

Thinking About Running for the Borough Assembly?



The role of a borough assembly member can be a demanding one. It requires knowledge of local government legislation, policies and systems, an interest in people and a willingness to invest time and energy in serving the needs and interests of the local community.

The Haines Borough has an assembly/manager form of government. It is also a representative government. The voters elect assembly members to be their representatives. If you want to run for election to the assembly you should understand the respective roles and responsibilities of an assembly member and the key functions of our local government.

Separation of powers - Legislative vs. Administration

Learning the difference between these two key functions – legislative and administration – and respecting the boundaries between them is critical to a well-run government. The separation of powers between legislative and administrative functions serves not only as a check on the exercise of authority between the two branches of local government, but also as a way to promote their efficient operation.

Legislative

The assembly is a legislative body – that is, the members are elected to make major policy decisions and laws and to pass budgets for the strategic delivery of services in the public interest. So the basic job of assembly members is to find the balance among themselves that represents the best interests of the majority of citizens,

while respecting the rights of everyone. Assembly decisions are made to direct the operational work and realize the planned goals that are set out in the Comprehensive Plan and strategic plans and priorities.

Assembly members are responsible for planning for the future and developing strategic plans and strategies to achieve their goals and deliver outcomes to the community. Your role, as an assembly member, will be to demonstrate and provide strategic vision and leadership by putting in place principles, policies and local laws that enable the delivery of outcomes promised by the Haines Borough.

Administrative

The internal day-to-day work of the Haines Borough is carried out by borough employees under the direction of the borough manager. This operational work is directed by borough code and the legislative/policy decisions of the assembly. The borough manager is an appointed professional who is responsible for the implementation and administration of policies, laws, goals, and plans.

Assembly members are not responsible for overseeing the work done by borough employees. This is done by the borough manager and department heads. An assembly member may request information through the borough manager to assist in making decisions. Going through the borough manager helps to ensure that unreasonable requests for large amounts of information do not become unduly onerous for a borough employee to provide with existing resources.

NOTE: As an assembly member, people in the community may expect you to have the answers to many problems over which you have no control as citizens do not always realize which level of government is appropriate to address their particular concerns. If you are uncertain, you could check in with the mayor, borough manager, borough clerk, or a senior assembly member.

Sustainable Local Government

- Sustainability is about local governments maintaining service levels over the long-term without having to resort to unplanned or unreasonable increases in revenue. Assembly members are accountable to the community to manage the local government well. Taxpayers and residents expect high standards and transparency in decision-making. They expect their assembly members to look over the horizon and plan for the future. They want to know they are getting value for their money.
- Sustainability over the long-term is more than building the infrastructure of today. It means having the capacity to maintain levels of service for the future. To achieve this, the assembly must effectively plan for the long-term future of the Borough.
- If you run for assembly, you need to be aware of the variety and diversity of the borough's business and activities aimed at building a sustainable community. The financial stewardship of Haines Borough resources is a big responsibility that requires careful planning by assembly members for a sustainable future.



Budget for the Borough's Financial Needs

The preparation, amendment and adoption of the annual budget is a major responsibility for assembly members. The annual budget is prepared by the borough manager for consideration by the assembly. The assembly review involves multiple budget meetings during the months of April and May. Once the assembly has reviewed and debated the budget they can make amendments prior to the adoption of the budget. The budget can be further amended during the year, if necessary.

Engage with the Community

Assembly members are required to effectively engage with their community members, taxpayers and residents. This is part of being an effective assembly member. Engagement can be formal or informal, including:

- attending public meetings
- attending meetings of interest groups or professional bodies
- receiving written comments and phone calls, and being stopped on the street
- proactively asking various people for their views on borough services.

Ex-Parte Communication

Definition: When someone who wants something from the assembly contacts a member outside of the public forum to offer information and gain the member's support.

- Expect it to happen
- If the info is in writing, distribute it to the assembly
- Seek opposing viewpoints
- Ask the person to share the info with the whole assembly
- If they don't, share the info yourself

Your Words will be News

Right now, chances are you can say almost anything you want without your words coming back to haunt you.

Chances are that your close circle of friends listen to and value your opinions. If you hold especially strong opinions, you might offend your neighbors or other acquaintances in the



community but that is all. If you are elected, your words will become news. Anything you say may have news value to the local newspaper and radio AND to the local gossip line. You will soon discover that your opinions are news, even if they have nothing to do with borough government operations. You will find yourself being quoted about issues. You will be considered to be a "politician" and, as such, fair game for public scrutiny with regard to all your actions and opinions.

Obligation to the Whole Community

You will not be elected to make friends, but to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the community. This sometimes means assuming a position that is contrary to powerful special interests. However, you will need to accept this situation if you are to fulfill your greater obligations to the whole community. Remember, above all, that if your name is on the ballot you will be asking the people of our community to place you on the hot seat and that your obligations extend to the whole community. If elected, your personal interests need to be secondary to those of the community as a whole, because the voters will have placed their pressures and problems on your shoulders.

Avoiding the Appearance of Impropriety

- Your fundamental role as an assembly member will be to serve and represent the interests of the community as a whole. In the event of a conflict between the public and private interests of you or your relatives, the overall public interest must prevail.
- A significant factor in your survival as an assembly member will be your approach to conflicts of interest and personal favors. It will be important to remember that what appears to be an innocent action to you may appear to be large scale corruption to the public at large. Nothing causes more public distrust of officials and loss of confidence in the assembly, and therefore the borough government, than what may appear to be conflicting loyalties between public and private interests. Obviously, some of it will be unavoidable. For example, if you work for a company that owns property in the borough you may be accused by someone of being a tool of a special interest no matter how impartial your decisions may actually be. It will be important to weigh all your actions against your broad responsibility to the entire community so they don't result in public mistrust of you and the borough government that will be hard to repair.
- You will be required to disclose any personal interests which may influence your voting at assembly and committee meetings. When a matter before the assembly could reasonably be seen as a possible conflict between your

personal interests and the public interest, it is considered a conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest can be real or perceived. It is important to note that you are responsible for dealing with a perceived conflict of interest because it may reduce public confidence in your integrity and the assembly as a whole.

- Chances are if you are elected you will still occasionally be the subject of public gossip and idle chatter. That comes with the office. Just do your very best to be ethical and disclose any possible real or perceived conflict of interest.

No Such Thing as a Single Issue

Most often, people run for office because they are deeply committed to their community and want to impact the community's direction. At times, people run because they are passionate about a single issue or problem. A single controversy – such as a land use or zoning decision – could dominate an entire election campaign. But once the election is over, things change. Candidates who've won election based on their position on that one issue soon discover that they are responsible for a much broader array of challenges. The issue they ran on may not even be on the assembly's agenda. Getting it placed there will only be possible if they are willing and able to work cooperatively with other members of the assembly, many of whom will have their own issues to champion.

Existing Issues/Projects

- It is important to realize that there is always a wide range of issues for the assembly to consider. Newly-elected and returning assembly members may have particular issues they are anxious to deal with. However, assembly members must represent the overall public interest of the borough so it is

important to understand there will already be a planned schedule of issues to be debated and determined by the assembly.

- These matters will have been previously identified and relate to the goals/outputs of the previous assemblies, the adopted budget, and any strategic plan. These cannot be changed simply by the election of a new assembly without due process. Newly elected assembly members will be required to undertake and carry on this important work as well as bringing their new issues forward for consideration.

Working as Part of a Team

- To be effective, assembly members must work as part of a team to establish a shared vision for the future, make plans that make that future possible. Holding a public office is an act of service to the public – that is, service to all the citizens of the borough, not just those who share your views or those who voted for you. It is a challenge that requires every office holder to rise above the fray, to reach beyond comfort zones, and to work with others with whom they may have significant differences. Rising to that challenge is what makes our government work. It's what makes shaping our own shared future possible.
- Getting elected as an assembly member brings a special status. It also comes with a special obligation to look beyond yourself and cultivate the qualities of collaboration, teamwork, and civility. Elected officials set the tone for the civic life of the community.



When assembly members demonstrate how to differ with one another respectfully, find principled compromises, and focus on the common good, citizens often will too. When assembly members get mired in blame, recrimination, or division, civic progress can grind to a halt, and the borough's sense of common purpose can fracture. To govern well, elected leaders must help each other and the public stay focused on the future and on the common good. That can be an uphill struggle when the passions of the moment lead to demands for instant solutions, or when there is a deep division over a single issue that threatens to push longer-term problems aside. There will always be occasions when assembly members differ among themselves. But the mark of leadership is the ability to handle those differences in ways that move the agenda forward, build trust, and create a civic culture of mutual respect that makes progress possible.

- As an assembly member, the range of responsibilities expected of you will require flexibility, patience, willingness to learn, leadership, being accountable to the community and planning for the current and future needs of the community.

- Assembly decisions are taken by a majority vote of all the elected assembly members. Each assembly member has an equal vote. That means a decision by a majority of votes at an assembly meeting is considered a decision of whole. In the case of a tied vote, the mayor, acting as presiding officer, will cast a vote.



- The collective will and decision-making of the assembly is paramount and an individual assembly person's views are secondary to the majority view. If you find yourself in the minority on a particular issue, once a majority decision is taken by the assembly, you should not seek to undermine the decision because you did not personally vote in favor of it.
- It is important to realize that you are elected to represent the overall public interest of the whole Haines Borough community, regardless of whether it is a divided or undivided assembly. Your primary responsibility and accountability as an elected assembly member is to your community and the assembly's decisions must be made for the benefit of the entire Haines Borough. If you represent a particular interest group or constituency, you must also ensure that decisions benefit the whole borough and not just the interests you represent.

Time Commitment

The amount of time that an assembly member is expected to spend on borough business and meetings varies depending on current issues and projects. You may find it helpful to talk to existing and former assembly members to get an understanding of the time commitment generally required. You could also talk to the mayor about realistic time commitments.

Assembly Meetings/Preparation

- Assembly meetings are the most visible work of local governments.
- An assembly member is expected to attend all assembly meetings.

- A meeting cannot proceed unless there is a quorum present consisting of a majority of the assembly members (four).
- Agendas and packets allow everyone to know what will be discussed and in what order. These are published five days before the meetings to provide the assembly with time to review, research, and ask for more information. It is extremely important to take the time to prepare for the meetings in order to participate meaningfully in the discussions and to make informed decisions.

Committee and Liaison Assignments

- You will have particular committee and liaison responsibilities that require attendance at various meetings, research and investigation. And, should you become chair of an assembly committee, your extra responsibilities will require even more time commitment.
- There are assembly standing committees that provide the opportunity to explore particular issues in detail. The role of these committees is to work on specific matters. If you have a particular interest you may wish to serve on a particular committee. Assembly members are appointed to these committees at a post-election meeting.
- There are several boards that act as advisory to the assembly, so assembly members are assigned to at least one of them to serve as a liaison. As such, this will involve attendance at the particular board's meetings.

Robert's Rules/Meeting Structure

- As an assembly member, you will need to be aware of the importance of observing the borough's meeting procedures. The decisions made in assembly



meetings are important and must be made in accordance with the correct meeting procedures in Robert's Rules of Order and any special assembly rules outlined in Title 2 of the borough code. The borough clerk serves as the assembly's parliamentarian and is always happy to assist.

- Assembly meetings are conducted in a formal manner but the level of formality for committee meetings can vary, depending on the topic and number of people in attendance. Sometimes, elected officials are frustrated with the rules of order, but they do protect the rights of the minority and can help meeting run more efficiently. And, code requires it!

Taking an Oath

- Once elected as an assembly member, you must not act in that office until you make the declaration of office in the form of an oath as prescribed in the charter and code.
- In addition to supporting the US and Alaska Constitutions, the oath says you will support the laws of the Haines Borough which includes the Charter and Code. By taking the oath, you are also agreeing to faithfully perform your assembly member duties to the best of your ability.

- This is usually done at the assembly meeting when the election is certified (second meeting in October).

Compensation

- If elected to the assembly, you will receive through the borough's payroll system \$125.00 for each regular and special assembly meeting.
- You will also receive \$50.00 for each budget meeting.
- If you live at a distance greater than 20 miles from the meeting site, you will receive an additional \$10.00 for every regular meeting, special meeting, and budget meeting attended to compensate for travel costs.
- No compensation will be paid for other meetings attended.
- In the event of consecutive meetings occurring on the same day, assembly members receive attendance and travel compensation for only one meeting and, in the event the meetings involve different rates, it will be paid at the higher amount.

Financial Disclosure

- In order to run for office, you will be required to file a financial disclosure statement. However, it doesn't stop there. You have to do one every year. And, even after you leave office, you have to do it one more time.
- Once you are an elected official you will be required to make all your activities and financial interests publicly known. You are also required to declare the interests of people related to you, including your

children. This is done annually in March by completing the financial disclosure form. The forms are kept so the community can have confidence that decisions being made by the assembly are in the public interest and are not made for the benefit of assembly members or their relatives.

Tools

There are several electronic tools available to assist an assembly member. Several years ago, the Haines Borough transitioned from paper documents to electronic. This includes meeting packets, reports, budgets, borough code, comprehensive plan, and others. Where assembly members in the past had to lug around large binders and unwieldy paper packets, everything is now readily available and searchable.



iPad

If you are elected to the assembly, you will be assigned an iPad for your use while you are in office. It will come preloaded with various publications. It will also come with iAnnotate, the app the borough uses for working with pdf documents, including the meeting packets. In addition to the items that come preloaded when you receive the iPad, there are two options for downloading new items: An assembly Dropbox account, and the borough's website.

Email

If elected, you will be given a Haines Borough email address for doing borough business. Your iPad will be set up to send and receive. Also, you will be provided instructions on how you can check your borough email from other computers via webmail.

Website/Online Code/Dropbox

The website is a wealth of searchable information, and the clerk is only too happy to show you how to get the best use out of it. One feature is the borough's online code. Super friendly and very searchable and printable. And, then there's the assembly Dropbox account...a repository for many documents for downloading to your iPad, as mentioned above.

Training after the Election

No need to be afraid of the unknown. In addition to the mayor and clerk being available to answer your procedural questions, there are a few more formal training options that will help you learn more following election.



Assembly 101

This is a training that is conducted by the manager and clerk every year shortly after the election. It is an important orientation session that you will be strongly encouraged to attend.

iPad/iAnnotate Training

This training is typically conducted by the borough's system administrator and will give you a basic overview of the iPad settings, borough email, and a how-to on using the iAnnotate app.

Newly-Elected Officials (NEO) Training – AML

This two-day training happens every year in November during the Alaska Municipal League Conference in Anchorage. The borough budgets for it every year in the event there are brand new assembly members. It is an

extremely informative and helpful training. If elected, you will be encouraged to attend, and the clerk's office will help to set up the registration and travel arrangements.

Informal Training/Mentoring

Current and former assembly members are generally more than happy to answer questions and show the ropes to a new assembly member. Sometimes a senior assembly member will be willing to mentor a brand new elected official. Also, the borough clerk, borough manager, and mayor are available to help. Appointments are encouraged so that you have undivided attention!

If You're Still Not Sure if You Want to Run...

Consider serving on an advisory board first. If you are thinking about getting more involved in your local government but are just not quite sure if you are ready to serve on the borough assembly, you might consider cutting your teeth at the board level to see how you like it. It can be a great training ground!

