

Candidates speak out on Girdwood issues

Girdwood 2020 sent this survey to all mayoral candidates. Here are the responses of those who chose to fill out the survey.

Q: Historically, few of Girdwood's projects make it to the top of the municipality's CIP list for state funding. Furthermore, Anchorage voters typically vote against Girdwood bond projects, even when the funds for those projects were to be garnered only from Girdwood property taxes. What will be your administration's stand on funding Girdwood projects? Do you have ideas on funding?

Bob Lupo: I have lived in Eagle River for 25 years, and have experienced the same problems. We who live outside the city of Anchorage must not be treated as second-class citizens. I will strive to give the municipality's outlying communities a fair share of all funds and resources available.

Paul Kendall: Maybe you could combine the Reliable Electrical Power and Secondary roads in and out of the valley And The Expanded water, sewage, road and drainage improvements in some form of bundled flow areas I really like Girdwood, in its closeness to each other and the lands folded and unfolded vistas. I am not familiar with your funding designs. I would hope you would learn me up quickly if elected...

+++ Well, I would hope your people/community would find some form of geographical identity or uniqueness as a foundation for a source of particular funding.

+++ Say, If you are considered a remote valley community, we would look to fund some form of clean and innovative energy research and development project which would have applications to apply or conversely, bring in some other like community energy idea that is compatible and proven

+++ Or, what about being the first experimental hydrogen gas village like Lollock Norway, or a miniature smart grid, or a village of all electric cottages, some form of alpine steep terrain counterweight energy generation new technology designs

Paul Honeman: I have been reading the plan and proposals – including the economic report for Girdwood. There is certainly a lot of potential for Girdwood to reach the intended goal set by the board. I do believe that Girdwood does not seem to get the attention or priority that others areas of Anchorage has been receiving (Downtown, Spenard) and my pledge is to do a better job during my administration to correct that problem.

As far as funding – there are many ways to do this – and I will assign my staff to find as many options as possible (Federal, State, Muni, Non-Profit, Private) to partner together. There have too many projects that have been left to voters' approval at election – Bonds. Though some Bonds may be attempted – the recent move by voters have been to slow or stop these type projects.

As Mayor – I will do everything possible to better educate residents/voters so that the bond(s) - if any –will stand a better chance for support.

Matt Claman: Girdwood is unique in Alaska and its needs demand unusual approaches. A high school would be the single best way to attract residents, which in turn makes other needed infrastructure easier to develop. A charter high school in Girdwood that focuses on winter sports curricula – especially world class Nordic and downhill racing – would be a natural. I support it. Secondary road access is a vital safety issue for Girdwood. Unfortunately, the cost can be supported only by development. Any new road funds that become available should be spent on secondary road access.

Eric Croft: I understand that Girdwood has too often been ignored in the Municipal CIP process and by the voters on bond issues. As Mayor, I would listen to the community, respect its planning, and make implementing your vision for your community a high priority. I would campaign for Girdwood bonded projects. We may need to take a new approach to explain (again) to people that their taxes are unaffected by certain Girdwood-only projects.

Walt Monegan: Girdwood suffers the same frustration of my section of the Municipality, Eagle River/Chugiak, in that often Anchorage voters vote down projects even though the bond clearly states that only the local residents will be responsible for the repayment of the bond. I will explore the possibility if seeking the approval of such local requests as we do 'service areas' or 'limited service areas'; perhaps as a 'limited bond proposition.'

Sheila Selkregg: First of all, as mayor I will be a strong advocate for Girdwood. Historically Girdwood has worked hard to build its infrastructure – the fire station, community center and library are examples of good community projects. However, in my opinion it has always taken too long for Girdwood projects to gain support. In part, I think Anchorage votes against Girdwood bonds because they don't understand that Girdwood property taxes will pay for them. As Mayor, I'll work to help educate voters throughout the Municipality of the importance of Girdwood projects and the fact that Girdwood residents are willing to pay for them.

I think each of the projects you've identified, as priorities require

a specific funding strategy. For example, if utility infrastructure requires relocating, the Municipality can play a role in working with Heritage Land Bank or the federal government to secure needed lands. The secondary road access, critical to public safety, can be included as part of the Municipal transportation plan. We can pursue funding through a municipal bond or state or federal funding. Water and sewage or road and drainage improvements could potentially be addressed through local assessment districts that are augmented by the Municipality. In the case of the high school, it will require close coordination with the school board and the Assembly in terms of building support for a potential bond.

Dan Sullivan: The mayor and the administration prepare the city's legislative program and the goal is that every area of town has their top projects included for state funding requests. The Assembly members representing Girdwood also strongly advocate for the most urgent projects in their district. It can be frustrating when funding doesn't happen as quick as a community wishes, but there are many needs in all parts of town and it is a constant challenge to balance all those needs. As mayor, I will make sure that Girdwood receives its fair and proper capital project dollars.

Bonds would pass for Girdwood projects if their was more education and the mayor can be much more active in helping let the public know that the bond costs would be paid only by Girdwood taxpayers.

Phil Isley: Currently, I am not into bonding. From what little I can tell from the muni.org budget information, we have what I would consider a lot of long term debt. I think some of your projects would meet the requirements for the stimulus package. Looking into grant programs could help. I would do my best to see you get most of your tax dollars back into your community and perhaps some of the tourist dollars as well. Will Rogers once said that we should be thankful that we do not get all the government we pay for. I tend to agree with him. Taxes are going up in Anchorage also and we are getting municipal services that scare me at times. Referring back to question 1, I would make an attempt to get your taxes back to your community in areas recommended by your community council.

Q: Girdwood property owners pay an increasing amount in property taxes and receive comparatively few municipal services. What are your ideas on restructuring this in a more equitable manner?

Bob Lupo: I want to see every wage earner, who receives pay from a municipality business or operation, to pay their fair share of the cost of operating the city, resident or not! A sales tax will not accomplish this, because those who live outside of the municipality will not be obliged to buy anything here. I propose the levying of a 5% income tax. Those who own businesses here, but live outside, would also be liable for this tax. The property tax payers would see a dollar-for-dollar credit toward their property taxes for any income taxes they pay, and will see property taxes decrease because those who have never paid any taxes will now be paying their fair share. Wage earning renters would be reimbursed up to the amount of the tax portion of their rent.

Paul Kendall: Again, I am not familiar with your pain,,,, but you should know Paul D. Kendall believes in our ability to individually own in reasonable amounts property, dwelling, and energy (clean water and electricity)

+++ Are you as a community keeping your own books..?? I would think you would divide your community into Residential citizens, Commercial, industrial, Institutional, --- city, state, feds, etc. and monitor all aspects of expenditures, revenues, and true and actual Impact cost accounting.... You should look for a foundational formula for all things to reference to:

Clean Water – generation of and waste
Clean Electricity – generation and use of by impact
A model dwelling formula

A piece of land as a model
What is your energy footprint ?? per residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, (recreation) schools, etc.. There are usually 5 areas of energy use and purchase.

Paul Honeman: Taxes: I have never met a tax that I EVER liked- With that said – we live in a first class city with first class services – and these services are not free. I feel strongly about the need to diversify our revenue streams. Property Taxes make up more than 50 percent of the revenue, and the balance come from fees, fines and grants. I will immediately establish a true citizen driven commission of residents, business and non-profits who will brainstorm for the very best options in order to diversify future revenue beginning in 2010.

I have voted against a sales tax proposal at every turn in Anchorage – largely because I did not trust those serving in elected office to preserve the true intent of such tax. I would support a possible sales tax that is seasonal and sun setting (every three years) and could not be raised or lowered by any elected official. (vote of the people only).

1) A Gross Receipts tax for business (in lieu of a sales tax);

2) an Alcohol Tax (that would require a Charter change so that the revenue could be dedicated to police, fire and health department sections dealing with chronic inebriates); 3) some service fees for 'super consumers of police services (i.e. restraining order violators would be charged a fine/fee if AFTER the court order was issued – the Respondent fails to comply with the order) ; 4) a Municipal Asset Forfeiture Ordinance for those who profit from criminal activities in the MOA. – I would consider ALL reasonable revenue diversity options – these options would be scrutinized by a committee of community stakeholders that would consult with my administration on a regular basis.

NOTE – Keep in mind that NO tax can or will be implemented unless supported by 60% of voters on Election Day.

Matt Claman: The Municipality is required by law to tax all residents equitably. Of course, Girdwood is its own service area for some purposes, but area wide for others – such as the new library, transit, and emergency management. Transit is a high priority for my administration, and I would look for ways to contribute area-wide tax dollars to continue the current transit program into the future.

Eric Croft: As Mayor, I will work to bring a more equitable distribution of city services and for balanced property tax reductions.

Walt Monegan: Conduct an audit of the services and related taxes in Girdwood, compare it an audit of the rest the MOA; to determine if set amounts are appropriate given the remote nature of your community.

Sheila Selkregg: We need to recognize that Girdwood is paying taxes and deserves services. Just because it happens to be a half-hour from Anchorage, doesn't mean it isn't part of the Municipality. It should be noted that assessments have gone up across the Municipality and I'm committed to restructuring the process, including returning to a civilian board of appeals. Another part of the problem unique to Girdwood lies in the multiple uses of Girdwood real estate. The community contains primary residences, short and long-term rental properties, and second homes. Consequently, the assessment issues for Girdwood are complex. Clearly there needs to be an examination of tax strategies that recognize and protect the local residents. We need to look at how other recreational communities address this issue and look for new strategies.

Dan Sullivan: I would first have to analyze the premise of the question and review how much is being paid in property taxes and the value of the services received and compare those numbers with other areas before making recommendations on restructuring.

Phil Isley: Ideally, one would note the amount of taxes collected in your area and allocate that amount to a budget the could be directed by your community council.

Q: Girdwood 2020 has asked the Alaska State Legislature to appropriate funding for Girdwood directly into the Board of Supervisors' municipal account and let them administer the money. This would avoid the municipal administrative fees, allowing Girdwood to maximize the impact of any funds secured from the State. Would you support such a transfer?

Bob Lupo: Yes

Paul Kendall: Look, I am unfamiliar with the Process Well, it sounds ok... again I am not up to speed on this...

Paul Honeman: Yes – it makes more sense to get the dollars to the source without adding the levels of bureaucracy.

Matt Claman: Where appropriate, I would support funds going directly to the Board of Supervisors. On a cautionary note, however, direct funding requires procurement, risk management, and accounting systems in place to administer the funds. Administration can be a huge burden, particularly for a small community with no such infrastructure in place. My administration would work with the Board of Supervisors to minimize administrative overhead.

Eric Croft: I respect the autonomy of the Girdwood Board of Supervisors and would let them assume any responsibility that they could adequately handle. If we can convince the State that the GBOS has the staffing and other requirements met, I would support the money going directly to the Girdwood.

Walt Monegan: No, as Girdwood is a part of the Municipality, such an option would present legal and fairness challenges I would not want to introduce. Instead I would support a restructure of the administrative fees; what is usually done is a set percentage of the award amount which has always frustrated me. To administer such funds that vary in amounts for a percentage rather than on an amount of time [which is more readily documented] seems patently unfair at best. Why should processing a \$1 Million dollar

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award cost more than processing a \$100,000 one? Let's look at this as an accounting function rather than revenue generating one.

Sheila Selkregg: If there are no legal limitations, I wouldn't have problem with this.

Dan Sullivan: This sounds like a possible idea but I would anticipate legal roadblocks. If one area of town is allowed to bypass the existing process then it would be likely that all communities within the municipality would want to do the same thing. A legal review would be the first step.

Phil Isley: I don't think you should be paying administrative fees. I guess someone would have to explain that one to me. If I could not find another way to be fair to Girdwood, then I would support idea. But if we are all part of Anchorage, then we should be all equal parts of Anchorage.

Q: Some resort communities form organizations for the collective promotion of their business interests. Some of these 'Resort Organizations' are similar to the Downtown Improvement District; others have powers similar to those of a local government, including the ability to levy and recover charges from its members. Would you support such a concept for Girdwood?

Bob Lupo: Yes

Paul Kendall: Well, isn't this a self-willed and locally organized construct? Again I need to be more informed on which entity your considering and why for... or... I will tell you that it seems to me some downtown areas have forgotten who begat them which is all of the Residential members of your community....ask me....

Paul Honeman: YES – I have seen the results in a locally managed and operated partnership – the ADP. This makes more sense – specifically due to the geographic distance from 'City Hall'.

Matt Claman: I would support a business improvement district / resort association for Girdwood. The Downtown Improvement District is a good model and could be a helpful resource.

Eric Croft: I am a big supporter of business improvement districts and have seen the good that the Downtown Business Improvement District has done. I would support this concept for Girdwood.

Walt Monegan: If it works for our Anchorage Downtown, I don't know why it couldn't for Girdwood, as long as the powers and responsibilities are similar.

Sheila Selkregg: I was Planning Director when the Business Improvement District for downtown Anchorage was developed. It's been an effective tool for improving infrastructure and services in the downtown area. As long as the landowners in the District supported a Girdwood Resort District, I would support it.

Dan Sullivan: Improvement districts can be effective in providing safe and clean areas within a city. Whether or not I would support the 'Resort Organization' concept depends on the details of the powers granted to the organization and how the revenues collected from levies and charges would be spent.

Phil Isley: Anchorage Convention & Visitor's Bureau and Anchorage Downtown Partnership invited me to a forum. I took time off work for the event. When I arrived, I was told that I could sit in the back and eat, but only the selected candidates were allowed to speak. Since this is my first experience with this type of organization, it reflects badly on all these types of organizations. I am not sure which is worse, the fact they felt their members did not need to know all the candidate details or the fact they felt I was so insignificant that my time was not worth an email telling me of the change so I would not have to take time off work to be insulted.

Q: Land use regulations that facilitate our evolution as a resort community and require high community standards are essential. The new regulations as outlined in the Title 21 Chapter 9 rewrite for Girdwood are cumbersome to understand, difficult for the municipality to implement and increase project costs. What is your stand on Title 21 Chapter 9, and how would you handle this situation?

Bob Lupo: I believe any regulation should be written in layman terms, for all to understand. I will make every attempt, within my power, to maximize efficiencies and thereby minimize costs.

Paul Kendall: I have no idea. I have not reviewed Title 21 chapter 9., I can tell you that the one I saw many years ago in another community seemed phony, unreal, and "The Prisoner" like in design. When it comes to small areas of closeness of its citizens I think it is like guiding a young child approaching adolescence... they have to find their own identity which strengthen their individual content and character and I think those things come through in communities in one way or another... And, by the way, I get concerned when things try to ("kill or induce trauma by complexity") overwhelm me with detail.

Paul Honeman: Title 21 language has been stale for almost 40 years. I believe that Anchorage needs a better planned and codified Land Use plan. This re-write may not be perfect – but many people have spent years on this cumbersome project – and it WILL BE CONCLUDED during my administration. Once the code is approved – we MUST have an ongoing process of monitoring and amending the code language to address the many different geographic neighborhood make-ups in Anchorage. In this way – we can be assured of making whatever needed adjustments to code happens more swiftly – and ensure that the code will not get 'stale' in future years. As to 'increased costs' – these are 'projections – not 'actuals'. Government regulations should not place undue burden(s) upon its citizens, industries and business. Rather – we need to allow for adjustments in the code to address problems that are discovered when attempting to work within the code. Resistance to change is a normal human characteristic. I believe that we should 'try' to work within this long delayed process and be flexible to change if needed.

Matt Claman: We need to work to improve Chapter 9. In working to improve the code, we should recognize that some aspects of the new code are critical for Girdwood. Successful resort communities have very high standards for lighting, building design, landscaping, and affordable housing for workers who service the resort. If those standards are unduly compromised, Girdwood will not become the first-class resort community that most of us want. If Girdwood is special, residents and visitors will pay more to be in Girdwood. They want to experience the authenticity of a resort community. Reasonable building standards are essential for a high quality resort community.

Eric Croft: Title 21, Chapter 9 needs to work better for Girdwood. I support a version that implements your vision for the community but does not place undue burdens on project costs. Girdwood's sensitivity to lighting pollution and the requirements for streetlights on developments is an example of Anchorage's requirements not fitting Girdwood's needs

Walt Monegan: Reading and understanding of laws are always cumbersome, and I have some experience in that; but, this chapter which undoubtedly was the product of countless hours of community input, I found onerous. Words placed within the texts like "substantial," "significant," "potential," "maximum," and "sufficient," are land mines and are so subjective. While phrases like "...to the maximum extent feasible..." or "...maintaining sufficient levels of service to existing and anticipated development..." are rickety bridges that does not invite a crossing. It is little wonder why there is confusion, or why cost estimates rise; such wording provides the rationalization for the submitting of increased project costs. I suggest remove the subjectivity from this chapter, as you repeatedly state what you are trying to preserve in your intent.

Sheila Selkregg: I'm committed to quality development; however, I agree that some aspects of Title 21 Chapter 9 are complex and limiting. As a member of the Assembly Title 21 Review Committee, I recognize that we need a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of these codes. If they're not working, too cumbersome, or ineffective, we need to revise them. As Mayor, I plan to establish a formal review process that allows us to do this.

Dan Sullivan: I have found that much of the title 21 rewrite, including Chapter 9, is over-reaching and hard for the public and the business community to understand. My administration will have the goal of making government more user friendly, not more bureaucratic and obstructionist. I support higher standards and good design, but these criteria can be achieved without rules and regulations that make it nearly impossible to develop profitably. While on the Assembly, we passed the Girdwood 20/20 plan and while there was a lot of consensus in the final document, I felt even then that it was extremely restrictive and too detailed for a guiding document.

Phil Isley: I am confused why the private sector allowed the city to produce this document with so little input. The city is supposed to work for people. At what point did everyone decide that the city could make all the rules. I feel this would be a good place to start budget cuts. The people do not need all the rules of this government. The resources could be better used making sure the buildings were safe.

Q: Girdwood residents want to see the community developed as a four-season resort while maintaining small-town livability. The municipality is the largest landowner in the Girdwood Valley and how it disposes of its land will be a definitive factor in the evolution of the community. Could you describe your vision of a future that meets the municipality's financial goals and the goals of the Girdwood community.

Bob Lupo: One project I would encourage is the widening of the Seward Highway. I prefer this instead of the Knik Bridge project. I can certainly envision Girdwood's growth and the need of a more efficient, and safer, highway to and from Anchorage. Girdwood

should also have an Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Right now the only one is in Anchorage. The one for Eagle River has been on hold for over two years. EOC's become paramount to citizen safety and survival during disastrous events. Safety and survival shall always be my number one priority, and will never be sacrificed to promote comfort and beautification.

Paul Kendall: Could you describe your vision of a future that meets the municipality's financial goals and the goals of the Girdwood community? Yeah, well, if you were shooting at me and nicking or winging me with the prior questions to test my experience in these matters., you just landed a head wound with this one... I would hope you would strive to become a more free people, finding union and interface with water, Electricity, and population balance in harmony with the Celestine Location like area your community is in... If I may, I will need to learn up quickly on some of these matter... I feel that many of our sectors of our society have complexed up themselves to the point of nonsense,,,If we can only elect those who have experience in these areas in our government then we should just hire from within ...

Paul Honeman: My vision of Girdwood is a 'showcase' of a well planned and livable community with a small-town feel and yet a big-town attitude. We must always be attentive to the public's tax dollars and take ONLY the money needed to deliver the services of local government that is expected by all residents. I believe that a public/private venture much like the Denaina Convention Center may be the answer to getting the plan to product. I pledge to continue working with and for ALL of Anchorage – including the Girdwood Community Council and 2020 Board. We can and WILL make progress if all stakeholders participate and are listened to.

Matt Claman: I have read the Girdwood Area Plan and I believe we must be cautious about developing Municipal Lands. We need to balance the need of new or improved public facilities – such as schools, daycare and the health clinic – with development that generates revenue. We must be cognizant of, and sensitive to the market. It would be a disservice to both Girdwood and the Municipality if we depressed values by flooding the market.

Eric Croft: The Municipality needs to work better with Girdwood as a partner and this is particularly true when the Municipality operates as a landowner. We need a longer term view. Using Municipal land to help realize a vision of a thriving and livable Girdwood will enhance property tax revenues to the Municipality in the long run.

Walt Monegan: Tourism is one of my stated goals for Anchorage, and we need to enhance our attractiveness to the rest of the world. Girdwood is and must be one of our crown jewels in this goal. There are communities we probably all have visited that are good and bad examples of resort development; so we have models to somewhat replicate and others to avoid. Our neighbor, Canada has numerous good ones, like Banff and Lake Louise [the Chateau Lake Louise in that hanging valley] that offer memorable visits of outdoor activity and fine meals, all in a tasteful blend of development with nature. Girdwood has the setting and is on the right course for your "evolution to a [world-class] resort community," and I, as a former resident there, will help you.

Sheila Selkregg: As the resort develops, it's also important that we develop the new town center area. We need to ensure we're building community infrastructure that supports the day-to-day life in the town. The Municipality can be a partner in making lands available for new parks, trails, school sites, and public buildings that maintain Girdwood's unique character. Girdwood residents genuinely seem to love their small town lifestyle, their access to recreation, and their beautiful natural setting. Anything we do needs to protect those values.

Dan Sullivan: The city has the responsibility to obtain land for public purposes like school sites, community buildings, parks etc. The city should sell the land in the valley that does not meet that purpose. The community can guide how the land, once in private hands, should be developed, within the framework of a development master plan and the 20/20 plan.

Girdwood has the opportunity to develop into a fantastic all season resort that maintains the unique values that make it such a special area. The city needs to work cooperatively with the community and the private sector, such as the new owners of the Alyeska Prince, to make that happen. As mayor I will have the planning staff and the Heritage Land Bank take a more active approach to furthering the development of the all season resort concept.

Phil Isley: Hopefully, the Girdwood Community Council would identify projects supported by business to be developed on that land. As it was transferred to private ownership, with tax base would be increased providing more revenue for the Girdwood area. Hording city land will not promote development, but the land should not be given away or sold if it would not be developed.