



Economic Stabilization Task Force

Appointed by the City & Borough of Juneau's Mayor
Adopted Meeting Minutes for Tuesday, April 14, 2020

Call to Order

The Economic Stabilization Task Force meeting held telephonically was called to order at 3:11 p.m. by Ms. Thomas.

Task Force Members Present: Max Mertz, Linda Thomas, Theresa Belton, Bruce Botelho, Eric Forst, Ken Koelsch, Lauren MacVay, Laura Martinson, and Terra Peters

Task Force Members Absent: None

Staff Present: CDD Director Jill Maclean and CDD Administrative Officer Brenwynne Grigg

Special Guest Speakers: Kevin Jardell, Kirby Day, and Craig Dahl

Approval of Minutes

There were no minutes to approve.

Rental Assistance Discussion

Ms. MacVay gave an overview of the letter that went to the Assembly last night at their April 13 meeting. Currently, significant amounts of economic support are creating a robust safety net, making it difficult to identify gaps that may exist. Therefore, a needs-based program with individual assessments and case-by-case analysis, paying only gaps in rent, seems the best path forward for ensuring the true gaps are filled. She suggested that AHFC does this type of analysis.

Ms. MacVay continued by speaking on the current eviction moratoriums in place. She suggested there is currently a large knowledge gap, which could result in Landlords believing they can threaten people with eviction. This could result in renters worrying they may be evicted, but the likelihood of an eviction actually occurring is small.

The goal of the Task Force is to make a recommendation at the next Assembly meeting on the best way to administer this program to benefit those most in need.

Mr. Botelho shared his concern that, while a significant portion of our population qualifies for renter assistance under the current terms, there are those who may need renter assistance due to drastic recent changes in their financial situation but who do not qualify under current terms. He also recognized that delays in unemployment benefits could create an immediate need for assistance that will be alleviated in a few weeks.

ACTION ITEM: A Letter of Intent was suggested to accompany the emergency resolution on rental assistance. This would serve as instructions to the Administrator of the program on how to apply the grant assistance.

Ms. MacVay suggested that one strategy to test need would be to allocate \$100,000 and determine how far it went. Given the needs based payments, the funds might go further than anticipated, but the only way to determine that is to test it and have AHDC report back.

ACTION ITEM: Ms. Thomas suggested the gap is much larger than the amount of families mentioned in the resolution. She asked the Task Force to consider recommending some amended language, in addition to the Letter of Intent, that would be provided to offer guidelines for best use by the public to serve more in need. Mr. Mertz supported that suggestion.

ACTION ITEM: To further strategize on this issue, the formation of a subcommittee that could meet within the week was discussed. The minimum 24-hour notice of public meetings was noted.

Ms. Thomas recommended revisiting the resolution one more time and providing language for a few provisions based on the information gathered by the Task Force. Mr. Botelho recommended scheduling a subcommittee meeting on the following Thursday, then deciding whether a full task force meeting is needed.

MOTION by Mr. Mertz to delegate authority to a Rental Assistance Subcommittee to provide the Task Force recommendations. Mr. Forst seconded the motion.

AMMENDMENT #1: Ms. Thomas added that the subcommittee should meet prior to the next Economic Stabilization Task Force Meeting.

Hearing no objections, the motion carried.

Governors AK Economic Stabilization Team

Mr. Mertz gave an overview of the Governor's AK Economic Stabilization Team, chaired by former Governor Sean Parnell and former US Senator Mark Begich. The team is working to develop strategies to deal with the economic impact of COVID-19 on Alaska. He introduced Kevin Jardell, CBJ's lobbyist in the Alaska Capitol, who was present telephonically to take questions. Mr. Mertz stated that the CBJ Mayor's Economic Stabilization Task Force is able to interact with and provide input to the Governor's AK Economic Stabilization Team, so it is imported to consider how the Economic Stabilization Task Force can best inform them of Southeast Alaska's economic issues. There is a need to get varied segments of Alaska's economy back into business; the way that we deal with that in Juneau needs to fit with the way the Governor's team is dealing with it statewide.

Mr. Jardell introduced himself and said the State of Alaska is following the lead of the other states in the nation. The Governor's team is reaching out to different sections for feedback on reopening. The team is working on a plan while trying to minimize bureaucracy.

A rough draft of the Governor's approach to the different phases of opening sectors of the economy should be released in 2-3 days. Currently, the plan is to open a sector, see if there is a corresponding increase in COVID-19 cases, and if so close it back down. If there is no spike in COVID-19 cases, the plan intends to move to the next phase by opening another sector, and so on. Addressing any COVID-19 spikes and identifying the cause will be a major priority.

Mr. Mertz suggested continuing to develop a plan for Juneau in the interim and being dynamic enough to adjust to the State's plan when it is released, if needed. Mr. Mertz will continue working with Mr. Jardell as the CBJ Mayor's Economic Stabilization Task Force liaison to the Governor's AK Economic Stabilization Team.

Economic Stabilization Fact Finding Updates

I. Child Care

Ms. Martinson introduce a childcare development block grant available for licensed childcare facilities in Alaska. Grant awards are based on February attendance in the individual childcare facility to ensure their budgets are stable, so they can meet all their operational needs and reopen as soon as it is deemed safe. Grants are awarded for the months of March, April, and May. There is a potential for gaps, as the initial funding for the program is \$6 million and it appears the program will need \$35 million to meet the need. It is still unclear how much the State will receive from the CARES act to help fund this.

ACTION ITEM: Ms. Martinson asked the Task Force to think about what they might be able to do for ensuring supply security when childcare facilities reopen. They will need baby wipes, thermometers, cleaning supplies, etc. These are all things that, in addition to more guidance from the State or City on protocols that should be put into place, will help them reopen safely.

ACTION ITEM: Mr. Mertz suggested that Ms. Peters, Ms. Martinson, and Ms. Belton interact with someone from the State or City to help establish what protocols should be in place once a childcare facility reopens. He has heard some of these same concerns from facilities that do not want to unknowingly create risks for the children, along with liability concerns.

ACTION ITEM: Mr. Mertz asked Ms. Maclean if the EOC could provide assistance acquiring PPE, wipes, and other supplies for the childcare facilities. Ms. Maclean stated the Task Force would need to make a recommendation to the Assembly, who could act to direct the EOC to do so.

MOTION by Mr. Mertz to release a PSA and advertisements specifically addressing insurance coverage for the uninsured, were they to be diagnosed with COVID-19. Mr. Botelho seconded the motion.

Hearing no objection the motion carried.

MOTION by Mr. Botelho moved that the PSA and advertisements would be released once the program is put into place. Mr. Mertz seconded the motion.

Hearing no objection the motion carried.

II. Business Protocols to Reopen

Mr. Forst gave an update on Item 20 of the Governors mandate, a catchall under the list of essential businesses. The State has been asked what that means. If a business can make the argument, they can ensure social distancing, does that mean they fall under this category? Mr. Forst is waiting to hear back from the State for clarification on this item number, as well as protocols that will be put into place that will allow bars and restaurants, dog groomers, accounting offices, hair dressers, retail stores, etc., to reopen.

Mr. Botelho expressed concern about a gap of knowledge related to healthcare in the membership of the Task Force. He suggested that healthcare professionals should be consulted to provide specific guidance on protocols that could help trigger decisions on how, and in what order, businesses should reopen.

Ms. Thomas asked if a recommendation had come before the Assembly to either task the Task Force to pull that together or for the Assembly to lead that. Mr. Botelho replied in the affirmative, and Ms. Thomas said the Task Force would follow up on that.

III. Cruise Ship Industry

Mr. Koelsch gave updates on the CDC's 100-day suspension of cruise ships in American waters. He stated that based off conversations with the industry, Juneau could be looking at a cruise season starting sometime between July 1 – 23, 2020.

Mr. Forst spoke about an email that Mr. Kirby Day had recently sent with the update that cruise lines have suspended all operations through the 2020 season. He added that some may do 7-day roundtrip cruises from Seattle through the Inside Passage, but that would be the extent of it.

Ms. Martinson encouraged the Task Force to consider and anticipate the concerns of the community prior to ships arriving to help Juneau citizens prepare and address potential health and safety issues in advance.

Mr. Mertz invited Mr. Day to speak to the subject. Mr. Day stated that implementing health and safety procedures is at the top of the list in order to get the cruise season started in July. He asked the Task Force to think about community concerns and ways the cruise ship industry could help alleviate those concerns to ensure a safe landing place for the community and the ships.

IV. Business-to-Business Assistance

Mr. Mertz spoke of work done over the past few weeks that has resulted in the Chamber of Commerce using an existing process to help businesses connect with each other, and to further reach out and encourage contact in the midst of this COVID-19 situation.

ACTION ITEM: There are resources already in place, and this needs to be made public knowledge through PSAs and advertisement.

Mr. Mertz invited Mr. Craig Dahl, Executive Director of the Greater Juneau Chamber of Commerce, to speak to the program.

Mr. Dahl introduced the existing Business-to-Business Assistance program, adding that the program and website have significantly expanded to address the business needs of our current climate. There are higher level resource pages on the website that address financial resources, CPA and accounting services, external loan programs, and social resources to assist employees.

MOTION by Mr. Mertz to work with Chambers to release a PSA to advertise this program to the public and get the information out in the community. Mr. Botelho seconded the motion.

Hearing no objections, the motion carried.

V. 477 Update

Ms. Belton introduced the 477 Program as a way for tribal governments to foster employment and economic development. This program give the authority to consolidate separate programs to encourage flexibility and reduce administrative burden. There are currently five programs in the CCTHITA's 477 Program and they are restricted funds with terms and conditions.

The childcare component will pay providers for March and April, and will waive co-payments. Providers will be able to pay their rent, and supplemental funding will be provided to purchase supplies. PPE is still in the ordering stage and supplies have not yet arrived.

The Welfare to Work Program helps low-income families with children in the form of rental assistance and short-term benefits until they are financially stable. It also provides regular support for families facing eviction.

Employment training is provided for people actively pursuing jobs, and support services are provided to purchase food.

Work Experience Programs provide on-the-job training but not much is occurring with that at this time.

Child support assistance is provided to non-custodial parents to continue making payment if they have lost their job.

CCTHITA is applying for every type of grant funding possible in order to help its tribal citizens. There are between 6,000 – 7,000 tribal citizens in Juneau. They are currently trying to obtain discretionary funding to help people who might not otherwise qualify for assistance because of income, but suddenly find themselves in need due to recent events.

The Administration on Aging just awarded CCTHITA a few grants that will enable them to have a program that will deliver meals to the homes of those in their elders program. This population normally does not qualify for funding because they receive social security benefits.

VI. Additional Fact Finding Groups

Ms. Thomas suggested tabling this topic until the next meeting. Mr. Mertz agreed.

Infrastructure

Mr. Koelsch spoke about the importance of capital projects and mentioned a list of infrastructure priorities given to Governor Walker on June 30, 2017. He suggested the Task Force review this list and see if it wants to recommend those same items for reconsideration.

Ms. Thomas proposed discussing it further at a subsequent meeting.

Mr. Mertz added that capital projects are not being prioritized by Congress currently, but that the Task Force should monitor the topic and see what is happening at the Federal level before addressing this.

Mr. Botelho recommended focusing on CBJ's 6-year CIP plan by recommending to the Assembly they prioritize funding for a robust list of projects as a way to stimulate the economy.

ACTION ITEM: Ms. Thomas recommended tabling the discussion to a future meeting to prepare a recommendation to the Assembly.

Addressing Ebb and Flow of Business / COVID-19

Ms. Maclean communicated that the EOC and Manager's Office has asked the Task Force to advise the Assembly on reopening businesses and the protocols that must be in place prior to doing so. Additionally, the Task Force has been asked to create procedures for properly shutting back down, either completely or partially, if COVID-19 cases increase due to reopening businesses, and for reopening once again.

Communications Process

Ms. Maclean reported that the webpage is live and may be found at <https://beta.juneau.org/assembly/economic-stabilization>. She went over the process for sharing public comments with the Task Force members on a once-daily occurrence and up to 30 minutes prior to a Task Force meeting.

ACTION ITEM: Mr. Botelho asked if staff could create a matrix that lists all issues identified in public comments. Then the Task Force could provide statements on these issues, which would be published on the website. Reviewing this list and making decisions on it would become part of future meeting schedules. There were no objections to that.

Good of the Order

There was discussion of how the Task Force could respond to public commentary being received. The matrix seemed like the preferred method of response as the official position of the Economic Stabilization Task Force, but Task Force members may also respond as individuals.

There was also discussion of improving the Zoom platform to Zoom Webinar.

Ms. Martinson asked if, in future meetings, specific areas of the economy needing stabilizing could be identified.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:43 p.m.

Appointed Task Force Members

Max Mertz, Co-Chair • Linda Thomas, Co-Chair • Theresa Belton • Bruce Botelho • Eric Forst

Ken Koelsch • Lauren MacVay • Laura Martinson • Terra Peters