

Candidate name

Bill Falsey

1. Describe your previous experience with Alaska tourism. Do you have any prior employment in the industry?

I served as president of CivicVentures, the municipally controlled non-profit that oversees the capital programs for the Dena'ina and Egan Convention Centers, and certain bed-tax receipts. In that capacity, I worked with Visit Anchorage staff to support improvements to the convention centers to increase their marketability and generate more convention-center business for Anchorage. As municipal manager, I oversaw the Port of Alaska, where cruise ships in Anchorage dock (and had the opportunity to tour the MS Queen Elizabeth when it called on the Port in 2019). Like many of us, in my personal life I have, of course, also served as unofficial vacation planner and tour guide for the many friends and family we have encouraged to visit, and then biked with them on the Coastal Trail; hiked with them in the mountains; boarded the train with them to points north and south; toured the museum and the Alaska Native Heritage Center with them; skied with them at Alyeska; and enjoyed with them many good meals.

2. Visit Anchorage ensures our community remains top-of-mind with visitors, meeting planners, and travel trade professionals. The work distinguishes our destination in a crowded, competitive landscape. Do you support Visit Anchorage's mission? Please explain your position.

I do. Tourism and convention-center travel a sustainable economic drivers for Anchorage. No doubt partly for that reason, voters long ago approved dedicating bed taxes in the amount of 4% (one-third of today's total 12% levy) to the promotion of tourism; especially as we look to recover from COVID-19, the work of Visit Anchorage is critical to helping Anchorage compete on the national and international stage, at a time when every community will be particularly hungry for additional visitor traffic. I would welcome a more active role for the mayor to serve as an ambassador to help attract additional convention-center bookings; explore additional opportunities to establish direct flights to overseas destinations, possibly in coordination with our sister cities; to beef up our winter-tourism offerings and marketing; and would gladly participate in regular meetings with the Visit Anchorage board to promote greater synergies with City Hall, and confirm alignment.

3. Anchorage's 12% room tax supports municipal services in three ways: one-third goes to the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) general fund; one-third goes to support operations and pay the bond debt for the Anchorage Convention Centers; and one-third goes to the MOA's destination marketing contract (currently held by Visit Anchorage). Do you support the current three-way allocation of Anchorage room tax revenues? Please explain your position.

I do, will defend it, and will note that the current allocation could not be substantially changed without authorization from voters—the 4% for “promotion of tourism” and 4% to support the convention center's bonded indebtedness are fixed popular vote.

4. In Anchorage, the visitor economy is already a significant contributor. Prior to COVID, the industry generated \$297 million in visitor-related spending and \$38 million in municipal hotel and rental car taxes. In addition to the taxes paid by visitors, tourism created one in nine jobs locally. Do you

support additional taxes levied on the tourism industry and/or customers? If yes, please explain the type of taxes you believe would be most appropriate, and also how you believe those funds would be spent. If no, please explain your position.

I do not support increased bed taxes, or motor-vehicle rental taxes at this time, and do not foresee good cause in the near-future to adopt a new tax that targets visitors. I am open to the idea of exploring a general sales tax that might be used to support expanded early childhood education, property tax relief, and/or needed economic revitalization projects; if adopted, a non-trivial amount of the tax would be paid by non-residents—but room rentals and motor-vehicle rentals, as already taxed, would have to be exempted.

5. COVID has fundamentally affected leisure and convention travel, and a complete recovery may be several years away. How would you work to aid local businesses and individuals – particularly those reliant on tourism and travel – so that they can survive and flourish?

The prime task to assist the recovery of our tourism-reliant businesses – and the hotel and restaurant industries in particular – is to get the virus under control. Unless and until COVID is brought to heel, travel and in-person dining will not fully rebound.

With the virus under control, for the biggest economic impact, Anchorage will need the assistance of the federal government, which is the only entity that can provide the direct financial assistance that will be most needed. Federal support will be key to the recovery, and will likely involve a significant municipal workload. As mayor, I will stand ready to efficiently and transparently distribute whatever funds the municipality next receives from the federal government, on the terms required by the federal legislation.

But beyond assisting with federal transfers, the municipality has a significant role to play in the economic recovery that includes: (1) supporting a robust infrastructure program –including completing the Port of Alaska rebuild—to get the city back up on its feet and working again; (2) spurring new private-sector development through more creative ways of financing on- and off-site improvements (such as through tax-increment financing-like arrangements, and targeted use of the municipality’s SB 100 ability to use its tax code to incentivize particular forms of development); (3) ensuring that the municipality processes construction permits quickly, and does not needlessly stall or block projects; and (4) making quality-of life investments to re-establish and grow our tourism sector, and make Anchorage a more attractive place from which to “work from anywhere.”

Anchorage will need to ensure that the local conditions needed for a robust return of tourism and a thriving restaurant and arts-and-culture scene are met. That will include everything from encouraging new construction to using the mayor’s bully pulpit to encourage residents to patronize recovering businesses, to working with the Anchorage Downtown Partnership and other organizations to engage in strong placemaking, space-activation, and other revitalization efforts.

In the long-run, the post-COVID, Zoom-capable world, should play to Anchorage’s comparative advantage—we’re community where workers and families want to be. It will be important in

the next few years to double-down on that, as we also playing to our strengths as a headquarters city, a logistics center, and a hub for tourism.

6. Do you have priorities that would make the municipality a more travel-friendly destination? If yes, please provide details.

Yes, priorities for me that would make Anchorage a more travel-friendly destination include revitalizing downtown, making real progress on homelessness, and investing in, and marketing, our world-class trails.

First, a vibrant, clean and safe downtown is critical to Anchorage's success—and downtown is where many visitors to Anchorage will stay and shop. Investments and partnerships that ensure downtown continues to thrive, and that make downtown more walkable and active will serve all of us well.

Second, homelessness is a highly visible and growing issue that is having negative impacts on neighborhoods and businesses. In Anchorage, homelessness should be brief, one-time and rare—and no one should be sleeping on our street corners or in our greenbelts. We have not made adequate progress on the issue, in recent years. After years of largely leaving the issue to our local non-profit and religious organizations to solve, homelessness in the Municipality is now off the charts—we have 200 more people in our shelter system today than we have ever had in any prior year; nearly 400 people living in the Sullivan Arena; another nearly 50 in the Fairview Recreation Center; and more than 100 in other settings around town. We need a comprehensive solution—one that reduces the inflow of people into homelessness; involves a safe and appropriately sized shelter system; a rapid, more effective camp-abatement program that connects people to services; and housing-first investments that get folks up and on their feet again.

Third, our trails and greenspaces. With creative marketing, and investments in big ideas like the Alaska Long Trail initiative, our parks and trails should also become signature attractions, unlocking additional tourism dollars by encouraging visitors to Alaska to stay an extra day or two in Anchorage.

Last, the next mayor can also have a significant influence on design of the new facilities at the Port of Alaska to receive cruiseship passengers. To date, construction of a terminal facility designed specifically to accommodate and attract more cruise ship landings has not received a lot of attention. But I would welcome the opportunity to explore what might be possible there.

7. What do you see as the mayor's role in Anchorage's visitor industry, destination marketing, and community development?

A great destination town is also a town that works for locals. The mayor's obligation to work relentlessly to really make Anchorage a world-class city to live, work and play also makes the city easier to market and more attractive to visitors. In practice, that means supporting economic development through sensible policy and smartly designed public-works projects, and maintaining at least the current level of investments in our convention centers and Visit Anchorage's work. As I said in question 2, above, I would also welcome a more active role for the mayor to serve as an ambassador to help attract additional convention-center bookings;

explore additional opportunities to establish direct flights to overseas destinations, possibly in coordination with our sister cities; to beef up our winter-tourism offerings and marketing; and would gladly participate in regular meetings with the Visit Anchorage board to promote greater synergies with City Hall, and confirm alignment.

8. What are your overall priorities for the municipality?

As outlined on my website (falseyformayor.com), I intend to:

- Champion the Post-COVID Economic Recovery
- Complete the Port of Alaska Rebuild
- Expand Pre-K and Early Childhood Education
- Preserve Our Public Safety Gains
- Comprehensively Address Homelessness
- Build More Affordable Housing
- Make Smart Energy Investments
- Strengthen Our Mental Health Response
- Invest In – and Market – Our Signature, World-Class Parks and Trails
- Partner with Our Local Universities, UAA and APU, and
- Maintain Balanced Budgets and Anchorage’s AAA Bond Rating

9. What do you see as the greatest threat to Anchorage’s future success? What about the greatest opportunity for the community?

The primary near-term threats are: economic stagnation potentially caused by the decline in the oil sector, and out-migration; shifts in the commercial real estate market; failure to make meaningful progress on homelessness; and wildfire danger associated with changing climate. Our greatest opportunity is leaning into the quality-of-life investments that really can, and do, make Anchorage a world-class place to live, work and play: we are place of unrivaled community, beauty, and opportunity.

10. Would you be interested in a follow-up meeting with Visit Anchorage?

Of course. I would welcome the chance to talk to with Visit Anchorage.