



April 12, 2019

Richard Boothby, Alaska State Fire Marshal
State of Alaska Department of Public Safety
5700 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, AK 99507

Dear Mr. Boothby,

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce urges you to immediately address the crisis of excessive review times for Fire Marshal permits. A reasonable review time would be two weeks, but there are examples amongst our members of waiting eight times longer. Alaska's current economic environment is already a challenge to business, and unnecessary permit delays add layers of cost and time impacts that are difficult to absorb and are an impediment to growth. Economic development is a key component of a robust state economy, and Alaska needs all the help it can get right now.

It is understandable – given the state's fiscal landscape – that certain state services would be reduced. However, State Fire Marshal permitting is a self-sustaining service funded through permit fees and licenses. It is counterproductive to both the state budget and the economy to limit or reduce a self-sustaining service that has such a large impact on business continuation and growth in Alaska.

With the closure of the Fairbanks State Fire Marshal office and consolidation to Anchorage, we have witnessed permit issuance review times of 16 weeks with final approval taking up to six months. In comparison, the City of Fairbanks and the Municipality of Anchorage review building applications and issue permits within two weeks, with peak time reviews fluctuating up to one additional week. It is also important to note that pending reviews by your office are frequently part of an ongoing construction process. Failure to provide timely reviews doesn't allow for interim work to be completed, can impede a project at multiple phases and most certainly increases cost. The

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currently broken system also pressures contractors and building owners to consider proceeding without approval, which runs counter to purpose and complicates later reviews and ultimately further increases costs in fines and re-work.

Construction in interior Alaska is seriously constrained by seasonal weather. With the Fire Marshal permits as a key construction milestone on most projects, delayed review times can push a project into either expensive off-season work or to the following construction season. Such delays raise costs that may be impossible to recoup and could prevent a project from going forward at all.

To address our concerns with these systemic deficiencies, we urge you to consider solutions such as:

- Adjusting fees to support sustainable staffing levels to match the base-level market need of a two week review cycle.
- Outsourcing review services (supported by permit fees) in peak times to qualified entities such as the City of Fairbanks, Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska design firms, University design and construction departments, or retired reviewers hired on a part-time basis - with final review oversight maintained with the State Fire Marshal Office.
- Enhancing existing expedited review options to cover the complete permitting process for an additional fee.
- Establishing a schedule of days and times that the Fire Marshal will be available in Fairbanks to confer and consult with the design and construction community for guidance early in the construction process.

Time is of the essence, as we are already weeks into Alaska's short construction season. A combination of the solutions identified above should be discussed immediately and a plan put in place that remedies this crisis so that the current construction season is not further impeded by the status quo. We further encourage your office to consider reaching out to industry and collaborating for solutions that work within State parameters while also resolving this pressing matter.

The costs and impacts to Fairbanks and Alaska businesses are immediate, compelling and preventable. As just one example, delays in the Fire Marshal review process for a local daycare facility recently left 60 families without childcare. We appreciate your timely and thorough consideration.



The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce represents over 700 business members throughout Interior Alaska. We work to advocate for the best business environment, promote economic strength and growth for interior Alaska, and to develop the resources and networks enterprising people use to share knowledge.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marisa Sharrah".

Marisa Sharrah
President/CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Dean".

Rebecca Dean
Board Chair

CC: Amanda Price, Commissioner of Alaska Department of Public Safety