



# Economic Stabilization Task Force

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

## Call to Order

The Economic Stabilization Task Force meeting was called to order at 3:01 p.m. by Mr. Thomas.

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

Task Force Members Absent: Terra Peters

Staff Present: EOC Planning Section Chief, Robert Barr; CDD Administrative Officer, Brenwynne Grigg; and CBJ Finance Director, Jeff Rogers

CBJ Assembly Members Present: Mayor Beth Weldon and Loren Jones

Special Guest Speakers: Chief Behavioral Health Officer at Bartlett Regional Hospital (BRH), Bradley Grigg; Executive Director at Juneau Economic Development Council (JEDC), Brian Holst; and Executive Director at Juneau Community Foundation (JCF), Amy Skilbred

## Approval of Minutes

**MOTION:** by Mr. Botelho to adopt the Economic Stabilization Task Force minutes from the July 9 meetings. Mr. Forst seconded the motion.

***Hearing no objections, the motion was approved.***

## Emergency Operations Center Testing Status Update

Mr. Barr reported that work on localized testing continues. He meets every Monday with BRH CEO, Mr. Bill; CBJ City Manager, Mr. Watt; and representatives from the CBJ Assembly and the BRH Board. The situation is complex, and they continue to evaluate and analyze all the options. Mr. Barr is continuing to hear from vendors that lead times are long and supply chains are stressed.

Mr. Mertz asked about the outstanding purchase orders for two different pieces of testing equipment and the status on identifying a strategy for the implementation of either of them if they are purchased. Mr. Barr replied that work continues on that and he is meeting with vendors on July 17. Both vendors are hesitant to promise anything this calendar year. It is likely that if the testing equipment is acquired, the program will be run by BRH, but may not be located at the main campus.

Mr. Botelho asked, given the extended period for the acquisition of testing equipment, if the City is keeping up with possibilities of new breakthroughs that may revolutionize our way of testing. He suggested that perhaps something faster and less expensive would come onto the market. Mr. Barr replied that the CBJ is preserving the right to back out of a conversation with vendors if it is in the City's best interest. Mr. Barr is reviewing newly authorized technologies daily and contacting vendors that might prove promising. He assured the Task Force that Juneau is preserving its choices and paying very close attention to new forms of testing.

### **JEDC Report on Grant**

Mr. Holst stated that as of July 14, there are 178 applications and 105 awards. They continue to keep up with the pace of applications as they come in. The average grant award remains around \$11 thousand.

Mr. Mertz stated that based upon the number of applications and the average award amount, an estimation of the current requests from applicants for phase 1 of the program is \$1.9 million. Mr. Holst confirmed that is close to accurate. Mr. Holst added that if phase 2 allows the calculation of short-term loans into the equation, along with the additional two months of eligible utility expenses, the awards will increase, and could attract additional applicants to the program. It will be likely that the grant fund will max out to capacity. Mr. Holst does not anticipate that the recommended minimum for very small businesses will greatly affect the funds capacity.

Mr. Mertz pointed out that their mid-April collaboration with Mr. Calvin and Ms. Bell regarding the recommended funding level working with limited elements of data points may have projected fairly close to the amount allocated by the Assembly for both phases. By expanding the parameters of the program, the requests will exceed \$12 million. It should not be a surprise that the program will be fully expended, and an argument could be made that additional funding is needed for grants.

Mr. Holst stated that the program could use more marketing in the fishing community; they are working on a remedy for that. He added that the big question is how many more businesses will be attracted into the program with the changes.

Ms. Martinson asked if it is possible that some businesses have chosen to wait on submitting an application for the CBJ Business Grant until they are able to submit for the State's AK CARES Grant, since it could make them ineligible. She wondered if, once the issues with AK CARES are resolved and grants are released, the CBJ Business Grant would receive another large batch of applicants.

Mr. Holst replied that he is unsure of how the resolution of the AK CARES Grant details will affect the number of new applicants, but there are measures in place with the CBJ Business Grant that ensures applicants who intend to apply for both are not put at a disadvantage for the State's AK CARES Grant. He added that many applicants may be hesitant to apply because they do not have a business license. While the CBJ program does ask if they have a business license, it is not a requirement in order to receive a grant. This could also be a perceived barrier in the fishing community that they are working to address. The AK CARES Grant has clarified that in their program, a business license is not a requirement. JEDC is in the process of clarifying this with Mr. Palmer as well.

Mr. Mertz stated that he spoke with Kevin McDougall, a fisherman and recently retired long-time chair of the Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association (NSRAA) Board, who communicated his opinion that the fishing community is largely unaware of the program. Mr. Mertz also contacted Ms. Katie Harms, Executive Director at DIPAC, who is working with the United Fishermen of Alaska to assist in marketing the CBJ Business Grant program to the fishing community.

## **Bartlett Hospital Behavioral Health Data: COVID-19 Impacts on Children**

Mr. Grigg directed the attention of the Task Force to a 2-page report looking at the significant increase in Emergency Department visits amongst children under the age of 18. He compared monthly trends from July 2019 – March 2020 to April 2020 – June 2020, correlating the increase to around the time of Spring Break ending in March. In just a short period, the Emergency Department saw 10 more children in the post-COVID-19 three-month period than in the pre-COVID-19 nine-month period, increasing the monthly average from five children to 16 children, three times the rate at which they are normally seen. While the increase is significant under the age of 18, the increase is even more alarming under the age of 13.

Mr. Grigg reported that in the same comparison periods for Emergency Department visits, Bartlett Outpatient Psychiatric Services caseloads have seen an increase in new patients under the age of 18. More new patients were added in the three-month period of April 2020 – June 2020, than were added in the nine-month period of July 2019 – March 2020. The average monthly number of new children enrolled in outpatient services pre-COVID-19 was 4.1, and has increased to 12.7 in this post-COVID-19 environment.

Mr. Grigg stated that more than 50% of the children in the Behavioral Health system at BRH have never seen a psychiatrist or a therapist. The socio-dynamics of the children are from all income brackets and race. BRH Behavioral Health has increased staffing, and continues to increase to meet the demand.

Self-reported factors include stress in the home due to parents who have lost a job, the stress of virtual school that did not go well, loss of social supports, loss of sports, and feelings of isolation. The Behavioral Health unit is also seeing substance use as a factor in some of these children. Mr. Grigg emphasized that the family unit is in crisis and parents are bringing children to the Emergency Department to see what can be done. They are hearing families consider whether a parent should quit their job or go to part-time in order to homeschool their children full-time, and try to absorb the financial impact.

Mr. Grigg added that in this same three-month period of April – June 2020, BRH Behavioral Health has seen 12 young adults raised in Juneau who left the State to attend college, and who arrived at the Emergency Department in crisis. Self-reports included worry over losing athletic scholarships and uncertainty over the ability to handle distance school in the fall due to COVID-19.

Mr. Botelho asked if BRH Behavioral Health is seeing a difference in the manifestations of the youth client, as historically it has been drug or alcohol related. Mr. Grigg replied that they are seeing an intensity in depression and anxiety alongside of substance use. They are each side effects of the other. Substance use often leads to depression and anxiety, and depression and anxiety often lead to substance use.

Mr. Botelho asked if what Juneau is experiencing mirrors what other communities are seeing, and if the Mental Health Trust is providing assistance to help deal with this wave of increased crises. Mr. Grigg replied that the Mental Health Trust is directly investing in communities, and BRH Behavioral Health is hearing of similar stories in other communities. He stated that the impacts of a crisis or trauma is often a delayed response in a population. While BRH Behavioral Health is experiencing impacts of COVID-19 today, their larger concern is the number of people in crisis three months, six months, and nine months from now.

Mr. Mertz asked if there is statistical data which gives an indication of every patient who presents at the hospital, how many more are suffering in similar ways who do not come for help. Mr. Grigg replied that national estimation is for every one patient who presents, there are three others who do not.

Mr. Mertz asked about BRH's billing resources: are they able to tap into COVID-19 funding, and are there any negative financial impacts at BRH? Mr. Grigg replied that mental health services are difficult to attribute directly to the virus, but more to the side effects of the virus. Therefore, BRH Behavioral Health is not tapping into COVID-19 assistance funds. However, they are in good shape due to reimbursements from Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurances, though there is a challenge to receive reimbursement at the cost of service, which often does not match up. BRH Behavioral Health is clear in their public relations that they have a sliding fee scale for families. Mr. Grigg stated the last thing he wants to see is a family deciding to forego seeing a psychiatrist because they feel they cannot afford it. BRH Behavioral Health has a program called Charity Care, which absorbs the costs that insurance does not cover for those in need. He added that when you have someone suffering from depression, a large bill will only make it worse, and that is something BRH avoids through this program.

Mr. Koelsch asked if Mr. Grigg interacts with the school system through contact with the principals or counselors. Mr. Grigg stated that he meets with Superintendent Weiss quarterly to discuss specific schools that are hot spots for incidents or drugs. He added it is important for him to stay engaged with the school district, because 315 children in the Juneau School District, which represents almost 7% of the population, are engaged in BRH's Outpatient Clinic.

Mr. Koelsch stated that he is concerned about the impact of teacher's decreased ability to identify children in crisis, due to the school district's limited in-person classroom setting this fall. He added that it would be much more difficult for teachers to identify and help children in need this year. Mr. Grigg agreed that this is concerning. He added that with the new school schedule this fall, the opportunity for a teacher to identify children in crisis will decrease by 60%.

Ms. Martinson asked if Mr. Grigg has seen any economic policies that would be helpful in situations like what BRH Behavioral Health is experiencing. Mr. Grigg replied that he has never seen anything like this, and he believes the whole country is trying to answer this question among many others. He stated that he is happy to provide input and information as policy discussions unfold to shed light on impacts from the behavioral health world.

Ms. Bell shared that, a few years ago, the Mental Health Trust funded a study that looks at the gaps in behavioral health services in Alaska by region. She stated she is happy to find this study and see if it can be helpful.

Mr. Forst asked what sort of outreach is happening to engage children and families who may not know where to go for help in this area. Mr. Grigg replied that they are working on a public relations campaign to provide a joint message with their Juneau partners, which include SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC), Juneau Youth Services (JYS), Juneau Alliance for Mental Health, Inc. (JAMHI), and Catholic Community Services (CCS). Mr. Grigg added that the biggest challenge of the public relations campaign is working to remove the stigma associated with reaching out for help. He added that he and the Medical Director for BRH Behavioral Health, Ms. Joanne Gartenberg, are on KINY every other Friday morning, speaking to the community.

Mr. Forst asked Mr. Grigg for his personal opinion regarding the impact of distance school, or two days a week versus five days a week of in-classroom learning. He asked if the risk of the virus outweighs the risk of all the other negatives we are seeing. Mr. Grigg replied that he is seeing different opinions on the topic. Some parents want a full-time virtual option, and others want a full-time in-school option. As a parent of an eighth-grader, he has concerns with virtual education as the teachers struggle to keep accountability. As he said prior, teachers are losing 60% of their opportunity to keep an eye on the children in their class and identify issues, both academically and emotionally, and work together to solve them.

## **Public Comment Matrix**

Ms. MacVay shared that public comment to the Task Force has greatly reduced. One new comment was received that advocated for a food production grant for \$238 thousand. She stated this is not a new idea, and includes elements such as increased freezing capacity. There has been much interest in the community for something like this. In the past, the Task Force has referred this to JEDC for follow-up.

Ms. Thomas suggested the Task Force take the next week to read all the public comments and re-examine the smaller ideas that have not yet taken priority.

## **Update on Active Legislation**

### *Business Stabilization Grant Phase 2*

Mr. Mertz stated that he sent the recommended changes adopted by the Task Force at the July 9 meeting to Mayor Weldon and Mr. Palmer. He thanked Mayor Weldon for taking the lead on writing the Ordinance. The recommendations will go into the packet for the Assembly Committee of the Whole on July 20. If the Assembly moves the Ordinance out of Committee that night, the public hearing will be held on August 3 with an opportunity for Assembly adoption.

## **Nonprofit Grant Program**

Ms. Thomas reported that the Nonprofit Grant program is being drafted for Ordinance, with most of the recommendations from the Task Force included. The Ordinance is scheduled to be discussed at the Assembly Committee of the Whole on July 20.

Ms. Thomas said that on July 10, there was notification that the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) collaborated with Alaska Community Foundation to issue up to \$35 million in CARES Act funding for social service nonprofits, with grant awards ranging from \$25 thousand to \$1 million through three rounds of funding. The DHSS press release states that "Grants will be prioritized based on the community impact and the organization's ability to carry out public health projects and will not be limited based on an organization's size, type of staff, or geographical location."

Ms. Skilbred shared that the program is similar to the AK CARES Grant fund, but only for nonprofits and faith-based organizations that provide critical services to Alaskans. She added that this program should not stifle progress to the CBJ Nonprofit Grant programs, because the CBJ program fills a gap that captures all nonprofits, and not just the ones doing social service work. Additionally, several small nonprofits are seeking funding in amounts that are less than \$25 thousand. Ms. Skilbred has reached out to several non-social service oriented nonprofits in Juneau to gauge interest in applying for the CBJ Nonprofit grant, and has received positive responses of intent amongst the arts community, sports community, and several organizations that engage children in extra-curricular activities.

## **Juneau ArtWorks Grant**

Mr. Mertz reported that Ms. DeCherney and Assembly Member Hale continue to work on the specifics of this program, and it is on the list of ordinance creations for Mr. Palmer. Once the Ordinance has been drafted, it will be introduced, discussed, and then set for public hearing.

## **PPE Grant**

Ms. MacVay reported no new updates from last week. The PPE Grant proposal was discussed at the Assembly Finance Committee meeting on July 8. She has sent out an inquiry to discover its status.

## **Infrastructure Bond Status**

Mr. Rogers shared that he met with Ms. Cynthia Weed, CBJ Bond Council at K&L Gates in Seattle, to discuss and draft an ordinance for consideration at the Assembly Committee of the Whole on July 20. The Ordinance is for one ballot measure, for \$15 million, financed over 25 years. The Ordinance includes \$5 million for school repairs, \$5 million for park improvements, and \$5 million for the extension of the West Douglas Road to water. Mr. Rogers has also contacted the City's financial advisor to discuss how this affects the mill rate. He stated that the Assembly plans to discuss this in great length on July 20. Some Assembly Members will desire a discussion about the general economic value of an infrastructure bond and others will desire a discussion about the specific projects included in the bond.

Mr. Koelsch asked Mr. Rogers to confirm that the \$15 million bond package is indeed just one ballot item, which Mr. Rogers confirmed. Mr. Rogers added that the Assembly could choose to present the bond package as three separate ballot items, if that is their will.

## **New Updates on Adopted ESTF Recommendations**

Ms. Thomas asked if there were any updates on the Rental Housing Assistance program. Ms. MacVay replied there were no updates.

## **Strategic Initiative Updates**

### *Workforce Development*

Ms. Martinson shared that she spoke with Mr. Pete Traxler, Executive Dean for Career Education at the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), about current work developments programs at the University, and ideas for others. The University currently has a nine-credit Behavioral Health program that accommodates up to 30 students. They also have a one-semester Cybersecurity program that accommodates up to 10 students, in partnership with Goldbelt. Additionally, UAS has degree programs in Nursing, EMT, Construction, and Maintenance that help to provide local businesses in Juneau with the workforce they need.

Ms. Martinson stated that she asked Mr. Traxler what the University would need to provide more programs like this, if resources were not a barrier. She was told that an economic survey of the workforce climate would be instrumental in understanding the need so they could work to develop more programs. They often hear things and suspect that a CDL program is needed for tourism, and that a culinary program is needed for people working with the cruise lines, but they have no real data to justify the creation of a new program.

Ms. Belton shared that Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA) has a CDL program, but it is in a transitional period. They have experienced issues identifying an instructor for the program. They are continuing recruiting and are hopeful to find one soon. Once they are able to hire an instructor, they intend to re-open the program for students and expand into heavy equipment operation. She stated that CCTHITA has recently applied for a \$150 thousand Economic Development CARES Act Assistance Grant, and perhaps Ms. Bell could assist in brainstorming ways they might help fund a feasibility study on this issue.

Ms. Bell stated there are also training gaps and needs related to childcare. She is currently looking at recent surveys from Southeast Conference and JEDC to see what information she can glean from them.

Ms. Martinson replied that Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (SEA-AEYC) has an 8-week intensive to certify people to work at daycare facilities, but space is limited and expansion could be an option.

Ms. Thomas suggested speaking with the unions in Juneau about their need for training.

### **Education and Childcare**

Ms. Martinson had another meeting with Superintendent Weiss, Ms. Lyons, Mr. Holst, Assembly Member Jones, Mr. Botelho, and Mr. Koelsch. The intent of the meeting was to see how the Task Force could fill the gap and mitigate the impacts of the Juneau School District's schedule. She shared that the School District recently adopted a mask mandate for everyone entering school premises. The School District is currently creating an inventory of their resources. She stated that RALLY could currently accommodate 70-75 children, which equals the needs of teachers for their own children. The School District is looking at ways to expand RALLY. Current barriers include space, staffing, and funding.

Ms. Martinson added there are conversations about expanding the Emergency Family Medical Leave Act (EFMLA) so parents can stay home with their children when they are not in school. She hopes the fact-finding group can assist with developing a menu of options for families to choose from, with some options that would allow parents to go back to work full-time. Ms. Martinson asked for the Task Force's approval to begin an inventory of empty spaces in Juneau that may be used for childcare.

Mr. Mertz stated that the school district seems intent on moving forward with their plan of partial in-school learning and partial distance learning. He added there might still be ways to provide educational opportunities and oversight to children when they are not in school. For example, he asked Ms. Martinson's opinion on using Centennial Hall or the libraries to provide more space for expanding the education coverage than the limited schedule provides. He added that daycare is great, but it is not educational and children of all ages need help staying on track academically.

Ms. Martinson replied that Superintendent Weiss has ensured that special needs children receive priority for full-time school. Her hope is to expand upon that. Ms. Martinson stated that as she understands it, in-school instruction would focus on math, reading, and core subjects, while the at-home distance curriculum will focus on art and physical education. She added that Mayor Botelho has some good ideas on educational care by looking at how substitute teachers, students in the Master Apprenticeship Program (MAP), and retired teachers may step in and help with tutoring and supervision.

Mr. Mertz replied that we needed to protect the educational interests of all children, in addition to the high-needs children.

Ms. Thomas reminded the Task Force to keep their scope in mind when discussing this topic and focus on the economic impacts of the situation.

Ms. Bell stated that she would continue researching ways to help bridge this discussion and look into facilities that could help to augment what the school district is doing.

**ACTION ITEM:** The Task Force approved Ms. Martinson's request to begin an inventory of spaces in Juneau that can be used to compliment the school district's plans.

### **Homelessness**

Ms. Thomas shared that the Planning Commission approved the Conditional Use Permit for the Glory Hall's new location on July 14. She added that the Assembly has approved the solicitation of a building the CBJ could purchase to be used as a warming shelter.

### **Good of the Order**

Mr. Forst sees an opportunity for short-term funding for a large marketing campaign that will inform the community of the counseling, and mental and behavioral health services, offered in the community for children and parents.

Ms. Bell reminded the Task Force of the inter-relation of topics. She added that nonprofits not only are employers, but also enrich our community. All the individual small pieces the Task Force is discussing are what makes Juneau our home.

Mr. Koelsch shared that while he was walking around with his grandchildren the other day, he spoke to many of the business owners in town, gathering some anecdotal data about the CBJ Business Grant program. A main reason that businesses chose not to apply for the program was the proprietary information they needed to provide in the application process.

Mr. Mertz directed the attention of the Task Force to the breaking news released earlier that day. The CDC has issued the No Sail Order to extend to September 30. He can easily see this being extended further, and it is starting to cause concern about the fate of the 2021 cruise season.

Ms. Thomas stated that she spoke at the Rotary this morning at 7 a.m. and was asked two specific questions:

1. One question was about the testing capabilities in Juneau for Southeast residents.
2. The other question was about her ideas on the best way to spend the rest of the CARES funding. She replied that the Assembly is working on that question currently.

Ms. Thomas added that childcare is still an incredibly important topic, as it is critical for keeping businesses operating.

### **Adjournment**

At 4:35 p.m., the meeting was adjourned.

### **Appointed Task Force Members**

Max Mertz, Co-Chair • Linda Thomas, Co-Chair • Susan Bell • Theresa Belton • Bruce Botelho

Eric Forst • Ken Koelsch • Lauren MacVay • Laura Martinson • Terra Peters