



# Economic Stabilization Task Force

Appointed by the City & Borough of Juneau's Mayor  
Meeting Minutes from December 3, 2020

## **Call to Order**

The Economic Stabilization Task Force Meeting was called to order at 3:01 p.m. by Max Mertz.

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

Task Force Members Absent: Linda Thomas

CBJ Staff Present: CBJ Finance Director, Jeff Rogers; CBJ Budget Analyst, Adrien Speegle; CBJ Emergency Operations Planning Chief, Robert Barr; CBJ Administrative Assistant, Jensina Sundberg

CBJ Assembly Members Present: Mayor Beth Weldon, Loren Jones

Special Guest Speakers: Executive Director of Catholic Community Services, Erin Walker-Tolles; CBJ Emergency Operations Planning Chief, Robert Barr

## **Approval of Agenda**

Mr. Mertz asked for any changes to the agenda, and hearing none, asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

**MOTION:** by Mr. Botelho to approve the agenda.

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

## **Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Botelho did not receive minutes to review for approval. Mr. Mertz suggested approving the November 19, 2020 minutes at the Task Force's next meeting: December 17, 2020.

## **COVID-19 Testing Status**

Mr. Barr provided an update on COVID-19 detection testing. Mr. Barr stated that a new COVID-19 testing machine is currently in route from Seattle, and is scheduled to arrive for installation at Bartlett Regional Hospital the week of December 14. Installation will be a four-day process, followed by a training period for staff, and a few weeks to perform validation with control samples to make sure the machine is detecting positive and negative samples accurately. Once the new detection machine is established, it has the capacity to execute three to four hundred COVID-19 tests per eight-hour shift. Test results will be available in the ballpark range of 18 to 36 hours after a specimen has been received.

Mr. Barr stated that all Juneau testing has recently been transferred to the commercial lab being used at the airport, which is operating very efficiently. The lab is able to do two- to three-day turnarounds on test samples. Additionally, some limited rapid-testing has come from the State Emergency Operations Center, which has aided in preventing some Juneau outbreaks from spreading. Some of these rapid tests were used recently on crews heading to Haines to provide support with the ongoing landslide tragedy.

The Juneau airport has a request for proposal out from the State that provides airport testing going into 2021. CBJ is not bidding on this contract, and it is likely a new commercial vendor will step in to take leadership of airport testing operations sometime in January. Mr. Barr hopes to encourage the new vendor to hire a number of the temporary staff who have been working with testing operations for the past months, as they understand the procedures and are efficient in running operations.

Mr. Barr stated that vaccine planning prioritization and distribution efforts are a priority. It is expected to see a vaccine from Pfizer, followed by Moderna, in mid-December, and hopefully administration will begin from middle to late December. It is expected that Pfizer will get emergency use authorization as early as December 11, with Moderna following. There are defined initial phases of distribution, with the first phase (A), targeting healthcare workers and first responders. Phase B will target essential workers, with broad categories defined by the Center for Disease Control and the State Department of Health and Human Services. Local entities will be responsible for applying the broad categories to specific populations.

Ms. MacVay asked Mr. Barr how many days after exposure could the new machine at Bartlett detect COVID-19 antibodies.

Mr. Barr responded that two days after exposure is a minimum for detection systems, though incubation periods vary from person to person.

Mr. Forst asked Mr. Barr how he anticipated the population size of Juneau will affect vaccine distribution, as Juneau has a smaller population and far fewer frontline workers than many other cities.

Mr. Barr stated that he believes Juneau will receive the vaccine in a proportional manner. He has heard speculation that the state of Alaska may see approximately 30-35 thousand batches in the first round of vaccine distribution. If this is the case, Juneau could see one to two thousand doses in the first round of

distribution. He noted that one thousand doses will not cover the population of frontline workers in Juneau.

### **Housing Assistance and Individual Hardship Grants**

Ms. Walker-Tolles provided an update on the Housing Assistance and Individual Hardship Grant programs. As of December 3, she has received about two thousand applications for the Housing Assistance program, with more coming in each day. Overall, 922 applications have been thoroughly completed and processed. Of those, 70% are deemed eligible, 8% are determined to be ineligible, 2.7% of applications were incomplete, and 16% require an in-person response in order to finish processing. Ms. Walker-Tolles fully expects the Housing Assistance Grant to expend the \$3 million allocation. Ms. Walker-Tolles will provide the Economic Stabilization Task Force with a sum total of how much funding has been authorized to date so the city can decide if the program should be eligible to receive more funding.

Ms. Walker-Tolles also provided an update on the Individual Hardship Grant. Advertisements for the grant will begin circulation within the week. The Individual Hardship Grant program will open at 10 a.m. on December 8, and will close on December 18. Applications will be posted online and available in person at City Hall. Publicity for the Individual Hardship Grant will be very similar to publicity for the Housing Assistance Grant, as staff is already in place and understands the process. Unlike the application for Housing Assistance, the Individual Hardship application allows for self-attestation of COVID-19 hardship, which Ms. Walker-Tolles believes will help the application process progress more fluidly, as applicants will not need to attach supplemental documentation.

Mr. Rogers elaborated on the potential of allocating additional funding for the Housing Assistance Grant program. At the Assembly Finance Committee meeting on December 9, Mr. Rogers will present an updated chart indicating CARES Act funding remaining for 2020. Mr. Rogers believes that, if Ms. Walker-Tolles stated that the Housing Assistance program was going well and requested additional funding, the Committee may consider expanding the funds available. According to information presented by Mr. Rogers, CBJ's \$53 million CARES Act funding has not been entirely spent. There is still approximately \$300,000 unallocated, and it is expected that some programs will have funding remaining. Mr. Rogers also stated that there have been calls to Assembly members requesting that the Business Sustainability Grant program be reopened to new applicants.

Mr. Rogers responded to committee questions.

Mr. Forst proposed recommending the Assembly reopen the Business Sustainability Grant program for a brief period in order to give businesses that may have missed the initial application period a chance to apply. He presented the idea that leftover funding could potentially be distributed proportionally, or be rolled into the Extreme Hardship Grant program.

**MOTION:** by Ms. MacVay to recommend the Assembly re-open the Business Sustainability Grant Program application period to new applicants for a brief period of time. The length of the reopening period would be determined by City staff.

**OBJECTION:** By Mr. Koelsch, who stated that he does not want to spend money when not absolutely necessary when other needs, such as COVID-19 expenditures and funding at the hospital, are still unknown. Mr. Koelsch stated he would rather have money left for future determination than re-open the Business Sustainability Grant.

**ROLL CALL VOTE ON MOTION**

Ayes: Mertz, Botelho, Forst, MacVay, Martinson, Bell, and Peters

Nays: Koelsch

***Motion passed. Seven (7) Ayes, One (1) Nay***

**MOTION:** by Mr. Forst to recommend the Assembly to reallocate excess Business Sustainability Grant program funds, after the reopening period has closed, to the Extreme Hardship Grant program. If the Assembly chooses not to reopen the Business Sustainability Grant program to new applicants, the Economic Stabilization Task Force recommends the full unspent balance of the Business Sustainability Grant program be reallocated to the Extreme Hardship Grant program. Ms. Martinson seconded the motion.

**OBJECTION:** by Mr. Koelsch and Mr. Botelho. Mr. Botelho agreed with Mr. Koelsch in remarking that he has concerns about making sure government needs are met in pandemic response, as some financial needs are not clear yet and he does not want to spend money for the sake of spending it.

Mr. Forst expressed that he appreciated Mr. Botelho's perspective, and asked Mr. Rogers to clarify whether there is a timeline that money needs to be spent. Mr. Forst pointed out that there are three weeks left in December to allocate the remaining funding, and that if the funds need to be spent by December 31, 2020, that reallocation is the most favorable way to aid the community.

Mr. Rogers clarified by stating that in January of 2021, if there is remaining funding, he would offer to reimburse the hospital for expenses incurred during the eligible period of March 1 to December 30, 2020. At the end of the day, it would net CBJ a general funds saving, as CBJ will have to continue paying for pandemic-related emergency costs, including testing, after the first of January.

Mr. Mertz expressed the sentiment that this is a difficult decision and that he can see both sides. He stated that he believes we have a cold winter and a difficult spring ahead for a lot of businesses in Juneau.

Ms. Martinson stated that she believes the Extreme Hardship Grant gets funding directly into the hands of people in the community, which is what this committee is obligated to do.

**ROLL CALL VOTE ON MOTION**

Ayes: Mertz, Forst, MacVay, Martinson, Peters, and Bell

Nays: Botelho, Koelsch

***Motion passed. Six (6) Ayes, Two (2) Nays***

**ArtWorks Grant Press Release**

Mr. Mertz provided an update on the ArtWorks Grant press release, on packet page 9. He stated that there was no discussion to follow, but he felt it important that Task Force members be able to view the list of art programs that have benefited from the grant.

### **Perseverance Theatre Grant**

Mr. Rogers stated that Mayor Weldon received an inquiry request from Perseverance Theatre concerning the availability of remaining CARES Act funding. Perseverance Theatre is in a unique position, and is unlike other arts and culture nonprofits in Juneau. Most arts and culture nonprofit organizations do not have full-time staffing or buildings, and are able to operate by renting venues such as schools and churches. Conversely, Perseverance Theatre owns two buildings, and has more than six full time, year-round staff. They have tried to retain staff and continue paying upkeep on the two buildings, which is further exacerbating financial strain brought on by COVID-19. Perseverance Theatre is a cultural touchstone in Juneau, and Mr. Rogers emphasized that no one would want to wake up after the pandemic to see that their doors are shut forever. Perseverance has already benefited from the Business Sustainability Grant program and received the maximum allocation, but even with help is in a dire financial situation. Mr. Rogers calculated that total economic harm is around \$412 thousand. After governmental support, program reductions, the CBJ non-profit grant, the Rasmuson Foundation Matching Grant, and the Extreme Hardship Grant, Mr. Rogers has calculated that remaining economic harm is resting at slightly more than \$85 thousand.

Mayor Weldon added that Perseverance Theatre is set apart by not offering educational components, such as lessons, that are allowing other arts and culture nonprofits to gain business and economic stimulation.

**MOTION:** by Mr. Forst to positively recommend the grant to Perseverance to the Assembly as proposed, for \$85,738. The motion was seconded by Mr. Botelho.

***The motion passed by unanimous consent.***

### **Task Force Review**

Ms. Bell provided an update on the Task Force review, regarding the final two pages in the packet. Ms. Bell stated that she is trying to find the most consistent approach to documenting Task Force work, Assembly actions, and Assembly recommendations. She stated that it would be ideal for the pre-determined fact finding groups to create a succinct summarization of the work that has been completed for their specific sections. The Task Force Review document contains six bulleted points that should be included in each section summary to maintain consistent information. Ms. Bell asked the Committee if they believed this was sufficient framework to begin compilation and working on creating a document.

Mr. Botelho suggested that an appendix be added on to the Task Force Review that includes all ordinances that were adopted. He also suggested creating an example template to send out to Task Force members.

Ms. MacVay agreed that a template would be helpful, and suggested beginning with rental assistance.

Mr. Botelho volunteered to do the Conservation Corporation as an example template to aid others in consistency.

Mr. Mertz suggested getting the templates finalized and shared before the next ESTF meeting on December 17, so that any questions that arise can be addressed.

#### **Public Comment Matrix**

Ms. Macvay stated that the Task Force did not receive any new comments from the public since the last meeting, therefore no Public Comment Matrix is presented.

#### **Good of the Order**

Ms. Bell extended praise to Ms. Martinson and all others who are doing everything they can to support local businesses.

#### **Adjourn**

At 4:25 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