



Economic Stabilization Task Force

Appointed by the City & Borough of Juneau's Mayor
Adopted Meeting Minutes from April 16, 2020

Call to Order

The Economic Stabilization Task Force meeting was called to order at 4:00 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: None

Approval of Minutes

MOTION by Mr. Botelho to table the approval of the April 14, 2020 Economic Stabilization Task Force minutes to the next meeting. Ms. MacVay seconded the motion.

Hearing no objections, the motion carried.

Review and Approval of Rental Housing Subcommittee Task Force Recommendations to Assembly

Ms. MacVay gave a brief overview of the research gathered to support the Rental Housing Subcommittee's recommendation to the Economic Stabilization Task Force. Through enhanced unemployment benefits, the CARES Act, and FFCRA provisions, the subcommittee found there to be a significance amount of Federal support. This good news makes it difficult to assess the need because there are no large and obvious gaps that seem to exist. The Subcommittee researched eviction moratoriums within the State of Alaska, and found SB241 to be the most significant barrier as it prohibits evictions for the next few months.

The Subcommittee finds that, due to the safety nets and Federal support, this program should be needs-based, with situations analyzed on a case-by-case basis and supported by a Letter of Intent that will provide administrative guidance to those distributing assistance.

Ms. Thomas asked for the Draft Letter of Intent to be shared on the screen before the Task Force.

The intent of this letter is to direct the funding where there is the most need. For example, it provides guidance that:

1. Directs coordination with other assistance entities to reduce duplication of services;
2. Ensures the assistance provided is equal to the gap in the ability to pay and not simply the full rent owed;

3. Ensures that receiving assistance from this program does not disqualify someone from another program – treating this as a last resort program;
4. Denies rental assistance that is owed to a governmental agency, as they are better able to absorb the lost revenue;
5. Ensures that immigration status is not taken into account for determinations;
6. Reports on the status of the program to the Assembly on a bi-weekly schedule; and,
7. Returns any funds that are not expended by the end of fiscal year 2020.

Ms. MacVay began addressing recommendations in Resolution 2889. She explained the Subcommittee's recommendation to change absolute language in paragraphs M and N from *will* to *may*.

Section 3 of the Resolution focuses on consequences of the COVID-19 event, such as lost wages and/or lost childcare. The Subcommittee recommends the language instead focus on the need to fill any gaps in assistance from other programs.

MOTION by Mr. Mertz to adopt the Subcommittee's recommendation, including the Letter of Intent, and forward it to the Assembly. Mr. Botelho seconded the motion.

Ms. Thomas opened the floor for any additional discussion.

Mr. Koelsch asked Ms. MacVay to elaborate on the issue of immigrant status in the Letter of Intent. Ms. MacVay explained that, in some Federal programs, only citizens are eligible for benefits. The Subcommittee recommends that immigration status not be a factor in determining eligibility. Mr. Koelsch questioned whether it is appropriate for the CBJ to provide financial benefits to individuals who are illegal immigrants. Mr. Botelho shared his understanding that this housing crisis is hitting all people regardless of their immigration status, and everyone needs to have a place to shelter during this public health crisis.

Objection: Mr. Koelsch objected to the stipulation regarding immigration status because he feels it is an important factor in the decision-making. He questioned whether the CBJ has an official stance on this issue and raised concerns regarding determining if this is contrary to other policy. Ms. MacVay said she would bring this before the Assembly as a question, because making this type of policy statement independently is beyond the scope of the Task Force. Ms. Thomas recommended approaching the City Attorney first to see if he could recommend appropriate language, or remove the stipulation if it is unnecessary.

Ms. Thomas addressed the motion on the table, acknowledged the objection, and proceeded with a roll call vote.

Roll Call Vote

Yes Votes: Mr. Botelho, Ms. MacVay, Mr. Mertz, Mr. Koelsch, Ms. Belton, Ms. Martinson, Mr. Forst, Ms. Peters, Ms. Thomas

No Votes: None

The vote was unanimous.

Additional Fact Finding Groups & Task Force Objectives

Mr. Mertz reviewed the areas that the Task Force has identified where COVID-19 is significantly affecting their operations. He led the Task Force in a discussion on further accomplishing the Assembly Charge:

Identify and promote strategies that enable businesses to continue operations safely such as curbside pick-up, take-away, delivery, and other innovative services. Additionally, explore strategies that enable businesses and Juneau's economy to recover in the long term.

Childcare

Ms. Martinson shared the common issues expressed by daycares throughout the Borough. In order to feel safe to reopen, they need supply security for masks, thermometers, sanitizer, etc., as well as Juneau-specific health and safety protocols in excess of what the CDC is offering. Many are considering re-opening sometime after May. Many daycares are expecting low enrollment levels upon re-opening and would appreciate assistance in dealing with the loss of revenue.

Restaurants, Bars, and Business

Mr. Forst has been conversing with many business owners in town and has requested they write a one-page description of what it would take to re-open their business and operate safely. Businesses include US Foods, dog groomers, retail outlets, hairdressers, insurance offices, movie theaters, restaurants, and bars. He hopes to have a systematic recommendation to the Task Force by next week. Whether business are able to re-open at a profitable level is still in question.

ACTION ITEM: Mr. Forst will provide an update at the next meeting on #20 of the Governors mandate and protocols to be used by restaurants and other businesses to be used for re-opening.

Open Discussion

Mr. Mertz encouraged the Task Force to think about resources it can provide to the community and the State when health officials determine it is safe to re-open certain sectors of the economy.

Mr. Botelho stated that the Task Force is in a position to suggest a process for opening or closing according to the health decisions made, and to support the City through that process.

Ms. Martinson shared that the Daycare Fact Finding Group is in a good place to make concrete recommendations to the Assembly. Mr. Mertz asked for the group to frame the recommendations for protocol and developing one-pagers. The City Manager has volunteered CBJ staff to work with the Task Force in developing the documents. Additionally, if there are areas of need that CBJ lack the scope or capacity to address, those items may be recommended to the Governors Economic Task Force.

Ms. Martinson reminded the Task Force that, beyond re-opening protocols, they must contend with the huge economic impacts. A childcare center and a retail store may open, but it is uncertain whether enrollment will be at previous levels or if there will be tourists to shop in that store.

As a point of interest, Ms. Maclean updated the Task Force on the coordination of the CBJ Command Center and Bartlett Regional Hospital. She shared they are in constant communication and have three standing meetings each week. Additionally, she stated that fact-finding groups are more efficient than subcommittees in accomplishing tasks quickly, as they require less administrative oversight.

ACTION ITEM: Mr. Mertz asked Ms. Martinson if she could present a recommendation on childcare to the Task Force at the next meeting, along with protocol from local experts. Ms. Thomas asked about the timeline for that protocol from experts. Ms. Martinson shared that the State Health Department and the City are already working on this, so it will not take long to organize the information in a document and have it before the Task Force next week.

There was continued discussion on the CBJ's monitoring capacity of COVID-19 cases in relation to testing for the virus and antibodies as sectors of the economy begin to re-open.

ACTION ITEM: Ms. Maclean recommended the Task Force invite a member of the EOC to give an update and answer questions.

ACTION ITEM: Mr. Mertz recommended bringing the question of health monitoring and testing capacity to the Assembly at their April 20 meeting during the Task Force's update. Based on the interaction that ensues, the Task Force can determine next steps.

Ms. Thomas shared that Ms. Belton needed to leave soon and asked if she had any updates to share.

Ms. Belton received information from the CCTHITA's Childcare Director that echoed what Ms. Martinson has been hearing from other childcare centers. Collectively, the concerns are the same – safety of employees, safety of children, supply security, and dealing with the loss of revenue.

Mr. Mertz asked if the group had any additional comments or thoughts.

Ms. MacVay noted that the Task Force is in a position to help fill the knowledge gap. The City could potentially calm public anxiety by using its delivery channels to disseminate targeted information. Ms. Thomas agreed and said the Task Force may use the services of the CBJ Public Information Offices.

Ms. Martinson shared her view on the need to protect businesses from eviction and provide assistance so they can survive long enough to recover. She recommended a fact-finding group to address this issue. She knows many people who do not qualify for assistance because they previously had a large income, despite now having zero income.

ACTION ITEM: Mr. Mertz recommended a fact-finding group for business support and asked Ms. Peters to lead it. Ms. Peters agreed.

Ms. Peters agreed to research the specific challenges that businesses are facing and to report on common themes. Mr. Mertz reminded the Task Force that it could be of assistance by shedding light on the issues, whether or not the City has the resources to help businesses financially. Mr. Forst agreed and went on to suggest the Assembly could take the issues to the delegation and bring them to the State or National level.

Ms. Maclean requested that fact-finding groups send potentially useful information to staff, who will work to distribute the information.

Mr. Mertz asked if there is a need to develop guidance for previously unaddressed areas of business. For example, what issues are manufacturers experiencing, and what assistance can the Task Force provide? Mr. Forst agreed and noted that, while any business dealing with the public will have similar issues and similar approaches to mitigation, manufacturing businesses would be different.

Mr. Koelsch asked if sectors of the medical community need support, as many have ceased operations. Mr. Mertz shared that many medical offices and veterinarian services are re-opening on April 21.

Mr. Koelsch suggested a general outreach invitation to the community to share their circumstance and any barriers to opening. He suggested advertising the Task Force's purpose to the Economic Stabilization Task Force, on the radio, to the Chamber of Commerce, to non-profits, etc.

ACTION ITEM: Mr. Mertz shared that he would like to work on general outreach to businesses, with Mr. Koelsch as a teammate. Ms. Thomas volunteered to reach out to manufacturers.

Business-to-Business Mentoring Update

Mr. Mertz shared that radio advertising would be aired in the next few days on the Business-to-Business mentoring program offered through the Chamber of Commerce.

Good of the Order

Ms. Maclean asked the Task Force how they would like to address businesses that are open and appear to be operating in spite of the closure order. Mr. Mertz stated he would speak with Mr. Watt on this issue, as he would prefer to lead by offering guidance on ways they can operate safely.

Speakers at the Assembly meeting on April 20 will be Mr. Mertz, Ms. Thomas, Ms. MacVay, and Mr. Botelho.

Ms. Thomas shared that a process for responding to emails and comments sent to the Task Force is in development. A matrix has been development to track progress by the Task Force on the various issues as they relate to comments received.

Hearing no other items for discussion, at 5:20 p.m. the meeting was adjourned.

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