

Municipal Attorney Supplemental Essay Questions

1. Please tell us why you are interested in this position and why it is a good time in your career to come to the City and Borough of Sitka.

I visited Sitka last summer and was immediately impressed with its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and vibrant community. As someone who values public service, the opportunity to contribute to Sitka's governance and support its residents is appealing to me.

Moreover, I am drawn to the complexities and challenges inherent in municipal law, particularly in a dynamic and diverse municipality like Sitka. By the end of my six years at the Fairbanks North Star Borough, I had been involved in providing legal advice to all twenty of its departments/divisions. The City and Borough of Sitka, as a unified home rule municipality, has three departments with which I have no direct experience — electric, harbors, and police. Working with these departments would provide me with an exciting opportunity for professional growth at a time in my career when I am ready to take on new challenges. Also, the values, mission, and vision statements in the Sitka strategic plan all resonate with me. I appreciate the forward thinking governance and am inspired by the opportunity to contribute my legal expertise to help preserve the quality of life for Sitkans in a sustainable community.

2. Please describe your experience with land use law.

I played a critical role in helping the Fairbanks North Star Borough navigate complex issues surrounding land use while balancing the interests of property owners, developers, residents, and the broader community. I have significant experience in land use litigation and have defended challenges to the Borough's issuance/denials of permits, appeals of planning commission decisions to the Board of Adjustment, and challenges to the Borough's interpretation of its zoning code in Superior Court. I also

provided procedural guidance to the Planning Commission in hearing appeals from the Platting Board and appeals of administrative decisions regarding variances, amnesty relief, and legal nonconforming grandfather rights. Finally, I initiated multiple land use enforcement actions and advised the Borough's Code Enforcement Officer on ways to gain voluntary compliance with the Borough's zoning code and avoid litigation.

In addition to land use litigation, I also onboarded new planning commissioners and platting board members by providing an orientation to the Borough subdivision and zoning codes and educating them on the Open Meetings Act and requirements imposed by Alaska Statutes. I drafted legal opinions and memoranda regarding spot zones, variances, conditional uses, and rezones. I worked directly with the Community Planning Director and Assembly members in drafting ordinances to help address community problems like lack of childcare from a land use perspective. I reviewed and provided legal advice on various planning documents such as the Trails Plan, the Downtown Plan, and the Comprehensive Plan. I met with the Chair of the Planning Commission prior to each Planning Commission meeting to discuss legal concerns. I then attended the Planning Commission meetings to give guidance on Borough code requirements and procedural issues. I also provided day-to-day legal advice to the Director/Deputy Director of Community Planning and helped ensure they were current on changes in land use law.

3. Describe your experience with labor and employment law.

During my tenure with the Fairbanks North Star Borough, I worked to ensure the fair and lawful treatment of employees while protecting the interests of the municipality. I had the opportunity to negotiate collective bargaining agreements, represent the Borough in arbitrations and negotiations regarding terminations and union grievances, provide legal advice on claim investigations and witness interviews, and draft legal opinions and letters of agreement concerning correct procedures and interpretation of collective bargaining agreements. I also provided day-to-day advice to the HR

Director and HR managers to help ensure compliance with applicable labor laws and regulations including laws related to workplace safety, discrimination, and employee benefits. I drafted and edited policies on issues such as the ADA and FMLA, and I helped the FNSB stay compliant with the FLSA while implementing alternative work day schedules. I regularly attended manager and director meetings to provide training and advise on best practices on issues ranging from recruitment and hiring to performance evaluations. I set up a mock arbitration to help HR and department personnel gain experience and comfort in providing testimony before an arbitrator. I also served on the hiring committee for key FNSB positions like the EEO officer, and I represented the FNSB in workers' compensation claims.

Additionally, I am an active member of the employment law section of the Alaska Bar Association. I have attended conferences on labor law and labor arbitration through the Labor Arbitration Institute and the International Municipal Lawyer's Association (IMLA) employment law program. I have stayed current on emerging workplace issues, legal decisions and regulatory news through monthly Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) newsletters and IMLA continuing legal education courses.

4. Please describe your perspectives and practices related to collaboration with a Municipal Administrator and Assembly members.

Collaboration with a Municipal Administrator and Assembly members is fundamental to ensuring effective governance and legal compliance within a municipality. I approach this collaboration with a blend of legal expertise, strategic thinking, and interpersonal skills. I believe in the importance of building strong relationships that in turn enable me to address legal issues proactively, share pertinent information, exchange ideas, discuss concerns, and lay the foundation for fruitful collaboration.

In practice, I prioritize proactive engagement with the Municipal Administrators and Assembly

members throughout the decision-making process. By being involved from the outset, I can provide timely legal analysis, identify potential legal challenges, and offer creative solutions that may help prevent potential legal disputes.

Furthermore, I recognize the value in listening to the perspectives and insights of the Municipal Administrator and Assembly members. Each person brings unique experiences and expertise that enrich the collective decision-making process. Through effective collaboration, we can navigate legal challenges, explore innovative solutions, and advance the collective interests of the municipality and its residents.