

If you look at a picture of the Municipality of Anchorage's finances from 1982, you'll see a startling number — the State of Alaska filled approximately 42% of the Municipality's budget.

That isn't the case anymore. Just look at the 2020 budget passed unanimously by the Assembly in November and it paints a very different picture, with both state and federal support only providing about 1.5% of our budget. The same is true for the capital side of the budget. Averaged out between 2005 and 2014, state capital spending within the Municipality was \$85M annually. Run that same calculation for 2015 to 2019, and that numbers drop to \$4.5M, or a 93.5% reduction.

That's a story that many cities, towns and villages across the state can relate to, and it's why we need to have a serious discussion in the Municipality. What do we want to look like in 2020 and into the future? What services are important to maintain? These are the questions we struggle with daily on the Assembly. It's important now more than ever that we have a conversation with the community and engage in a dialogue to figure out our path forward.

That requires having a frank discussion about our fiscal situation. We won't ever be able to rely on state spending like we did in the hey-days. The Governor and leadership in the Alaska Legislature have made it clear — the days of state generosity to local governments is over. We must become more independent from the state and that means looking at new revenue options to fill our critical needs ourselves — because no one will do it for us.

That's why we are hosting a series of town halls from January 7 to 9 to begin this necessary conversation. We'll have one town hall in each part of our community.

The Anchorage town hall will be on January 7, at 5:30pm at the Wilda Marston Theatre in the Loussac Library. The Chugiak-Eagle River town hall will be on January 8, at 6pm at the Chugiak High School auditorium. The Girdwood town hall will be on January 9, at 6:30pm at the Girdwood Community Room in the Community Center.

Each of these events will begin with a presentation on our current fiscal situation so everyone is working off the same sheet of music. After, each proposed tax measure currently being considered by the Assembly will have five minutes to give a quick overview of their proposal. We have three proposal before us right now — two versions of an alcohol sales tax and a general sales tax. We'll end the town halls with public testimony and dialogue.

In the end, we have important decisions to make and a deadline quickly approaching. At the regular Assembly meeting of January 14, the Assembly will be considering whether to put any of these measures on the April 7 ballot. We'll be hearing public testimony at that meeting and invite everyone who can to attend or email us in advance with your thoughts at wwmas@muni.org.

We must be in control of our destiny. This dialogue will be critical to informing our work and I encourage everyone to engage in the process.

Felix Rivera

Chair of the Anchorage Assembly, elected in 2017 to represent Midtown