

JUNEAU COMMISSION ON AGING

City & Borough of Juneau

Minutes of Regular Meeting

February 11th, 2016

CALL TO ORDER

The Commission met at the Senior Center. Chairperson VandeCastle called the meeting to order at 1:15 p.m. Other members present were: Brynn Keith, Carol Trebian, Ric Iannolino, Eileen Hosey, and Mary Lou Spartz. Pat Watt was absent. Also attending were senior center director Carol Comolli, Assembly member Jerry Nankervis, former JCOA member Marie Darlin, Connie Munro representing Tlingit & Haida, and Eileen's visiting sister Abby.

AGENDA; DECLARATION OF A QUORUM

The agenda was adopted. It was declared that a quorum of members was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the brief regular meeting on January 11th were approved, with one change (deletion of the phrase "due to illness" regarding an absence). Chair VandeCastle suggested that, since the busy agenda didn't allow time for detailed discussion of the meeting summary materials provided by retreat facilitator Le Florendo, members review them for discussion at next month's meeting.

MaryAnn passed out copies of our annual Juneau senior population update (attached), prepared for a brief presentation to the Alaska Commission on Aging earlier in the week.

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

MaryAnn announced that our draft letter for the Assembly regarding the extension of the Alaska Commission on Aging's sunset date would be conveyed to Juneau legislators using similar language, but our other letter listing numerous senior legislative priorities was deemed to represent an unappealing "laundry list" approach and will not be acted upon. We were encouraged to present more information on a FEW priorities, if we choose to. MaryAnn suggested we decide on 3 or 4 priority items to expand upon, which we'll discuss at next month's meeting.

We also received word that an Assembly liaison to the JCOA has been appointed: Loren Jones will be our liaison. He won't be joining us for today's meeting due to a conflicting meeting of the marijuana control board.

Ric distributed a report on the Smart 9-1-1 system, which he investigated while in Honolulu recently. We'll discuss this in more depth at the March meeting.

PRESENTATION BY CONOR BELL, ECONOMIST, ALASKA DEPT. OF LABOR & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bell spoke to us about Juneau's and Alaska's economy and how seniors impact and are impacted by these overall trends.

While Juneau's economy is not doing great, Juneau and Southeast Alaska are more used to these setbacks than some other areas of the state, as we've already lost the timber industry, etc. Alaska as a whole has been on a decades-long growth streak. Now we're looking at losing a significant number of jobs in government and industry.

Mining, tourism, government, and fishing are Juneau's economic drivers. We're losing government jobs faster – we've lost 380 State jobs. Few of these represent actual lay-offs; most are due to attrition, where jobs are simply not re-filled when someone retires or quits. Mining is stable, but we're not seeing growth in this industry. A weak year is expected in fishing. Tourism is the one bright spot. This industry is growing. We have 1,600 to 1,700 summer jobs in tourism.

Federal government jobs are especially important, as their average annual wage is over \$80,000. We had been losing these in the past decade, but they have been stable in the past year.

The retail and transportation industries are essentially just circulating money brought in by the main economic drivers.

We're seeing slow growth in Juneau's population. There is lots of "churn," with young people moving in and out, a stable group from age 40 to 60, and then some fall-off. We don't see a lot of seniors moving to Juneau. However, with the aging of the baby boomer population, we've had a 40% increase in the number of seniors in just the past five years. By 2022, we expect to see another 50% increase, about 2,000 people, and by 2027 another 1,000 seniors (people age 65 and over).

The younger senior age groups are growing now, but later on the older age groups will begin to increase as the boomers age. Right now, 90% of seniors are under age 80. By 2032, 27% will be age 80 and older. This is the group that will really need services. We have some time to develop the necessary assisted living, skilled nursing care, home health care, etc. An assisted living or skilled nursing facility usually creates an average of 1.5 jobs per facility resident. The state of Georgia has done a study showing that two jobs are created in the community for each senior household.

Eileen noted that the State of Alaska is cutting Medicaid, and there is a huge gap between those who can afford these more intensive services and those who can't pay. And in some areas of the state, such as Anchorage, many doctors no longer accept Medicare. This trend doesn't seem as notable in Juneau. Connie added that her doctor is noticing an increase in senior clients.

Conor observed that official poverty rates are lower among seniors than in other age groups – about 3% among Juneau seniors, compared with 6% in the overall population. However, as MaryAnn noted, the U.S. Census does not adjust for varying costs of living in different parts of the country. She noted that about 10% of Juneau seniors receive benefits through the Senior Benefits program, which provides a monthly income support to low-income seniors. Census forms no longer ask about income, so this data is now gleaned from the American Community Survey, which surveys a much smaller sample of the population. This has a 4 – 7% error range, Conor told us.

Poverty is still measured according to a formula developed in the 1960s which does not allocate as much family income to housing costs and certain other expenses as modern households are likely to spend. Alternative poverty measures are being developed. Mary Lou pointed out that single older women receive an average of \$4,000 a year less in Social Security income than men

of the same age. Brynn noted that seniors in poverty will stay in poverty – they no longer have a chance to change their economic status.

Conor said there is good data available on where seniors' money comes from, but not such good data on where it goes to. (Conor estimated that retired Juneau seniors age 65 and older bring in about \$200 million a year; total Juneau wages are in the billions.) We know seniors are more likely to buy from local businesses, but can't document the precise extent of this effect. Eileen agreed that seniors have real buying power, and we need to encourage businesses to see us as a resource.

Unemployment rates are low among seniors (that is, among those who are still in the labor force). And those still working between age 60 and 70 earn an average wage of \$63,000, which is well above the Juneau median wage of \$56,000.

Addressing how seniors may be affected by the current economic downturn, Conor said their homes may be worth less, but that may be balanced by lower property taxes. Public services could decline. Seniors may be forced to pay more for goods and services, as with the recent changes to the senior sales tax exemption in Juneau. With less economic activity and some businesses (such as Wal-Mart and some small shops and restaurants) closing, there are fewer local options for shopping.

The presence of seniors tends to bolster home values and stimulate consumption, noted Conor. They increase direct employment in health care, home care, assisted living, etc. These jobs, though, increase slowly. We haven't seen growth in local health care employment in the last few years.

Conor estimated that local government spends about \$1,500 per local resident, including various services provided. But seniors bring in income to the local area.

While the minimum wage in Alaska is increasing (now \$9 an hour), there are actually not that many minimum wage jobs in Juneau. There are some in seafood processing, etc. Even tourism and retail usually pay above minimum wage, so the rise in the minimum wage is not affecting a lot of industries here.

The biggest issue among Juneau seniors is the speed with which the senior population is growing. Also coming along are the "echo boomers," the children of the baby boomers, now mostly in their 30s, another large group.

Connie asked about the volunteer work done by seniors. Conor responded that while seniors volunteer at slightly lower rates than other age groups, they put in more hours. Those who do volunteer average 96 hours per year, with 10% of seniors putting in over 500 hours per year. That's a lot of value added to the community. Seniors are also a prime source of charitable donations and are notable patrons of the arts.

Conor offered to respond to any further questions, should we have them, via email.

PRESENTATION BY JONATHAN LANGE, CBJ PLANNER, ON COORDINATED HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN.

Jonathan discussed the CBJ's coordinated human services transportation plan, an update to the CBJ transportation plan that focuses on services to low-income, disabled, and older residents. The

plan fulfills a State requirement that local service providers coordinate their transportation services in order to receive State funds. By identifying barriers and gaps, and emphasizing inter-agency coordination, the plan helps improve services to clients.

The plan was prepared by the Community Development Department with help from Sheinberg & Associates and the Juneau Coordinated Transportation Commission. It includes input from Care-A-Van, SAIL, Juneau Youth Services, and other agencies serving the target populations. Tlingit & Haida did not participate, but they are included in the service plan.

An online needs assessment survey was done using Survey Monkey. Copies were also distributed through the senior center and to the clientele of other service providers. They collected over 100 survey responses, and held a couple of public meetings, including one specifically addressing how to improve transportation services.

Jonathan handed out a list of the project priorities identified by the Coordinated Transportation Commission. Priorities include vehicle upgrades and improved scheduling. The plan itself (available online) shows demographic data on clients served. "It's a living document," he noted, and they welcome anyone's help to accomplish its goals.

JCOA members offered Jonathan some comments on CBJ transportation issues, in particular the city buses. Ric noted that there are no schedules posted at the downtown bus shelter, which have been promised for some time. Jonathan agreed that better signage, and schedules posted at each shelter, are needed. Ric noted that tourists, who frequently use the bus, are often older and disabled. MaryAnn observed that the bus schedules are difficult for many people to decipher.

Other issues raised included pedestrian safety (length of walk lights, etc.), ice-free sidewalks, and cleared bus stops in the winter. MaryAnn suggested the City investigate installing heated sidewalks in the downtown area. KeyBank (on Seward St.) has them and they work great. There would be an upfront cost but no more snow-plowing or ice-melt needed in the future. The intersection at Main and Marine Way was discussed – people routinely walk out into traffic there. Mary Lou suggested painting DO NOT STEP OFF on the curb, as is done in London. People at the Main and Egan intersection fail to press the button for the walk light – perhaps a PRESS THE BUTTON sign would help. Connie suggested a box of red flags as is kept at the Cordova St. intersection with Douglas Highway: pedestrians pick up a flag to signal they wish to use the crosswalk, then leave the flag in a box on the other side.

Carol mentioned the busy corner by Teal St., where there is lots of foot traffic and no sidewalks. It's very difficult for people with low vision. With a senior housing complex in the area, it's difficult for older people to take walks, with cars and buses speeding by on their way to and from the airport. And the lighting is bad as well. Brynn wondered whether sidewalks could be required in that area. Jonathan responded that Smith Hall and St. Vincent's are technically located in an industrial area. Sidewalks are not required. But if and when an old street undergoes improvements, pedestrian amenities can be added – crosswalk, sidewalks, lights, etc.

Jonathan noted that these kinds of issues are more for the larger transportation plan. CBJ also has a non-motorized transportation plan that targets pedestrians and bicyclists. MaryAnn noted that the JCOA had provided extensive input to the consultants who assembled the transportation plan a couple years ago, but few of our recommendations made it into the final version of the plan.

Jonathan noted that the Care-A-Van plans to expand to accommodate the expected increase in demand from the boomers. Capital Transit will offer rider training for people, including seniors, who could ride the bus rather than use assisted transportation, with some training.

Jonathan suggested we look through the plan's project priorities and contact him with any questions or comments. Marie reminded Jonathan that the 2010 CBJ senior survey is available online and every City department should also have a copy of it. There are many detailed comments from seniors on specific issues, so departments should consult it with regard to projects and plans. MaryAnn noted that the online survey document is searchable and includes all comments by seniors. Marie emphasized, "It should be used!"

CONCLUSION

The next meeting of the JCOA will be on March 10th, with City Manager Kim Kiefer speaking to us regarding the Juneau Economic Plan – specifically the initiative to build the senior economy. MaryAnn will try again to get Erann Kalwara to come talk to us about the Smart 9-1-1 system. We'll try to keep the April agenda open for focused board work on our 2015 priorities.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.