



# Economic Stabilization Task Force

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Appointed by the City & Borough of Juneau's Mayor  
Meeting Minutes from November 9, 2020

## **Call to Order**

The Economic Stabilization Task Force meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by Mr. Mertz.

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

Task Force Members Absent: Susan Bell and Linda Thomas

Staff Present: Planning Section Chief for Emergency Operations Center, Robert Barr; CBJ Deputy City Manager, Mila Cosgrove; CDD Administrative Officer, Brenwynne Grigg; and CBJ Finance Director, Jeff Rogers

CBJ Assembly Members Present: Mayor Beth Weldon, Loren Jones, and Gregory Smith

Special Guest Speakers: Chief Behavioral Health Officer of Bartlett Regional Hospital, Bradley Grigg; and, Executive Director of Catholic Community Services, Erin Walker-Tolles.

## **Approval of Agenda**

Mr. Mertz asked for any changes to the agenda.

Ms. Martinson asked to add a brief cruise industry update after Mr. Rogers' finance updates. Mr. Mertz asked that Ms. Walker-Tolles give an update on the Housing Assistance Grant after Mr. Griggs' update on Children's Mental Health.

**MOTION:** Mr. Mertz asked for any objections to changes made to the agenda.

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

## **Approval of Minutes**

**MOTION:** by Mr. Forst to approve the Economic Stabilization Task Force meeting minutes from October 8, 2020. Ms. Peters seconded the motion.

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

## **Impacts of COVID-19 on Children's Mental and Behavioral Health**

Mr. Mertz introduced Mr. Bradley Grigg, Chief Behavioral Health Office at Bartlett Regional Hospital (BRH), and asked him to update the Task Force on trends in children's mental and behavioral health since his last visit in August.

Mr. Grigg stated that the data brought before the Task Force last August has been updated to include FY21 data from quarter 1, which is July through September of 2020. BRH is continuing to compare the first nine months pre-shutdown, which BRH is now calling pre-COVID, to six full months of COVID activity. Bartlett Regional Hospital is continuing to see an uptick in Emergency Department (ED) presentations for children, families, and adults. Teenagers are feeling the stress of COVID and its impacts at home, and do not have the tools to effectively manage that stress in ways that many adults do. Self-reports of stress-inducing factors include stress in the home, at work, at school, and with finances. From April – September 2020, 52 children age 13 and under presented in the ED compared to just six children the nine-months prior. In the 14 – 17 year age bracket, 68 children presented in the ED from in the six-months, post-COVID, compared to 33 children in the nine-months prior. The youngest child presenting in the ED was five-years-old. The most common age presenting during this time is 13-years-old. The middle school age seems to be the most seriously impacted by this time.

Mr. Grigg also stated that BRH is seeing an uptick in new patients receiving Psychiatric Outpatient Services. Adults receiving psychiatric outpatient services for the first time went from a monthly average of six in the nine-months, pre-COVID, to 10 in July through September 2020. Children receiving psychiatric outpatient services for the first time went from a monthly average of four, pre-COVID, to almost 16 in July through September 2020. This data only represents what BRH is experiencing and does not include services being offered through SEARHC, Front Street Clinic, JAMHI, Juneau Youth Services, or other agencies in Juneau. Most of the new patients are citing COVID as a factor for why they are seeking services. However, many of the adults are saying the Housing Assistance program is offering some relief and they are grateful for it. BRH staff are assisting patients with applications for this housing assistance so that the process is not too overwhelming for them.

The third data point Mr. Grigg presented on reflects suicide attempts in children. In the nine-months prior to COVID, there were three suicide attempts by children ages 17 and younger. In the six-month period post-COVID, there have been 12 suicide attempts by that same age bracket. Five suicide attempts occurred in minors between the ages of 14 – 17, and seven suicide attempts occurred in those ages 13 and under. Mr. Grigg expressed remorse over this data point, noting that this statistic crosses all walks of socio-economic and cultural status. Families are self-reporting their children struggling with school and distance learning, and struggling with no extra-curricular activities or social life. Even if those activities are available, the fear and worry of those choosing not to participate are negatively affecting these children. BRH Mental and Behavioral Health is experiencing its own surge with people and families in crisis due to the effects of COVID.

Ms. MacVay asked Mr. Grigg to speak about the work with the School District and what outreach they might be doing to let children know that their feelings are valid, and that their parents are aware that the children's struggles are valid. She spoke about the tendency sometimes to downplay or marginalize things that are happening, and said perhaps it is time to start having conversations about this. Mr. Grigg replied that currently, the BRH Psychiatric Clinic is serving 6% of the school district in outpatient services, which is about double the national average. He is receiving questions from coaches on what they should do when they notice a kid that is struggling. Mr. Grigg stated he is speaking with Dr. Weiss on how to communicate this data so that families know they are not alone. Additionally, he hopes to have conversations on a toolkit for teachers, coaches, and any adult who is in a child's life, so they can identify secondary trauma and stress in a child.

Mr. Botelho asked if Mr. Grigg knew how many deaths by suicide have occurred over the last 6 months to a year. Mr. Grigg replied that since July 2020, there have been five deaths by suicide, with one victim under the age of 18.

Mr. Mertz noted the growth in children's visits to the ED and asked how the routine or lack of routine is

affecting these children. For example, how much of this stress is caused by children being unable engage in their normal activities? Could reinstating a routine and sense of normalcy be helpful? Mr. Grigg replied that the biggest stressor for children and young people is the lack of normalcy of a social life: being unable to play sports or hang out with their friends, or perhaps swim club happening but then being canceled for a week and then back on and back off again. The lack of normalcy, structure, routine, and social life is really wearing children down. Children do not have the ability to adapt to these changes as quickly as adults do, and even adults are struggling.

Mr. Mertz asked if BRH is able to staff these services to meet the need in the community. Mr. Grigg replied that three years ago, BRH has seven masters-level and licensed Behavioral Health Clinicians on campus. As of today, BRH has twenty masters-level and licensed Behavioral Health Clinicians, five of which have been hired in the last six months. The State of Alaska has recently funded BRH to continue expanding the capacity for behavioral and mental health work in the ED. BRH is addressing the challenge of supporting a family in crisis immediately following a visit to the ED. One Behavioral Health Clinician and two Youth and Family Navigators were recently hired to support the family in their home for the following five days to get through the initial crisis, connect them with community-based services, and provide other guidance and coping skills to stabilize the family unit. The new staff start their orientation on November 16, and services will begin on November 30.

Ms. Martinson asked if BRH needs anything in terms of support or funding to facilitate the programs, or anything they wished they had. Mr. Grigg replied that their next step is to gather leaders from the School District to talk through this issue and examine how to equip coaches, teachers, and mentors to help children when they are with them.

#### **Update from Erin Walker-Tolles on Housing and Utility Assistance Grant**

Mr. Mertz asked Ms. Erin Walker-Tolles, Executive Director of Catholic Community Services (CCS), to give an update on the status of the Housing and Utility Assistance Grant program. Ms. Walker-Tolles shared they have received 1,000 applications to date, receiving 400 applications on day one and 350 applications on day two. CCS was pleased with the publicity efforts; it seemed to work. However, recently, they are only receiving a few applications a day, so CCS is considering doing another publicity push because of concern that they may be unable to expend all the funds. Of the applications received, 42% were deemed eligible based on the description of impact, while 15% were deemed ineligible. Another 45% of application needed follow-up, mostly due to a vague description of impact and the inability to connect it to COVID. For example, many people will describe their circumstance as unemployment, instead of specifying they are unemployed because they were laid off due to COVID. There are many applications from those who are in financial distress, but that distress is not always due to COVID-related matters. Many retirees are mentioning a financial strain due to the increase in cost of living, but this is not a COVID qualifier. CCS is following the self-attestation guidance in the Ordinance, but it must hear from individuals that their distress is directly related to COVID. CCS is referring applicants to partner agencies across the community if they are determined ineligible.

Mr. Botelho asked about the level of outreach to communities whose first language is not English, such as the Filipino and Latino communities. Ms. Walker-Tolles replied that they are using the networks they have. She added that the faith community is instrumental in reaching that population; they have promoted the program through the inter-faith council and Filipino community, in addition to the posters distributed all over town and the AEL&P advertisements mailed to each household. Mr. Botelho followed up and encouraged Ms. Walker-Tolles to print materials in Spanish and Tagalog to make this program more accessible to those members of the community.

Mr. Forst asked if there has been outreach to apartment and trailer park managers. He also encouraged the flyers to be printed in additional languages to increase accessibility. Ms. Walker-Tolles replied that if the CBJ can have the flyers printed in those additional languages, she is happy to distribute them. She added they have used

Alaska Finance Housing Corporation (AHFC) and Alaska Housing Development Corporation (AHDC) to expand outreach, because that is where people go when they are in need of assistance to pay their rent. Additionally, there was a long list of individuals who were directly contacted about the program. AHDC, AHFC, and the Juneau Coalition on Housing and Homelessness were relied on to contact the landlords and others who might know people who can benefit from this program.

Mr. Mertz asked how many applicants are receiving the full grant amount, and if they are experiencing issues with the income cap. Ms. Walker-Tolles replied they have not experienced issues with the income cap as of yet, though some have asked questions about household structure qualifications. For example, they wanted to know if their elderly parent's income was included as a household income if they were living in their basement or attached apartment.

Mr. Mertz said that Ketchikan increased their income threshold to a higher amount and had many additional applications because people had formerly self-excluded themselves. Ms. Walker-Tolles stated that she is concerned they will be unable to expend all the funds and does not see how it can hurt to expand that income cap. She also feels that the Individual Assistance Program being considered by the Assembly will help fill some gaps on the lower income spectrum as well.

Ms. MacVay stated there are many mortgages for which \$1,500 is not enough to cover even one payment. She advocated for broadening the scope and asked if they have an idea of what the ceiling is on a monthly payment they are unable to satisfy. Ms. Walker-Tolles replied that if the program covers expenses from August to December, then this equates to a mortgage payment of \$300 per month, which is very low. The program is not examining how much an applicant has lost in income or examining how much they are able to pay. Instead, the program is trying to determine how applicants can be eligible for the maximum amount through the program. Most applicants are receiving the full benefit amount. The only applicants receiving less are those who are paying very limited utilities, due to this being included in their rent. In this situation, the program will pay for internet expenses, for example. CCS is tracking monthly housing and utility expenses, so this data is available to us.

Ms. MacVay stated that for some people, \$1,500 is a drop in the bucket, and suggested that the program could be expanded to include a full mortgage payment on the higher end to optimize use of the funds. Ms. Walker-Tolles replied that it would not be difficult to go back and confirm monthly housing expenses and double it expend more of the funds.

Ms. Walker-Tolles stated that CCS is receiving many calls from people who do not qualify for this grant because they have not experienced harm that can be closely linked to COVID, but have experienced harm and are financially on the edge. For example, their adult public assistance was reduced and now they cannot pay their bills. Alternatively, someone was unemployed at the start of the pandemic and they still cannot find a job because the job market has declined because of COVID.

The application period for the Housing and Utility Assistance Grant program closes on December 12, 2020.

### **Updated CARES Act Funding Pie Chart and Finance Discussion**

Mr. Rogers shared an updated pie chart displaying the allocation of CARES Act funding. The chart was revised to remove an additional \$1 million that was thought might be needed by the Housing Assistance Program. Pending legislation continues to include:

- \$2 million for Economic Stimulus Grants;
- \$2.3 million for the Economic Hardship Business Grants;
- \$300 thousand for Family Promise;
- \$30 thousand for a supplemental to the Arts Sustainability Grant; and,

- \$73.1 thousand for FY21 Eaglecrest COVID-19 Related Operations.

To date, \$48,209,054.00 has been obligated, \$4,703,100.00 is pending, and \$298,788 of the CARES Act funding remains.

Mr. Rogers stated that it should not be the goal of programs to spend every penny of funding if they are struggling to do so. There are CBJ operations that are eligible for CARES Act funding that can be reimbursed if there are funds leftover. The CBJ is experiencing large deficits due to COVID and anything leftover can help to support CBJ COVID-related expenditures.

### **November 10 Finance Committee Agenda Update and Draft Ordinances**

Mr. Rogers shared the Assembly Finance Committee meets on Tuesday, November 10. They will discuss the remaining pending legislation for CARES Act funding, and receive updates from the School District on RALLY funds, the Nonprofit Sustainability Grant, and the Housing Assistance Program. Most of the pending legislation will receive a public hearing on November 16 or 23.

Mr. Mertz stated that numbers are in from quarterly tax returns and asked Mr. Rogers to share insight from what they are seeing and how that might impact the average grant amounts and eligible businesses in relation to the Extreme Hardship Business Grant.

Mr. Rogers shared a spreadsheet displaying anonymized 2019 Quarter 3 business tax data compared with 2020 Quarter 3 business tax data. He highlighted there are many micro-businesses that are most probably side-gigs that would be eligible for a \$500 grant award. These micro-businesses would only receive the \$500 grant due to a minimum amount to make it worth the administrative effort, because when using the mathematical formula accounting for loss, the result is less than \$100. This effectively reduces the awards for businesses that provide a main source of income for the owner and jobs for Juneau residents. When examining the year-over-year loss, there is a natural break point at around \$25 thousand, which he recommends the Task Force consider as a minimum loss requirement for grant eligibility. When setting a minimum loss of \$25 thousand, it reduces the amount of eligible businesses and increases the award amounts by approximately \$4,500 for those who are experiencing the greatest loss.

Ms. Martinson asked for clarification on the calculations for award. Mr. Rogers clarified that the numbers he presented are estimates, and once the full calculation is taken into account, there will be fewer businesses that qualify, targeting the ones who have suffered the extreme hardship and losses.

Mr. Mertz appreciated the recommendation of a minimum loss of \$25 thousand.

**MOTION:** by Mr. Forst to recommend the Assembly include in the ordinance a minimum threshold of \$25 thousand in taxable year-over-year revenue loss to qualify for the grant. Mr. Botelho seconded the motion.

Mr. Mertz stated that the Business Sustainability Grant Ordinance did well in focusing the types of businesses that might receive the grant. The current ordinance for this Extreme Hardship Business Grant does not have exclusion language for C corporations, and he wonders whether this is needed.

Mr. Rogers replied that he does not have strong feelings around this. Mr. Holst has stumbled into some difficult issues on this topic when administering the Business Sustainability Grant program. It is not uncommon for one LLC to be owned by another LLC, which is owned by another LLC. These types of business structures have made it difficult to discern how it meets the intent of the program. The CBJ has counseled Mr. Holst that it is difficult under the law to deny someone a public benefit based on where they “plant their feet.” Mr. Rogers does not see an issue with including the language from 4b of the Business Sustainability Grant Ordinance.

Mr. Mertz stated that his intent is to ensure that grants are not being awarded to businesses that do not operate in Juneau year-round.

Ms. MacVay supports the concept, but is leery of the real world application of restrictions that are put into the ordinance because of potential complications.

Mr. Forst asked if the language of 4b in the Business Sustainability Grant caused problems for applicants. Mr. Rogers replied they did not, but there were still businesses who qualified under the technical aspects of the grant, yet would not be viewed as a locally owned business. He does not believe this language is excluding any legitimate local business.

Mr. Mertz said that Mr. Rogers comment regarding the complexity of adding this language without resulting in excluding businesses not based in Juneau is a good point.

Mr. Mertz stated the Family Promise Grant and Emergency Individual Assistance Grant is already at the Assembly level and is outside of the Task Force's purview, but Mr. Rogers can answer questions of the Task Force.

Ms. Martinson asked for more information regarding the \$2 million Emergency Individual Assistance Grant and its target population. Mr. Rogers replied there are circumstances where individuals legitimately need financial support, but they do not neatly qualify for the Housing Assistance Program: for example, the unsheltered population, and adults who live together because they are roommates and not necessarily a household. This program is meant to fill the gaps and offer additional assistance to those in need above what the Housing Assistance Program offers.

### **Cruise Ship Update**

Ms. Martinson shared that she met with Mr. Day, and he stressed that it would be wise to wait until City Managers and Mayors have been approached by CLIA with parameters for a tourist season before planning any sort of program. She stated that CLIA has announced voluntary suspension of all cruise ship operations for the remainder of the year. Canada has extended their ban on cruise travel until March 2021. Viking Cruise Lines announced they are installing their own PCR lab on their ships to test all crew and passengers every day.

### **Public Comment Matrix**

None

### **Task Force Review**

None

### **Good of the Order**

Mr. Forst shared that Norwegian Cruise Lines announced a community Zoom meeting on November 18 to speaking about development plans for the Subport lot property.

Ms. Martinson plans to speak to childcare providers to gauge how they are doing, and with parents about how they are handling the inconsistent scheduling due to COVID closures.

Ms. MacVay plans to obtain additional information on mortgage delinquencies and defaults.

## **Adjourn**

At 4:28 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