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MAYOR SULLIVAN ANNOUNCES COMMUNITY BUDGET DIALOGUES



ANCHORAGE- Given next year's budget challenges, Mayor Dan Sullivan announced a series of community conversations that will provide input to his budget decision making. To assist in designing these discussions, the Municipality will retain the services of Viewpoint Learning, a leader in creating opportunities for citizens to have constructive input into public policy decisions. This process will be very different from citizens' traditional role in the budget process, which is usually limited to three minutes of commentary during an Assembly public hearing after the Mayor has introduced the budget. Instead, these conversations will center on objective materials about municipal finances and the choices that members of the Administration and Assembly will face in terms of the level of services and amount of property taxes.

Viewpoint Learning was selected to design and lead this process because of its experience in designing what they call "ChoiceDialogues", which differ from polls and focus groups in learning what citizens think. While polls provide an accurate snapshot of people's current thinking, they are not designed to predict the future direction of people's views on important issues where they have not completely made up their minds ChoiceDialogues enable people - through dialogue with their peers - to develop their own fully worked through views on issues even if they previously have not given them much thought. Participants will work through several scenarios of spending and revenue choices and then delve further into the options and trade-offs within each. Viewpoint Learning has conducted ChoiceDialogues across the country, including California, where company representatives tackled public policy issues like the state's budget reform process, and several major U.S. cities in which dialogues were conducted about Medicare and the Federal deficit.

The mayor's office is working with Viewpoint Learning to conduct several ChoiceDialogues in August, so citizen comments can serve as an input into the Mayor's budget decision making. The Mayor's budget is due to the Assembly in early October.

Specific dates and locations will be announced later. Funding to pay Viewpoint Learning for its services comes from a combination of private donations (Rasmuson Foundation, Northrim Bank) and municipal interest earnings.

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 ~ Steven Angel ~ Fleet Sales Manager Seekins Ford Lincoln Mercury ~ Fairbanks, Alaska ~

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