



Economic Stabilization Task Force

Appointed by the City & Borough of Juneau's Mayor
Meeting Minutes from August 6, 2020

Call to Order

The Economic Stabilization Task Force meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Ms. Thomas.

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

Task Force Members Absent: Theresa Belton

Staff Present: CDD Administrative Officer, Brenwynne Grigg; and, CBJ Finance Director, Jeff Rogers

CBJ Assembly Members Present: Mayor Beth Weldon and Loren Jones

Special Guest Speakers: None

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved with no changes.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: by Mr. Mertz to adopt the Economic Stabilization Task Force minutes from the July 30 meeting. Ms. MacVay seconded the motion.

Hearing no objections, the motion was approved.

Education and Childcare

Ms. Martinson shared that the Education and Childcare Fact-Finding Group has been meeting for some weeks with Juneau School District (JSD) Superintendent, Bridget Weiss; Executive Director of Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (SEA-AEYC), Joy Lyon; Assembly Member Loren Jones; and other representatives of the education and childcare industries. The school district has moved to a Risk Level Orange, which means school will begin with 100% virtual education. The school district will reassess this decision around Labor Day and in regular intervals thereafter. The decision for students to participate in school on school property versus participating virtually in their homes is based on the risk level. Once the district is able to reintegrate students back into the classroom, they will begin slowly, prioritizing their high-risk students.

Ms. Martinson presented the K-12 Pandemic Childcare Recommendations of the Education and Childcare Fact-Finding Group to the Task Force. The primary recommendation of the fact-finding group is to appropriate CARES Act funds to support a short-term K-12 Childcare Coordinator position. Ms. Martinson emphasized Section A of the recommendation as perhaps the most important task, to create a childcare program for school-aged children for the duration of the pandemic.

The school district released a survey a few weeks ago to the parents of enrolled children. Approximately 1,300 families responded, which represents 2,500 students of the 4,700 total students in the school district. Based on the results of the survey, approximately 66% of Juneau families reported that reduced or eliminated in-person instruction for students will create a hardship for their family. Over 95% of families who responded have at least one member of their household in Juneau's workforce and must continue to earn enough income to support their family needs. Additionally, 30% of parents reported that it is likely or highly likely that an adult will have to quit their job to provide childcare for their children.

Ms. Martinson shared that the youngest children who are unable to stay home alone are their highest priority. Of the survey respondents, 1,155 are able to have a parent at home to watch their children. The RALLY childcare program is able to care for 126 children, and the Central Council of Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of America (CCTHITA) have a Family Care Program that is able to care for 80 children. This leaves 739 children in Kindergarten through 5th grade who need childcare. However, these numbers only represent the portion of families who responded to the survey, and it is expected that the need is greater.

Childcare Coordinator Implementation Recommendation 1

Create a childcare program for school-aged children for the duration of the pandemic. Priority should be given to the youngest children first. Providing care for K-5 aged children is imperative to allow parents to remain in the workforce, and to maximize structured, in-person development. Given that students are already receiving distance education through JSD, the intent of this program should be to safely care for children during their parent's workday.

Ms. Martinson referenced possible locations for childcare services as reported by Ms. Cosgrove at the July 30 Economic Stabilization Task Force meeting. Staffing the childcare facilities will be a challenge, but they would like to prioritize the recruitment of retired teachers, substitute teachers, and daycare workers who may not be working at this time.

Ms. Martinson continued, stating that if employers are able to find the space to facilitate on-site childcare for their employees, it would be more efficient and they would not have to meet the same licensing requirements as other childcare centers, because the parents are on-site at their jobs.

Childcare Coordinator Implementation Recommendation 4

Provide financial and implementation support to employers who choose to offer on-site childcare. Based on the DHSS childcare cost assessment, a subsidy of \$350 per-month per-child should be created for employers who offer on-site or off-site informal child supervision with

connection to school instruction assignments. Either may be in association with other employers. Based on JSD survey responses, the potential demand for onsite employer provided care would accommodate approximately 120 children districtwide.

Ms. Martinson also reported that survey results showed an interest in creating family pods to form tight bubbles of children and parents. This way, parents only need to take one day off from work each week if they rotate childcare responsibilities.

Childcare Coordinator Implementation Recommendation 5

Based on JSD survey responses, interest in family pods to provide “bubbles” of care could potentially serve up to 200 K-5 aged pupils. Structural, curriculum, and organizational support for these families should be provided through the childcare coordinator.

Ms. Martinson asked the Task Force to recommend the Education and Childcare Fact-Finding Groups recommendations to the Assembly.

Mr. Koelsch, a member of the fact-finding group, stated that the recommendations outlined in the Task Force packet are more general in nature, due to the uncertainty around the school semester. He recommends planning for an entire year of 100% virtual learning just in case it turns out to be this scenario. He asked if a priority should be an education component for the childcare facilities or just a safe place for the children.

Ms. MacVay suggested the childcare coordinator, if funded, could provide counsel to businesses on setting up of an on-site childcare space. Additionally, they could assist small businesses that are close in proximity in collaborating where it would make sense.

Ms. MacVay was also interested in the cost of insurance and increased liability if a business were to provide on-site childcare. She asked what protections or considerations exist for this, suggesting that a Childcare Coordinator could research this and have the information available to businesses.

Ms. Martinson shared that she envisioned a packet of information for businesses that answers many of those initial questions, and the Childcare Coordinator could create this packet. She suggested that \$350 per student, per month, in assistance to businesses may not be enough to cover the costs, and there needs to be more research on that matter.

Mr. Botelho, also a member of the fact-finding group, stated that he imagined the Childcare Coordinator would work at a higher level to match business to each other for working together to spread the financial burden. He emphasized the need for a dedicated coordinator, or even a team of people, to implement this program.

Mr. Mertz thanked Ms. Martinson, Mr. Botelho, and Mr. Koelsch for all their work on this topic. He expressed his support for a Childcare Coordinator position. He added that the report has a lot of focus

on the Kindergarten through 5th grade levels, and asked what consideration has been made for middle and high school students?

Ms. Martinson stated the fact-finding group began by discussing the topic broadly then zeroed in on the Kindergarten through 5th grade levels as the highest need. They have discussed mentorship programs for high school children. The model for middle school children will likely look similar to the Kindergarten – 5th grade model, but with some age appropriate modifications. She added that Ms. Jordan Nigro at Zak Gordon Youth Center is coordinating with Discovery Southeast to see what they can provide during the school year.

Mr. Botelho expressed the importance of bringing together all the organizations in Juneau that serve youth, to see what they can offer between them. He added there is probably a role for sports programs as well.

Mr. Mertz asked if middle and high school students may occupy school buildings with supervision, or if they are hoping to use churches and youth centers.

Mr. Botelho stated that as he understands it, school buildings are not available because teachers are expected to run their virtual classes from their classrooms.

Mr. Mertz expressed approval of the packet idea for businesses, suggesting it might also include information around tax credits.

Mr. Forst suggested looking into a group insurance policy for on-site childcare coverage that can incorporate every business participating in the initiative, as a way to simplify the process and ease the financial burden.

Ms. Cosgrove, EOC Incident Commander and Deputy City Manager stated that the Task Force has produced a lot of good work in examining the issues and brainstorming potential solutions for exploration. She added there are many details that go into setting up a program like this and it is complex. She agrees that if the Assembly chooses to pursue this path, there will need to be dedicated staff to put toward the effort – one person to oversee the efforts and overall focus of the program and a team to provide pieces of support and assistance. She added that Mr. Watt, City Manager, spoke to the Assembly at their Finance Committee meeting on August 5 about the education and childcare issue, so the Assembly is expecting something from the Task Force.

Ms. Thomas stated that as a matter of Task Force scope, the Task Force cares about economic stabilization, and her understanding is that the school district is focused on the education of students. However, the Task Force is focused on keeping the parents employed and able to work so the economy can function well during this time. She believes this recommendation is well suited to provide the Assembly an actionable item and further develop the conversation.

Mr. Botelho asked Ms. Cosgrove about the Assembly timeline were the Task Force to make a formal recommendation at the meeting today. Ms. Cosgrove replied that they have a Committee of the Whole scheduled for Monday, August 10. There are no Assembly meetings scheduled the week of August 17, and there is a Regular Assembly meeting on August 24.

MOTION: by Ms. MacVay to move the K-12 Pandemic Childcare Recommendations forward to the Assembly with proposed operational considerations as outlined in the memo. Ms. Bell seconded the motion.

OBJECTION: by Mr. Botelho for the purposes for discussion.

Mr. Botelho stated his enthusiasm for the staffing outlined in the recommendation, but he expressed caution with the Task Force prescribing a method for how the Assembly should manage the details. He suggested a motion that specifically states a staffing position for the K-12 childcare issue and provide the fact-finding groups recommendations as a supplemental of suggestions.

Ms. Thomas asked if an agreeable motion might be to appropriate CARES Act funds to create a Childcare Coordinator position.

Mr. Mertz stated that he feels as Mr. Botelho does, and would like to see a motion that includes hiring a position to handle this issue but continued that this could be a CBJ position or a private sector position. For example, a nonprofit or two may have capacity and be well suited to stand up an employer based childcare program. He suggested providing the Assembly many options on how to deal with this very broad and complex problem.

WITHDRAWAL OF MOTION: Ms. MacVay withdrew her former motion.

MOTION: by Mr. Botelho requesting the Assembly direct city staff to coordinate a comprehensive childcare strategy for Juneau in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. MacVay seconded that motion.

DISCUSSION

Ms. Bell and Ms. Martinson spoke in favor of sharing a report summarizing the information in the fact-finding group's recommendation to the Task Force. Mr. Botelho asked that the motion be accompanied by the report. Mr. Mertz suggested a brief cover page written by the fact-finding group summarizing the Task Force's discussion regarding this motion. Mr. Forst agreed and asked that the cover letter include a statement that the position may be suited to the private sector or a nonprofit.

Ms. Thomas asked the fact-finding group members to be present at the Assembly Committee of the Whole on Monday, August 10 to speak to the matter.

Mr. Mertz stated that to be clear, the Task Force is empowering the fact-finding group to write the cover letter for the motion. There was no disagreement among Task Force members.

Mr. Koelsch asked for clarification on whether this motion is to address the broader childcare issue in the CBJ or just in response to COVID-19 and how it is affecting the schools.

Mr. Mertz suggested including the first paragraph of the fact-finding groups recommendation so that it is clear the motion is specific to the pandemic. The first paragraph states:

Driven by the Covid-19 pandemic, Juneau's schools will be operating on a schedule in which pupils attend classes only part-time. To mitigate the economic impacts of this schedule on working parents and employers, the Economic Stability Task Force (ESTF) urges the immediate development of adequate childcare alternatives that would remain in place for the duration of the pandemic. The recommendations below are based on information gathered from stakeholders in the community including The Juneau School District (JSD), parents, The Juneau School Board, Southeast Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC), The Juneau Chamber of Commerce, and Tlingit & Haida Central Council.

Hearing no objections, the motion was approved.

Role of Task Force with Legislation Adopted

Ms. Thomas shared some examples of the work the Economic Stabilization Task Force has accomplished and has been assigned various grant administrators since the Task Force inception in April 2020.

- The Task Force worked on Rental Housing Assistance and Ms. MacVay continues to collaborate with Alaska Housing Development Corporation (AHDC) on program effectiveness.
- The Business Stabilization Phase 1 Grant program is almost complete, with Task Force members providing many hours of hands on assistance in the development of the administrative components to the program in coordination with Juneau Economic Development Council (JEDC).
- The Nonprofit Sustainability Grant program just passed at the Assembly level. The Juneau Community Foundation is the grant administrator, and Ms. Thomas and Ms. Skilbred worked at a high level to develop parameters for the program.
- Juneau ArtWorks appears to be moving forward and with grant administration by the Juneau Arts and Humanities Council (JAHC).

Ms. Thomas suggested a Task Force discussion of the groups' role in the administration of programs as initiatives move forward. She proposes that once the Task Force makes a recommendation to the Assembly, their role is to respond to Assembly questions. After Assembly adoption of a recommendation or ordinance, she suggests the Task Force do not involve themselves in the administration of a program unless requested to do so by the Mayor or the Assembly. However, she recommends the Task Force be included in updates and status reports as they consider future recommendations.

Ms. Thomas recommends this as a way to free time to address the future economic landscape and prevent potential conflict of interest issues. She asked the Task Force if there is any disagreement.

Ms. Bell clarified that their involvement with JEDC has been to communicate in a way that informs recommendations for the Business Stabilization Grant Phases 2 and 3.

Mr. Mertz stated that the Task Force has acted on other things not mentioned as well in the examples given by Ms. Thomas.

Ms. Thomas affirmed both statements and said she will draft this recommendation into a form to provide to the Task Force at their next meeting on Thursday, August 13.

Summary Update Report of Significant Action Items and Recommendations to the Assembly

Ms. Thomas shared that the Task Force is four months into their six-month charge from the Mayor. She proposed that someone draft a simple summary report of significant action items and recommendations, so they have a report on outcomes to provide to the Assembly. This will be further discussed at the next meeting.

Open Legislative items CARES Act

PPE Grant Program

Ms. MacVay shared that the Business Safety Ordinance was presented to the Assembly Finance Committee on August 5. She presented an overview of the program to the Assembly and there was some discussion. Assembly member Carole Triem, who was the Assembly sponsor of the program, stated that the landscape has changed since the original idea and she no longer considers this the best use of funds. Other Assembly members agreed. The ordinance was withdrawn from consideration.

Mr. Koelsch stated that the CBJ recently began giving away cloth masks and the discussion of this program has had wonderful outcomes, even if it did not result in legislation.

Ms. Martinson said that she knows of many businesses who could use the reimbursements provided from this program, as they have invested and continue to invest substantial amounts erecting contact barriers, providing sanitizer and masks, and additional cleaning protocols. She asked what caused the Assembly to change their minds.

Ms. MacVay shared that in spite of the investments by businesses, the average size of the grants, being \$1 to \$5 thousand, made the program expensive to administer. She suggested that perhaps other programs could cover these investments, but if not, there is a gap.

Mr. Mertz stated that originally, the program was supporting and incentivizing a public policy goal. In the period of time it has taken for the program to reach the ordinance level, most of the public policy goals have been met. Then, the intent of the program becomes a question of whether or not to reimburse businesses for the retrofits they have made to operate in this new environment. He feels that was not enough of a reason to expend the funds at this time without the public policy goal beneath it. Additionally, there was little awareness or public outreach on this program.

Juneau ArtWorks

Mr. Mertz shared that the Juneau ArtWorks Grant program was discussed at the Assembly Finance Committee meeting on August 5, and was advanced to the full Assembly, with a reduction in funding from \$500 thousand to \$300 thousand. He reminded the Task Force that their original proposal was for \$250 thousand. At the meeting, Assembly member Michelle Hale felt that \$300 thousand was reasonable. There were no other changes to the program.

Phase 2 of Nonprofit Grants

Ms. Thomas shared that the Task Force recommended the Assembly set aside \$3 million in addition to the \$3 million in Phase 1 of the Nonprofit Sustainability Grant program. The intent for the additional \$3 million was specifically for social service nonprofit programs. The Task Force made this recommendation prior to the State of Alaska allotting an estimated \$37 million in funding for nonprofit agencies, administered by the Alaska Community Foundation. As it stands, it seems there are other options for nonprofit programs in Juneau to receive funding, but we will know more of the opportunities in another week or two.

Action Items and Fact-Finding Reports Stemming from Public Comment Matrix

Ms. MacVay asked the Task Force for recommendations on next steps. At their July 30 meeting, she highlighted various areas of focus, which Ms. Grigg captured in the minutes. She added there are a few follow-ups due and asked how members wanted to proceed.

Ms. Thomas volunteered to follow up with Task Force members individually to see if they are able to move forward on various topics.

Mr. Mertz stated that he has an update on fisheries but can report out at the next meeting.

Ms. MacVay stated there was one new public comment received that she forwarded to Mr. Holst at JEDC and Mr. Palmer at CBJ. The comment was around concern for disadvantage businesses.

Ms. Thomas replied that CBJ grant programs have been open and available to all businesses, but the comment should have an administrative response from the CBJ or JEDC.

Mr. Botelho added that he is not aware of anything in the grants system that disadvantages people. He stated there is a lot of focus on the Juneau Human Rights Commission and they are looking closely at programs and their administration. He expressed interest if there is something specific about the program that does indeed disadvantage people, unknowingly. He stated it is important for the Task Force to respond to this.

Mr. Mertz stated that the programs do not allow for discrimination due to their design, as they are centered on costs incurred and measurable impacts from a financial perspective.

Mr. Koelsch recommended a coordinated response with CBJ Law Department so that phrasing is worded in a way that accurately represents their intent.

Ms. Thomas feels the Task Force should acknowledge they have received the correspondence and that the CBJ will provide a response.

ACTION ITEM: Mr. Botelho will work with city staff and JEDC to coordinate a response to the public comment received by Ibn Bailey on August 5, 2020.

Strategic Initiatives Action Items and Fact-Finding Group Reports

Ms. Bell referenced the Strategic Initiatives Work Session summary that captured discussion at a high level. From that, three workgroups were developed addressing homelessness; education and childcare, which was discussed at the beginning of this meeting; and, workforce development. Another important priority coming out of that work session was to continue advocating for the timely testing of COVID-19. Ms. Bell asked Ms. Thomas to update the group on the homelessness topic.

Homelessness

Ms. Thomas shared that many ideas on this topic came from the Strategic Initiatives Work Session, but most of the problems around homelessness are not within the scope of the Task Force. However, there are two issues she feels falls within the Task Force charge and asked for support in moving forward on these areas. These areas include recommendations to the Assembly on ways to improve the downtown economy during this time, and how the culture of the downtown is presenting safety and economic problems. One recommendation is to fund the Glory Hall and other programs that help people at risk. She understands there may be funding from the State for this purpose and will speak with the Glory Hall to obtain more information.

Ms. Thomas prioritized activities that improve the downtown economy and promote increased business, such as a sales tax-free holiday and curbside pickup parking designations. The Assembly Finance Committee discussed the idea of a sales tax-free holiday at their meeting on August 5.

Mr. Mertz shared the idea that if changes are made by Congress to allow CARES Act money to be used to replace lost municipal revenue, this would open that funding up for things that are currently prohibited by the CARES Act. He suggested the Glory Hall's request for \$1.5 million could fall into this category.

Ms. Thomas replied that the State of Alaska Nonprofit Grant is another potential funding source for the Glory Hall.

Workforce Development and Training

Ms. Bell recalled statements made by Ms. Belton at the July 30 meeting around CCTHITA's interest in a study around community workforce needs in hopes of offering targeted training programs to fill those needs. She recalled the University of Alaska Southeast is also interested in this information. Ms. Belton asked for assistance from the Task force in developing the scope of work for the study, and CCTHITA has committed to funding this need. This task is moving forward.

Timely COVID-19 Testing

Ms. Bell asked the Task Force how it could amplify the need for timelier COVID-19 testing. Ms. Thomas replied that she feels it has been amplified by the recent situation experienced by UnCruise Adventures. She added the Mr. Watt spoke at the Assembly Finance Committee meeting on August 5, about how the process has been bifurcated between Bartlett Regional Hospital and another group, in looking at how to cover community needs and not just hospital needs.

Ms. Martinson shared that EOC Planning Section Chief, Mr. Barr, spoke about a new type of test coming online in November or December 2020 that can test everyone every day. She expressed optimism that this could help with our testing situation in Juneau.

Good of the Order

Mr. Koelsch commented that just as we begin our cruise ship season in Juneau with UnCruise Adventures, it once again abruptly ends. He added that the ship tried to do everything correctly and they just found themselves in a bad situation.

Mr. Koelsch encourage the Task Force to keep their focus on the Glory Hall and social service opportunities in Juneau. He shared that he was downtown with his grandchildren one night and the situation was out of control from his perspective. He emphasized the need for help in assisting the Glory Hall to moving forward. He looks forward to Ms. Thomas' update on this topic next week.

Adjournment

At 5:21 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