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Our view: City bonds make sense

Package covering roads, transit, safety and parks sticks to basics

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At \$44 million, the city's 2009 bond package is about \$15 million less than what Anchorage voters approved in 2008. City leaders deliberately scaled back requests for this year, concentrating on spending that would take care of basic city needs and put hundreds of people to work. Roads, transit and parks bonds leverage state, federal and private foundation money for nuts and bolts upkeep of everything from storm drains to neighborhood parks and will ease congestion in the U-Med and Lake Otis and Tudor areas of Midtown.



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Police and fire bonds will continue the expansion of police headquarters, provide a regional shooting and training range and replace, refurbish or add to fire stations serving Airport Heights, Mountain View, Spenard and Eagle River.

These five bond propositions make up more than \$39 million of the total bond request. This is public spending we can afford. This is public investment we'd be foolish to neglect. We can keep people working and keep city services sharp.

These are anxious times, as the area's rising foreclosure rate reflects. But cool heads assessing the state of Anchorage see a city in good shape. As the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce noted in its support for

the bonds, "although the business community is concerned with national economic trends, Anchorage's economy remains steady."

Prop 3: ROADS AND DRAINAGE

More than three-fourths of the city's bond request -- \$34.2 million -- is for roadwork, most of it involving road rebuilding and upgrades. Not exactly marquee projects. But these are what keep traffic moving in Anchorage. It's maintenance, and necessary to keep roads driveable, potholes manageable and water out of basements.

One of the more high-profile projects is the extension of East 40th Avenue from Lake Otis Parkway to Dale Street. This will ease congestion in the increasingly busy U-Med district and at Lake Otis and Tudor Road - as well as make traffic there safer.

This bond provides the city's share to match \$39.6 million in state money, and the city is seeking another \$40 million worth of matching funds. That's good math for Anchorage residents.

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PROP 4: PARKS AND REC

At \$1.85 million, the parks bond is modest for taxpayers. It is fortified by almost \$1.5 million in private matching funds and \$2.2 million in federal, state and old bond money. This is money to take care of what we have -- fixing bridges on the Tour of Anchorage trail, reseeding and upgrading soccer fields, rebuilding the vandalized playground at Ruth Arcand Park and Equestrian Center, provide a "tot lot" playground at Westchester Lagoon and help an army of volunteers take on the neighborhood parks fix-it list.

That list includes 14 neighborhood parks for this summer, from Standish Park in Muldoon to Johns Park in Oceanview.

"We don't lack for volunteers," said Beth Nordlund of the city and Anchorage Park Foundation. Those volunteers shouldn't lack for money.

PROP 6: PUBLIC SAFETY AND TRANSIT

Anchorage voters have gotten savvy about the People Mover's ability to fetch several federal dollars to every one the city spends. Prop 6 takes advantage of a 4-to-1 deal: \$600,000 in city money lands \$2.4 million in federal money to buy AnchoRide buses, make bus stops accessible to disabled people, and do major fleet maintenance like engine and transmission replacements. Coming off the record ridership year of 2008, this is major-league leverage at the right time.

The other part of this \$1.3 million bond would provide \$700,000 to buy up to 33 new cardiac monitors for ambulances and fire trucks in Anchorage, Chugiak and Girdwood. Michelle Weston, deputy chief for administration of the Anchorage Fire Department, said AFD tried to win federal grants for the monitors but didn't get them.

Voters shouldn't wait. Weston said the monitors should have been replaced two years ago, and the city is spending \$88,000 a year to keep them repaired. When you're on your back in an ambulance and the EMTs need those multiple measures of your heart, you won't quibble about the \$25,000 price tag.

PROP 7: FIRE PROTECTION

This \$1.5 million bond is the city's match of \$11 million in state funds to replace Fire Station 3, which serves Airport Heights and Mountain View, refurbish Fire Station 5 in Spenard, add to Fire Station 11 in Eagle River and replace that station's ladder truck, which burned due to an electrical short while fighting the Moose Horn fire in 2007.

Deputy Chief Weston described stations 3 and 5 as "workhorse stations," always busy and too well worn. Station 11 will add training and dorm rooms, and the new ladder truck.

PROP 8: POLICE

The Anchorage Police Department has outgrown its headquarters. This \$3 million bond would help APD expand its building by 15,000 square feet, add a 56,000 square-foot evidence and forensics building and begin work on a regional shooting and training range on open land near the private range in Birchwood.

Chief Rob Heun hopes the \$3 million local contribution will be enough to win lawmakers' OK of \$19.5 million in state money.

Anchorage voters are being asked to pony up first. That's fair, and the expansion makes sense when you consider the department's force is about twice as large (418 sworn officers and 177 support staff) as it was in 1986.

The range would give police a much wider and more realistic range of training and officer survival exercises, and would be shared with Alaska State Troopers and federal law enforcers. Both elements of this bond make for a better police force.

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stephentracy wrote on 04/03/2009 04:04:11 AM:
skeptical lol i don't think so sarcasm is as close as i will get to agreeing with you

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Skeptical wrote on 04/02/2009 10:11:55 PM:
Stephen - we finally agree on something.

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aweha wrote on 04/02/2009 04:43:23 PM:
Secondly, why are they not asking the military for use of all the ranges and land they use for training which is already built expressly for this purpose? It's already paid for and with over 7 ranges of varying sizes from pistol ranges to 500 meter ranges there plus all the land that is east and northeast of Muldoon out to Hiland useable for survival training, their is room for everyone to get training done. Vote the range idea down til economic times are a little more prosperous please.

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aweha wrote on 04/02/2009 04:34:24 PM:
There is no reason APD needs a training range at Birchwood. APD can and has been using Birchwood's range for training purposes for quite some time so why pay for a new range when the existing one is working just fine. This is a want and desire, not a need to have item by APD and voters should turn this one down. You can guarentee that if this range is built at Birchwood the public will not have access to it yet have to pay for it and lastly, why is it being built at a PRIVATE range instead of down at Potter's Marsh range which is already a STATE owned facility? Is this private range going to benefit from a tax cut or benefit from the city or is someone getting their hands greased with city money?!?!? There is already an existing facility at Potter's under the state dime that they can use with a classroom building in place, costs less money and time to get there and room to train plus expand. They drive their cop cars home to the valley as a perk, give that up first then we'll talk.

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jireys1680 wrote on 04/02/2009 08:59:51 AM:
jerry and drneil:

should we let our city crumble, or should we invest in it? I say invest in it, we live here!

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stephentracy wrote on 04/02/2009 07:24:59 AM:
skeptical why would you think i am mad at you ? im not your renter and im not the one name calling i just guess im just not very bright like you are.

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