which the City needs to continue to operate.

Mr. Ringstad spoke to the dire situation of the Fairbanks Emergency Communication Center (FECC), which is also incredibly understaffed, with dispatchers struggling with similar work-life balance challenges. He asserted that FECC personnel are also a critical part of the public safety system. He noted that more money has been spent on the FFD than on all others and that first responders cannot be called out if there is no one to answer the phone.

Mr. Marney shared that he voted against postponement because he felt December was too far away, suggesting that the Council should have a clear idea of the budget by November. **Mayor Pruhs** stated that he will have his budget to the Council on Monday, October 28. He reminded Councilmembers that there will be budget work sessions during the first two weeks of November and that whether the ordinance is passed or not, they will be receiving a budget that encompasses everything. He agreed that the request is too early and that the needs of all departments should be considered altogether before the Council commits to adding nine more positions at the FFD. He reiterated that the City could have discharged positions from the FFD after the grant funding ran out, but it did not.

Mr. Marney, seconded by **Mr. Ringstad**, moved to POSTPONE Ordinance No. 6291 to the Regular Meeting of November 18, 2024.

Ms. Sprinkle asked to confirm that the Council would, at that time, have all information available for review. **Mayor Pruhs** confirmed that the Council will have had two weeks of budget work sessions and will have gone through each department's needs. He stated that November 18 would also be the first reading of the 2025 budget ordinance.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO POSTPONE ORDINANCE NO. 6291 TO THE REGULAR MEETING OF NOVEMBER 18, 2024 AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Marney, Cleworth, Rogers, Sprinkle, Ringstad

NAYS: Tidwell

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

c) Record of City Council Executive Sessions

City Attorney Thomas Chard stated that Alaska laws, the City's Charter, and the Fairbanks General Code all affirm that the City Council can conduct business as it sees fit, within certain parameters. He explained that the recording of Executive Sessions is not something required by any of those governing resources and that doing so is solely a procedural decision of the Council which has been in place for many years. He suggested that, given the questions that had been raised on the topic in recent discussions, it would be appropriate to have a vote on the record regarding how the Council would like to proceed with the practice of recording Executive Sessions.

Mr. Ringstad, seconded by **Ms. Tidwell**, moved to DISCONTINUE the practice of recording Executive Sessions.

Mr. Ringstad stated that he believes the purpose of Executive Sessions is for members of the Council to have open, honest, and free discussions, without hesitation. He acknowledged that conversations are typically about critical issues that should not be discussed in a public setting and that laws govern what kinds of topics qualify for Executive Session discussions. He shared that he has seen numerous examples over the last 40 years of individuals hesitating to say what they truly felt based on the presence of cameras or other recording equipment. He indicated that the knowledge of being recording not hinder the honest and necessary conversations.

Mr. Cleworth shared that in the 1990's a Councilmember decided to talk about matters that had been discussed in Executive Session and that the opposing attorneys in an active legal matter got wind of it and spoke to the Councilmember. He explained that they subpoenaed the record of the Executive Session. He stated that, somehow, they were able to get the record, which created a significant problem for the internal balance, unity, and cohesion of the Council at that time. He added that dialogue from the Executive Session was published verbatim in the newspaper which was very unfortunate. He expressed concern that a similar situation could arise.

Attorney Chard thanked Mr. Cleworth for providing historical context on the issue and shared that he had gone back and read about that incident for his own knowledge. He explained that an Executive Session, held correctly in accordance with the Open Meetings Act (OMA), is in fact a confidential session. He stated that if the Council entered an Executive Session appropriately and then inadvertently veered off topic, anything other than what was publicly noticed as the subject of the Executive Session would be potentially disclosable. He noted that if a recording exists and that scenario occurs, someone will have to listen to the recording and determine whether every individual statement made during the Executive Session was covered under the OMA, and those matters which were not would be subject to disclosure. Attorney Chard added that if a Councilmember chose to personally record a confidential session, the Council would have discretion for handling that situation by policing its own members. He stated that some states have specific punitive parameters in place for such action but, to his knowledge, Alaska does not.

Mr. Cleworth thanked Attorney Chard for the explanation and noted that it has always been the Council's policy to ensure that the City Attorney is present in all Executive Sessions, which helps prevent discussion from veering off-topic. He agreed that it is important to maintain a system of the Council monitoring itself.

Mr. Ringstad concurred that they should continue the practice of including the City Attorney in Executive Sessions to help keep them on track. He indicated that he has seen nothing to give him anything other than great confidence and trust in his fellow Councilmembers. He stated the Council has a great ability to resolve issues, and that is one of its greatest strengths.

Ms. Rogers stated she prefers to continue recording Executive Sessions because she would like an official record to exist. She stated that an accurate account would help refute any accusations.

A ROLL CALL VOTE WAS TAKEN ON THE MOTION TO DISCONTINUE THE PRACTICE OF RECORDING EXECUTIVE SESSIONS AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS: Tidwell, Cleworth, Ringstad, Marney, Sprinkle

NAYS: Rogers

Mayor Pruhs declared the MOTION CARRIED.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS TO THE CITY COUNCIL

- a) Historic Preservation Commission Meeting Minutes of March 5, 2024

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- b) Historic Preservation Commission Meeting Minutes of June 4, 2024

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- c) Historic Preservation Commission Meeting Minutes of July 30, 2024

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- d) Clay Street Cemetery Commission Meeting Minutes of August 7, 2024

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

- e) Fairbanks Diversity Council Meeting Minutes of August 13, 2024

ACCEPTED on the CONSENT AGENDA

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND COUNCILMEMBERS' COMMENTS

Ms. Tidwell shared an update from Jomo Stewart, President and CEO of the Fairbanks Economic Development Corporation (FEDC). She reported that the recent Alaska Defense Forum was, by all accounts, the best one yet. She added that planning for the 2025 event had already commenced. She stated that the Alaska Interior Small Business Accelerator had kicked off earlier in the day, with 18 applicants participating. She noted that the Tri-Municipality Economic Development Memorandum of Agreement had been signed and officially adopted on September 6 and that the restoration of funding to FEDC was underway. She shared that the FEDC board voted unanimously to formally pursue receiving designation as the Alaska Regional Development Organization (ARDOR) for the Interior and that the Council will likely be presented with a resolution of support.

Mr. Ringstad asked if the FEDC would be reaching out to municipalities outside of the Borough that would fall under the regional umbrella of the ARDOR. **Ms. Sprinkle** stated that had been briefly discussed and, while there are many moving parts to the process, bringing representatives from outlying communities onto the board for the ARDOR will be part of the eventual plan.

Ms. Sprinkle reported that the Chena Riverfront Commission held a special meeting to consider the request by an entity to rezone a piece of land in order to build a condo for friends and family off Airport Way on the river. She stated that there are many moving parts, but the request was approved. She shared that she is glad the Mecca Bar license renewal is moving forward but that she still feels it is essential to review individual licenses when any question or concern lingers. She indicated that the call reports are a quagmire and often do not help with the process. She expressed frustration with the public intoxication that seems to be widely condoned across the City, be it sidewalks, streets, or parks. **Ms. Sprinkle** acknowledged that increased law enforcement comes at a price and suggested that the City may need to look at its alcohol tax. She added that she had personally spoken with an insurance professional who insisted that coverage would extend beyond the front door for a business like the Mecca Bar, but she realized it would not have been beneficial

to debate with people expressing themselves. She stated that the problems that persist in front of the Mecca Bar make it less of a good neighbor. She added that there were many individuals who would have liked to have spoken in support of protesting the license but chose not to out of fear of retribution. **Mayor Pruhs** expressed appreciation for the concern Ms. Sprinkle shows.

Mr. Cleworth reported that there has been a broken window in the tower at the Lavery Center since earlier in the summer and requested an update from Public Works, as winter is approaching fast. He spoke of the interesting discussion that had occurred during the meeting and noted that it has happened many times as the community considers problems downtown, who is responsible, and what can be done. He asserted that having more police is not the answer and referenced the noticeable improvements he had seen along Second Avenue over the last two weeks. He pointed out that all it takes is people speaking up, pointing out that certain activities are illegal, and reminding folks that it gives a bad name to any business where the activity is taking place – even if they are not within the licensed premises. He affirmed his desire for businesses to coexist regardless of the difference in industries and that more can be done to ensure laws are enforced.

Mr. Marney stated that he was happy to hear the news about the FEDC and the ARDOR. He suggested a collaboration with FECC Manager Kristi Meredith on the coding of calls in order to have more useful reports when considering license renewals. He reported that he missed the last Explore Fairbanks board meeting as he was helping prepare food boxes at a nonprofit organization due to a lack of volunteers. He stated that he would be attending the next board meeting soon. He shared that he had thank you cards for the two seasonal police officers who had spent the summer patrolling the GHP and invited others to sign the cards before leaving.

Ms. Rogers shared that she recently met with Anna Nelson from the Interior Aids Association and that she will be joining that committee. She discussed the Mecca Bar issue, noting the significant level of public inebriation and the lack of enforcement – not just in the downtown area. She suggested that discrimination occurs at a much larger scale than what was discussed earlier and that problems are far greater than what is happening on Second Avenue.

CITY CLERK'S REPORT

Clerk Snider stated that she appreciated the ideas shared regarding potential updates to the Fairbanks General Code and the process for license renewals. She indicated that sections of Code pertaining to the issues had not been looked at in a long time and that she and the City Attorney could work together on a review.

CITY ATTORNEY'S REPORT

Attorney Chard stated that he had nothing to report and thanked those present for their commitment to the community.

ADJOURNMENT

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

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

Mayor Pruhs declared the meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.



DAVID PRUHS, MAYOR

ATTEST:



D. DANYELLE SNIDER, MMC, CITY CLERK

Transcribed by: CC