

2024

LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

PRESENTED BY THE ANCHORAGE ASSEMBLY
& MAYOR BRONSON



TOP PRIORITIES

Pursuant to Anchorage Municipal Code 2.10.075, the Anchorage Assembly annually adopts legislative priorities on behalf of the Municipality of Anchorage.

There are three top priorities for the 2024 Legislative Session:



1 The Port of Alaska Modernization Program



2 Increasing Housing Supply and Addressing Homelessness



3 Supporting Mental & Behavioral Health Needs

The Municipality has invested considerable time and resources into each of these areas – securing valuable federal grants for the Port, using federal recovery funds and alcohol tax proceeds to create new housing and behavioral health services, and amending code to make it easier to build housing in Anchorage.

However, these are tough issues that cannot be solved with local attention and funds alone. State support is vital to solving these problems and ensuring that the State’s largest community and hub of economic activity is healthy and thriving for many years to come.

Mayor Bronson and the Anchorage Assembly appreciate your support.

Dave Bronson
Mayor

Christopher Constant
Assembly Chair

Meg Zaletel
Assembly Vice Chair

Anna Brawley | District 3, West Anchorage

Karen Bronga | District 5, East Anchorage

Kevin Cross | District 2, Chugiak Eagle River

Zac Johnson | District 6, South Anchorage

Kameron Perez-Verdia | District 3, West Anchorage

George Martinez | District 5, East Anchorage

Scott Myers | District 2, Chugiak Eagle River

Felix Rivera | District 4, Midtown Anchorage

Randy Sulte | District 6, South Anchorage

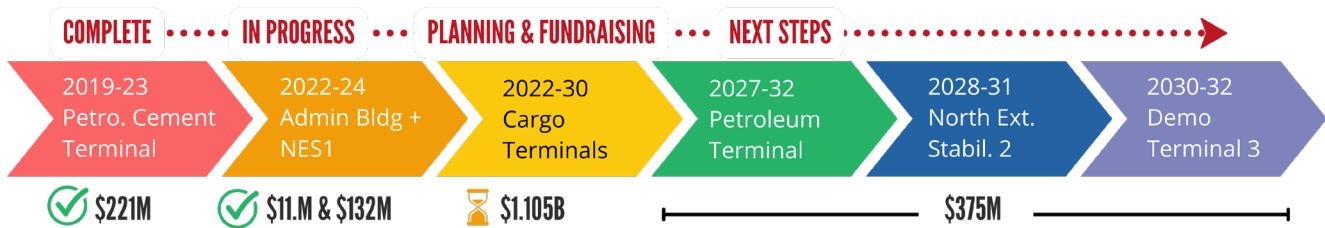
Daniel Volland | District 1, North Anchorage

PORT OF ALASKA MODERNIZATION PROGRAM

The Municipality of Anchorage thanks the Alaska Legislature for your past support towards funding the approximately \$1 billion required before the end of 2025. Your \$200 million investment, and the \$270 million in grants it has helped leverage, are assisting with design and replacement of aging cargo facilities at Alaska’s largest and most strategically located port.

Status

Thanks to your support, many milestones were reached in 2023 – the Petroleum Cement Terminal opened, the parties came together to agree on a Basis-of-Design, the tariff structure was approved and Anchorage hosted a successful visit from U.S.D.O.T. Secretary Buttigieg. Port officials are now preparing cost analysis data and other materials for Terminal 2 to move the project forward on time.



Our primary ask for the Port is that you continue to find avenues to promote and educate your constituents and colleagues on the importance of this project for Alaska’s economic future.

Lifeline to Alaskans

The Port of Alaska Modernization Program (PAMP) aims to replace Anchorage’s aging docks and related infrastructure to improve their operational safety and efficiency, accommodate modern shipping operations, and improve Alaska statewide supply chain resiliency and efficiency.

The Port of Alaska handles 75 percent of all non-petroleum, Alaska in-bound marine cargo, and more than 39 percent of all refined petroleum products used in Alaska. The Port directly serves 90 percent of the state’s population.

As one of eighteen Department of Defense designated commercial strategic ports, the Port supports critical military operations across Alaska, the Arctic and around the world.

Partnerships

The partnership of the Municipality and the State Legislature with our Congressional Delegation and the recent visit to the Port from Transportation Secretary Buttigieg have been pivotal toward securing continued federal support and investment in our infrastructure.

Thank you for your continued investment and support.



Learn more about the Port of Alaska

INCREASING HOUSING SUPPLY & ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

Across the state, communities are struggling with a major housing shortage crisis and local governments have limited powers and finances to resolve this issue without State support.

The Municipality asks that the Legislature make the statewide housing shortage a priority for the 2024 session and consider policies such as state financing for housing development, transfer of Municipal Entitlement lands to local governments, and encouragement of relevant state agencies to leverage their financial powers to develop housing.

LEGISLATIVE REQUESTS

\$10 million capital request in the FY25 budget for Housing Alaskans: A Public Private Partnership.

Until 2022, Alaska was one of only a handful of states lacking a statewide housing trust focused on increasing attainable housing stock. Funding for Housing Alaskans is one simple way the state can help meet housing needs across the state. *See **Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 3.***

\$4 million operating request in the FY25 budget to provide a 100% match for the Municipality of Anchorage to operate year-round shelter. Location Pending.

Statewide support for shelter operations in communities like Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau and others is necessary to ensure that shelter facilities have sustainable and reliable funding. Additionally, current homelessness funding should be maintained, including funding for the Basic Homelessness Assistance Program (BHAP), which provides prevention and case management for existing shelters.

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUESTS

Encourage relevant state agencies to exercise their existing bonding, lending and financing abilities to create a state infrastructure revolving fund encourage additional housing development.

Historically, the state has played a large role in helping to spur housing development. In 1972, the state offered a 36-year loan, which resulted in 98 rental units being created in downtown Juneau, and AHFC's Senior Housing Development Program, launched in 1975, helped create a thousand units of senior housing. A model similar to the Department of Environmental Conservation's revolving loan funds could be replicated by the state to create a revolving loan fund to assist urban and rural Alaskan communities meet oftentimes prohibitively expensive infrastructure needs. *See **HB 154** and **SB 125** to fund the Alaska energy independence fund at AHFC.*

The Governor should commission an update to Alaska's Plan to End Long Term Homelessness.

Alaska's Plan to End Long Term Homelessness (the counterpart to Anchorage's Anchored Home Plan) ended in 2019. Ownership of this plan currently lies with the Alaska Council on the Homeless and its last progress report was in 2018.

As the state's designee to carry out the day-to-day management of the Balance of State Continuum of Care program, the Alaska Coalition on Housing and Homelessness could be formally designated to oversee the plan, including conducting the plan update and providing ongoing progress reports on the plan.



STATE SUPPORT FOR MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NEEDS



The Anchorage Assembly convened behavioral health providers and statewide decision-makers in August 2023 to identify the most immediate and effective steps that can be taken to address mental and behavioral health needs in Anchorage, resulting in the following recommendations:

LEGISLATIVE REQUESTS

Grant \$650,000 to the Municipality of Anchorage to support integrated medical and behavioral health outreach services.

The Municipality requests this funding to bring back holistic outreach services to include basic street outreach, medical services, and behavioral health services. No services currently exist for behavioral health outreach, which had been previously provided but was ended due to staffing and budgeting issues.

Change state labor laws to allow behavioral health staff to work 12-hour shifts.

Currently, behavioral health providers face significant workforce shortages, but unlike nurses who are able to work 12-hour shifts, other behavioral health staff must be paid overtime for 12-hour shifts, making it unaffordable for most providers. Behavioral health workers have requested this change in state law to assist them in better providing their services to the community. *Could potentially be incorporated into **HB 204 and SB 153** to exempt certain employees from overtime pay requirements.*

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUESTS

As the Alaska Department of Health undergoes the Medicaid 1115 waiver billing renewal process, it should remove barriers currently preventing more participation among behavioral health providers.

Barriers to allowing behavioral health providers to bill Medicaid through the 1115 waiver for their services related to people experiencing homelessness has artificially limited the number of providers who can deliver this essential service.

An Alaska Department of Health review of regulations and processes to allow for easier enrollment and access to services such as Medicaid, Social Security, and SSI for people experiencing homelessness.

Currently, there are significant barriers to assisting people experiencing homelessness in enrolling in and accessing public benefits which could support them on their journey to housing stability. For example, to access Medicaid services, an individual would need to be enrolled, have an assessment and a formal treatment plan.



These barriers become untenable for individuals experiencing homelessness who have co-occurring mental health and substance misuse issues who would greatly benefit from these services.

MUNICIPALITY-WIDE PRIORITIES

While the Port of Alaska, Housing and Homelessness, Mental & Behavioral Health, and Energy Security are the Municipality's top priorities, there are also several other high priorities that are essential to making the Municipality run effectively and serve the residents that comprise half of the population of the state.

STATUTORY AND POLICY REQUESTS

- Support full restoration of the Eklutna River
- Strengthen benefits for public employees
- Reform election regulations for voter registration
- Expand municipal tax exemptions for new development and taxing blight properties

FUNDING REQUESTS

- Fund robust snow removal and strengthen State and local coordination
- Reinstate funding for the Community Assistance Program
- Increase public school funding
- Invest in infrastructure capital projects
- Prioritize road safety corridors
- Support redevelopment of the Ship Creek Small Boat Launch

ENERGY RELIABILITY & AFFORDABILITY

EMERGING PRIORITY

Take fast action to ensure Anchorage maintains energy reliability and affordability.

Alaska's Southcentral region faces a looming energy crisis that threatens to impact not only Anchorage residents but also its economy. At the heart of this crisis is the depletion of natural gas reserves in the Cook Inlet oil and gas basin, long the primary source of energy for the area.

In the next eight years, Southcentral Alaska is expected to run out of available gas, making it imperative for state leaders and decision-makers to take immediate and strategic actions to prevent an energy crisis.

We strongly encourage the Legislature and the Governor to craft sound policy that ensures Anchorage can meet the gas and electrical needs of its citizens, businesses, and schools. These policy changes must prioritize energy reliability and affordability. Because there is no time to waste, we urge swift, bipartisan action during the 2024 legislative session.

See **HB 154** and **SB 125** to establish a green bank and **HB 121** and **SB 101** to establish a renewable energy portfolio standard for electric utilities. The Renewable Energy Fund, made permanent in 2023 via **HB 62**, also needs new appropriations.



STATUTORY & POLICY REQUESTS

SUPPORT FULL RESTORATION OF THE EKLUTNA RIVER

The Municipality concurs with the Native Village of Eklutna's priority to restore salmon habitat.

The Native Village of Eklutna (NVE) and its partners have been working toward full restoration of the Eklutna River, which is a critical salmon habitat in Southcentral, for many years, and have identified potential cost savings and fund sources. Not only is full restoration of the river the right thing to do to respect the vision, subsistence needs and culture of the people who have stewarded this land long before the dams existed, it also has huge economic potential with recreation and tourism opportunities in the area.

The Draft Eklutna Fish & Wildlife Program, which currently favors partial restoration, is making its way to the Governor's desk for approval this spring.

BLIGHT PROPERTIES & TAXES

Pass legislation regarding municipal tax exemptions for new development and taxing blight properties.

In September 2023, the Assembly and Mayor passed a resolution in support of **SB 77** and **HB 84** to help correct an inconsistency in state law and give local jurisdictions greater flexibility to develop impactful community development and redevelopment incentives for their communities and would allow the Municipality to craft its own development incentives and tax system to address blighted properties that can be tailored to local needs and encourage needed development and re-development.

STRENGTHEN BENEFITS FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

Create and fund a defined benefit option for state employee retirement.

Like all public sector employers, the Municipality is struggling to recruit and retain employees in part because retirement benefits are not keeping up with the private sector and Lower 48 public employers, which costs the Municipality millions of dollars a year in contracts to make up for labor shortages. Improvements in retirement benefits at the state level are needed.

In January 2023, the Anchorage Assembly passed a resolution in support of **HB 22** and **SB 35** to create a new defined benefit pension option for state and municipal peace officers and firefighters in the Alaska PERS with protections for the state against unforeseen future liabilities. **SB 88** was since introduced to expand benefits to all PERS and TRS.

ELECTION REFORM

Pass an election reform bill that amends AS Title 15 to address concerns with voter registration and clean up voter rolls.

Per AS 15, the MOA reports of undeliverable ballot packages trigger an 8-year waiting period to update voter registrations in the SOA Voter Registration Rolls. The Municipality asks the State to amend AS 15 to decrease this period to 4 years, as well as to amend AS 15 to accept information from ERIC as direction to initiate the cancelation of voter registration when a voter registers in another state and doesn't respond to a SOA confirmation. See **SB 138** currently under review.

FUNDING REQUESTS

ROAD MAINTENANCE & SNOW REMOVAL

Fully fund a robust level of service for State snow removal operations within the Municipality and improve State and Municipal road maintenance coordination.

The past two winters demonstrated that additional funding for State operations and improved coordination between the Municipality and the State are needed to maintain the level of snow removal and road maintenance the community expects.

The Municipality is currently working with AKDOT&PF to identify areas for short- and long-term improvements and better service for Anchorage residents. Two solutions to address immediate needs include: a request that the State increase resources to DOT&PF Southcentral Region for year-round road maintenance of State-maintained roads in the Municipality; and better coordination and alignment of DOT&PF operations with Municipal road maintenance to more efficiently restore roads after snow events.



COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Make a full contribution for 2024 and fully recapitalize the fund.

In 1986, the State contributed \$56M to Anchorage's operating budget (about \$150M in today's dollars), in 1999 it contributed \$20M, in 2009, \$15M, and in 2019, \$6M.

In recent years, it's been under \$2M. This major drop in funding is because in 2016, the program was changed from Community Revenue Sharing to Community Assistance and the fund was reduced to \$90M, with annual distributions not to exceed \$30M. As a result, funding to local governments was cut by 50%. Last year, the \$30M needed to recapitalize the Community Assistance Fund was vetoed. Without this money, the Fund will lack sufficient resources to give local governments the amount they received this fiscal year.

At the same time state revenue sharing has dropped, school bond debt reimbursement has been reduced and other state costs have shifted to the Municipality. Despite some one-time funding boosts, overall the Municipality has had to absorb more costs that have been historically paid for by the state, shifting the burden for funding of statewide issues onto municipal taxpayers. In 2017, Alaska ranked 40th in terms of the percentage of its budget allocated to local governments at just 16%.

INCREASE PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING

Raise the Base Student Allocation to account for inflation since 2017 by no less than \$1,655 to \$7,615 and increase its transportation funding by at least \$209 per pupil to \$690 per pupil for FY25.

ASD's structural deficit for the 2024-2025 school year is now projected to be \$95 million, at a minimum and the Anchorage School Board may be forced to eliminate approximately 650 educators, paraprofessionals, and key support staff in May 2024 unless Legislative action is taken by the middle of February 2024, in advance of the ASD Board's obligation to pass a balanced budget for the 2024-2025 school year.

ROAD SAFETY CORRIDORS

Identify state roads in the municipality that have high incidences of vehicle collisions and fund \$500,000 for data collection and enforcement.

- Create a policy and project to identify State of Alaska high traffic roads within the Municipality of Anchorage that have a high incidence of vehicle collisions and identify priorities for designation as safety corridors through the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP).
- Fund a grant of \$500,000 to the Municipality for data collection and enforcement. Re-design and reconstruction of these key corridors within the Municipality will be considerable undertakings in both time and funding. This is a preliminary step, with long term effects of using safety corridors to gather data and reduce speeds anticipated to result in reduced vehicle and pedestrian collisions and improve overall safety.



SHIP CREEK SMALL BOAT LAUNCH

Determine management structure and fund \$500,000 to maintain the Ship Creek Small Boat Launch.

The Alaska Railroad owns the property on which the Ship Creek Small Boat Launch is located. The Municipality of Anchorage previously leased that property from the Railroad, constructed the boat launch, and assumed maintenance costs. The lease has since expired and future maintenance and management for the launch is now undetermined. The annual costs for dredging are about \$100,000; \$5 million in infrastructure repairs are needed, and launch user fees are not high enough to cover the costs.

A new user agreement needs to be arranged with the Alaska Railroad and, if the Municipality of Anchorage re-assumes management, state funding is needed to support operations.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

- \$2M for each senate district to help with badly needed road improvements and rehabilitation.
- \$10M grant to match federal capital funds for airport improvements to help Merrill Field with future expansion and better utilization of assets for economic development.

DISTRICT PRIORITIES

In addition to the Municipality's areawide priorities, the State can address local needs and improve quality of life at the neighborhood level with projects highly prioritized by the residents in the surrounding areas.

NORTH ANCHORAGE

- West Bluff Dr/Ocean Dock Road Area storm drain improvements **HD 18, SD I**
- Peratrovich Park pedestrian plaza and landscape upgrades: 500 West Fourth Ave **HD 17, SD I**
- Debarr Rd surface rehab and ADA upgrades **HD 17 & 19, SD I & J**
- Pine St/McCarrey St surface rehabilitation and ADA upgrades **HD 19 & 22, SD J & K**
- Tract J Park Master Plan **HD 18, SD I**
- Alley Paving **HD 17 & 19, SD I & J**
- Playground for Northstar Elementary: design and build a playground at the terminus of Eagle Street at the Chester Creek greenbelt **HD 17, SD I**
- Public boat launch and boathouse at Westchester Lagoon for future boat rentals **HD 17, SD I**

JBER, CHUGIAK & EAGLE RIVER

- Starner Street Bridge Replacement **HD 24, SD L**
- Local Road and Drainage system rehabilitation in the Chugiak Birchwood Eagle River Rural Road Service Area (CBERRRSA) **HD 18,23 & 24 and SD I & L**
- Eagle River Emergency Water Fill Station **HD 23, SD L**
- Artillery Road Overpass Improvements **HD 18, 23 & 24 and SD I & L**
- Establishing a Cemetery **HD 18, 23 & 24 and SD I & L**



WEST ANCHORAGE

- Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and Bluff Erosion at Point Woronzof, on State of Alaska-owned land at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (TSAIA) **HD 16, SD H**
- Pedestrian Crossings/Traffic Calming: Minnesota Boulevard from International to Northern Lights Boulevard **HD 13, 14 & 17, SD G & I**
- Raspberry Rd Expansion: Sand Lake Rd to Jewel Lake Rd **HD 16, SD H**
- Dimond Blvd Pedestrian and Landscaping Improvements: Jewel Lake Rd to Old Seward Hwy **HD 10, 15 & 13, SD E, G & H**
- Sand Lake Regional Water Access Project **HD 15, SD H**

MIDTOWN

- Quinagak St Upgrade: E Dowling Rd to Askeland Dr
HD 12, SD F
- 46th Ave Area Street Light Improvements: Folker St to Piper St (23-01) **HD 20, SD J**
- 42nd Ave Upgrade: Lake Otis Pkwy to Florina St
HD 20, SD J
- Folker St Upgrade: 42nd Ave to Tudor Rd **HD 20, SD J**
- 41st Ave Upgrade: Piper St to Dale St **HD 20, SD J**
- Sound Barrier Fence Project on Northern Lights
SD G, HD 14
- Campbell Creek Trail Separated Grade Crossing at Lake Otis
HD 13, 14 & 19, SD G & J



EAST ANCHORAGE

- Tudor/Muldoon Traffic Calming **HD 20, 21 & 22, SD K & J**
- Fire egress on military boundary for Campbell airstrip and northeast residents **HD 12, 20 & 21, SD J, K**
- Northeast mixed-use transit/community hub, potentially with library and/or recreation center
HD 21 & 22, SD K
- 6th Avenue at Boniface Separated East and west-bound left turn lane and improved pedestrian crossing
HD 19 & 22, SD J & K
- East Anchorage JBER Perimeter trail recon study **HD 18, 20, 21 & 22, SD I, J & K**
- UMED Pedestrian safety improvements **HD 19 & 20, SD J**
- Boniface Pkwy Pedestrian safety improvements: 22nd Ave to Debarr **HD 19, 20, 21 & 22, SD J & K**
- Northern Lights Blvd at Bragaw St Pedestrian Crossing improvements **HD 19 & 20, SD J**
- Russian Jack Springs Park upgrades to deteriorated trails and facilities **HD 19, 20, 21 & 22, SD J & K**

SOUTH ANCHORAGE, TURNAGAIN ARM & GIRDWOOD

- Hillside Fire Prevention: Secondary egress points, safe clearings for shelter in place, fuel mitigation, and fire breaks. **HD 9 & 11, SD E & F**
- Safe pedestrian crossing for O'Malley Elementary at O'Malley Rd and sidewalk installation along Rockridge Dr.
HD 11, SD F
- 100th and Victor Rd intersection redesign to improve pedestrian and vehicle traffic safety **HD 10 & 15, SD E & H**
- Safe pedestrian access along and across Abbott Rd around the Birch Rd intersection for Service High School
HD 11, SD F



TOP PRIORITIES

1

**The Port of Alaska
Modernization
Program**

2

**Increasing Housing
Supply and Addressing
Homelessness**

3

**Supporting Mental
& Behavioral Health
Needs**

CONTACT STAFF

Mia Costello

Director of Legislative Affairs
Office of the Mayor

mia.costello@anchorageak.gov
907-952-2953

Clare Ross

Legislative Services Director
Anchorage Assembly

clare.ross@anchorageak.gov
907-538-2259