

# City of Valdez

212 Chenega Ave.  
Valdez, AK 99686



## Meeting Minutes - Draft

Thursday, September 23, 2021

6:00 PM

Special Meeting

Civic Center Conference Room

**City Council**

**SPECIAL AGENDA - 6:00 PM**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Scheidt called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in Valdez Civic Center Conference Room.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Present: 7 - Mayor Sharon Scheidt  
Council Member Todd Wegner  
Council Member Susan Love  
Council Member Dawson Moore  
Council Member Jimmy Devens  
Council Member Dennis Fleming  
Mayor Pro Tem Alan Sorum

Also Present: 6 - City Manager Mark Detter  
Assistant City Manager Nathan Duval  
Assistant City Manager Roxanne Murphy  
City Clerk Sheri Pierce  
Deputy City Clerk Allie Ferko  
City Attorney Jake Staser (*by teleconference*)

**III. CONSENT AGENDA**

**1. Approval to Go Into Executive Session Regarding Legal Strategy for 2022 Legal Budget**

MOTION: Council Member Devens moved, seconded by Council Member Devens to approve the Consent Agenda.

VOTE ON THE MOTION:

Yays: 7 - Mayor Scheidt, Council Member Wegner, Council Member Love, Council Member Moore, Council Member Devens, Council Member Fleming and Mayor Pro Tem Sorum

MOTION CARRIED.

**IV. NEW BUSINESS**

**1. Proclamation: Imploring the Valdez Community to Work Together to Keep Our Community Healthy, Children in Schools, and Businesses Open During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

MOTION: Council Member Fleming moved, seconded by Council Member Moore to approve the proclamation imploring the Valdez community to work together to keep our community healthy, children in schools, and businesses open during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mayor Scheidt explained her reasoning behind putting forth the proclamation, saying a mandate of any kind should not be a first line of defense. She felt the proclamation was a good first step and would bring citizens together regardless

of personal opinion. In addition, she believed the need for citizen action outweighed just masking and the proclamation urged the community to discuss vaccination with their physician, to stay home when sick, and avoiding high risk activities. She shared her concerns that a mask mandate in the current climate may not result in the desired behavior. She stated she believed there was something every person could individually do to slow the spread. She stated she believed most people would be willing to help if the urgent need was specifically conveyed and directly asked of them. She explained the proclamation was intended as a positive call to action and requested the other Council member's support in this approach.

Council Member Devens shared his support of the items in the proclamation, but said Council had been asking people to do these same mitigation measures for over a year. He stated he understood making it official in a proclamation would achieve action and he supported the proclamation with the caveat he didn't think it would be the end of action the Council must take.

Council Member Love stated although she would rather make a plea than mandate masks, the delta variant was too effective at transmitting between people for the effectiveness of a proclamation to be the best course of action at this point. She stated time was of the essence. She stated she did not want to rush into something or throw around mandates carelessly, but she did want to look at all available tools to try and affect some change on how fast COVID-19 was negatively impacting the community.

Council Member Moore shared concern over hearing some businesses were waiting on the City to take action before implementing mitigation steps in their facilities. He stated he hoped the proclamation encouraged them to move forward. He said he felt implementing a mandate without enforcement may make more of a statement than a proclamation. He encouraged Council to continue to think creatively on how to help the community slow transmission and get back on the right track.

Council Member Love asked at what point further action would be necessary. Mayor Scheidt had hoped to see improvement within the four weeks cited in the proclamation, but she would even be amenable to reassess in a week or two, depending on the situation at that time.

Council Member Devens asked what was different now, versus in 2020 when the first mask mandate was implemented, which made Council feel the community was in a better place with a higher local case count.

Council Member Moore stated the level of knowledge was the biggest difference between 2020 and now. In spring of 2020, with the unknowns surrounding the beginning of the pandemic, he had been grateful for guidance from the government on what he needed to do to keep his family safe. At this point, although he felt amenable to a mandate, ignorance of what to do and how to keep each other safe was no longer an issue, but an individual choice.

Mayor Scheidt agreed the climate was different and the divisiveness very strong. She did not know if a mandate would give the community what it needed without causing additional issues along the way. She stated during the time of the 2020 mask mandate, vaccination had also not been available.

Council Member Love stated COVID-19 in Valdez was worsening. She stated cases were rising, contact tracing was challenging, and the local hospital was not in a position to take care of people at the level the community expects. She said comparing last year to this year was pointless because the community was faced with an evolving situation.

Council Member Sorum stated the proclamation couldn't hurt. He said a decision on a mandate would not occur during this meeting, but possibly at the next meeting which would allow for more public input.

Council Member Wegner said he thought the proclamation was a good start. He reiterated the content of the proclamation was information known since 2020, and people should already know what they needed to do. He said 100% of students were masked in the high school and did so willingly because they were social beings and wanted to participate in social things. He reminded Council that Alaskans and Valdezeans historically were "pull themselves up by the bootstrap" type people, citing several natural disasters in recent memory and the community's willingness to band together and help each other. He stated he felt it was important to allow the community to do the same in this case and make allowances for personal choice. He shared his encouragement for sticking with the proclamation and not taking it farther into a mandate.

Council Member Fleming shared his support for the proclamation as a start.

Council Member Love shared the importance of personal responsibility and the need to limit personal choice when it begins to affect others.

Council Member Wegner highlighted the confusion of some in the community over information sources and what to believe.

Council Member Devens shared his support of the local medical community and the information they provide regarding the pandemic.

Dr. John Cullen, Providence Valdez Medical Center Chief of Staff, stated it was his duty to inform Council that Alaska had gone to a crisis standard of care signed by the governor. He outlined what this meant for the local community, including rationing of beds and supplies, as well as the difficulties in transferring patients to larger hospitals. He encouraged those unvaccinated to consider speaking with their physicians and reiterated the safety of the vaccines. He stated, at the end of the day, people would either choose vaccination or come down with COVID-19.

Council Member Wegner asked if there was a local shortage of rapid testing supplies. Dr. Cullen stated there was a national shortage both in terms of supplies and in terms of staff to administer the tests.

Mayor Scheidt asked if any of the medical personnel coming into the state under the governor's declaration would be assigned to Valdez. Dr. Cullen said he believed nurses would begin arriving in state the following week, but he was unsure if or when Valdez would receive any of the incoming help.

Council Member Fleming asked if the algorithm forewarning a spike in cases over the next two weeks was being shared. Dr. Cullen confirmed it was being shared.

Dr. Kathleen Todd, physician from Valdez Medical Clinic, stated the delta variant was more contagious than previous strains of the virus. She reminded Council some people were still vulnerable, including children under 12 years of age and those who with underlying health conditions regardless of vaccination status. She encouraged Council to adjust the wording in the proclamation so the tone indicated increased urgency. She stated now was the time to use virtual meeting options and work from home. She stressed the importance of acting now and not waiting.

Council Member Devens stated over one in five hundred Americans had died of COVID. He asked what concerns Dr. Todd had for those who survive COVID. She explained some people still had "Long COVID", with symptoms six months post recovery. However, no one knew the long-term ramifications of the disease yet.

Public Health Nurse Terri Lynch discussed the reality of the COVID cases both in state and in the community of Valdez, including current case counts. She provided a reminder of isolation and quarantine guidelines and stated there were local positive cases refusing to quarantine or cooperate with contact tracers.

Ms. Katrina Hering, the nurse for Valdez City Schools, stated last school year in the district the total case count had been 28 cases of COVID-19. This year, six weeks into the year, there had already been 50 cases and 35 cases were currently active. She said it was time to tighten down on safety measures and anything the community could do to further support the safety of our children should be considered.

Council Member Wegner asked what Ms. Hering's solution would be for the next few months to slow the case counts in the schools. Ms. Hering said she felt tightening down on mitigation matters was priority. She also explained changing the school's contact tracing efforts to fully encompass the students who might have been exposed would be a step in the right direction.

Dr. Todd stated there was spread within the schools, but there was also community spread outside the schools causing cases amongst students.

Dr. Angela Alfaro, physician from The Alfa Doc, recommended doing an internet search for "COVID pneumonia" She said scars from this pneumonia would be in the lungs of those who come down with it forever. She beseeched the community to trust their local physicians and understand the healthcare system across the country was exhausted and suffering. She pleaded with the community to do more and care about their neighbors.

Dr. Todd shared the urgent nurse staffing crisis in the local hospital.

Ms. Gail Gwaltney, Valdez resident, stated she supported the proclamation. She stated her main reason for attendance at the meeting was to highlight the additional stress put on the hospital staff by the federal vaccination mandate.

Mr. Darin Sauls, Valdez resident, shared his gratitude for the local medical community. He provided a statistical observation of the current mitigation measures for the current COVID-19 infection and hospitalization wave in Alaska. He thanked Council for holding off on the mandate through this wave, and stated

he hoped they continued to do so. He suggested the results of mandating masks would be negligible, unmeasurable, and would lead to the distrust in local leadership.

Ms. Shirley-Mae Ellis, Valdez resident, stated she faced losing her job with Providence Valdez Medical Center due to the federal vaccination mandate. She could get the vaccination or file for a religious exemption, which she did not believe she was qualified to receive. She stated if the hospital lost even one person from the facility, they would lose more than that in actual work accomplished because each individual performed four jobs. She shared concern over local businesses implementing testing protocols due to the federal mandate, which put additional burden on already dwindling testing resources and personnel. She supported the proclamation. She stated she appreciated Council encouraging, not forcing people to vaccinate and mask.

Mr. Jacob Case, Valdez resident, encouraged Council to think critically about mitigation measures, including vaccinations. He stated the director of the CDC had said the vaccination did not stop transmission. He read from the Great Barrington Declaration.

**VOTE ON THE MOTION:**

Yays: 7 - Mayor Scheidt, Council Member Wegner, Council Member Love, Council Member Moore, Council Member Devens, Council Member Fleming and Mayor Pro Tem Sorum

**MOTION CARRIED.**

Ms. Pierce requested direction on moving forward with a Council special meeting on Tuesday, September 28th regarding implementation of a new disaster declaration and mask mandate.

Council Member Devens stated there would need to be significant alterations to the wording of the previous disaster declaration due to changes in conditions since that time.

Ms. Ferko explained a baseline would be drafted and brought forward to Council. She asked if the Council sponsors for the mandate had availability the following day to meet and discuss so the document more directly reflected their intent.

Mr. Detter highlighted the need for Council to discuss the enforcement mechanism of the mandate with the Police Department.

Council Member Love stated her vision for the mandate would involve voluntary compliance. Ms. Ferko reminded Council that Valdez Municipal Code clearly states failure to follow a public health mandate could result in a fine of up to \$500 and mandatory court appearance. If the Council's intention was to not actively enforce the mandate, it would need to be clearly communicated to the public to set appropriate expectations and reduce conflict amongst citizens. Council Member Wegner shared his support of voluntary compliance.

Council Member Sorum felt the mandate provided a tool for local businesses to reference when enforcing mitigation measures within their business.

Council Member Fleming stated if Council chose to move forward with a

mandate, it needed to have consequences and be enforced.

Mr. Detter stated he would meet with the police chief to discuss the challenges encountered during the previous iteration of the mask mandate and determine what the police chief advised moving forward.

Council Member Moore stated although he philosophically agreed with the need for a mandate to be enforced, he also believed in practical solutions. He stated the 2020 mask mandate had had a positive effect on the community and had not been actively enforced. He encouraged Council to think creatively about positive solutions in addition to implementation of any new mandates.

Council Member Love stated a mandate was an easy to activate and effective approach. She explained she hoped the Council would hold additional discussions regarding possible positive solutions, such as incentives to increase vaccination rates, and additional support for COVID-19 communication and education.

Council Member Devens stated the mask mandate was not intended as a solution, but as an aid to assist the community in reining in the spike in cases. He shared his support of finding alternative positive solutions.

Ms. Pierce reminded Council Ordinance 20-03 had established Valdez Municipal City Code, Section 9.36.060 titled Emergency Mandates, which included the fine schedule. She read the section from code.

Mr. Detter explained city staff did not feel standing up a formal Incident Command System was necessary at this time, even if Council passed a new emergency declaration.

#### **V. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Council transitioned into executive session at 8:21 p.m.

#### **VI. RETURN FROM EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Council transitioned out of executive session at 9:15 p.m.

#### **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Mayor Scheidt adjourned the meeting at 9:15 p.m.