

JUNEAU COMMISSION ON AGING

City & Borough of Juneau

DRAFT Minutes of Regular Meeting

October 9, 2014

CALL TO ORDER

The Commission met at the Senior Center. MaryAnn VandeCastle called the meeting to order at 9:03 am. All members were present: Elizabeth Terry, Pat Watt, Mary Lou Spartz, Dixie Hood, Cliff Cole and Charles Wilson. Also present were Mayor Merrill Sanford, Assembly members Loren Jones and Jerry Nankervis, member-elect Debbie White, and State Representative Sam Kito. CBJ Finance Director, Bob Bartholomew, Max Mertz, president of the Chamber and Commerce, Kirsten Walker of the McDowell Group, and several of Juneau's senior residents also attended.

DECLARATION OF A QUORUM

It was declared that a quorum of members was present. The agenda was adopted as presented with a minor adjustment to allow attendees with other obligations to leave when they needed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes for the regular meeting on September 11 were approved.

FOCUS ON SENIOR TAX EXEMPTIONS

Commission Chair VandeCastle explained that, following on last month's meeting, the main focus of this meeting is to continue learning about senior tax exemptions, hear various community perspectives on the issue, and begin formulating a recommendation to forward to the Assembly. Based on today's meeting, a draft recommendation will be developed for further discussion and approval at the November Commission meeting so that it may be forwarded to the Assembly prior to the Tax Exemption Review Committee finalizing its report and recommendations.

Max Mertz overviewed the Chamber's process and recommendation that it had just finalized. He emphasized that its recommendations are being made in an air of collaboration and seeking a good, sustainable solution to the CBJ's long-term budget outlook. Also, that improvements in efficiency and cost controls are essential to accompany some necessary increases in revenue. This will require everyone to sacrifice something in order to benefit the whole, and to ensure that no inequitable burden falls on any one segment of the community.

Each elected official took a few moments to share their perspective and concerns, as well as appreciation for the efforts of all to reach a fair and equitable solution to CBJ's budget concerns while keeping Juneau the kind of place we all want to live. The Mayor emphasized that all nine members of the Assembly are committed to not hurting seniors, but are also bound by their duty to develop a balanced budget that is in the best interests of the community as a whole. The Assembly is facing some hard decisions, and it will be impossible to please everyone.

Bob Bartholomew reviewed demographic projections over the next two decades, and highlighted the accompanying growth in the impact of senior tax exemptions on the City's budget as the population ages. He said that the Assembly's goal is to find a way onto a sustainable financial path, bearing in mind the significant impact of reductions in contributions of operating funds by both federal and state governments. He emphasized that the Assembly highly values the economic contribution the senior population makes to the community and the uncounted volunteer hours that seniors provide.

In June, the Assembly appointed 4 of its members to serve as a Tax Exemption Review Committee (TERC) with its report due by January 1, 2015. The TERC has met 7 times to learn and consider all existing sales and property tax exemptions. The Committee has narrowed the list to items that it is now seeking public comment on. A public hearing on senior tax exemptions is scheduled to begin at 5pm in the Assembly Chambers on Thursday, October 23 and will be carried over to Wednesday, October 29 if necessary. Also, the public is encouraged to submit comments by email to Borough_Assembly@ci.juneau.ak.us. Email comments are given the same consideration as public testimony.

The Commission then heard remarks from several seniors who were present. Concerns varied and the Commissioners carefully listened to all. Thereafter, each Commissioner offered his or her perspective and, based on those comments, a draft recommendation will be prepared by the Chair and circulated for review and adoption at the November Commission meeting so it can be forwarded to the Assembly for consideration within the TERC's timeframe.

UPDATE ON STATUS OF THE JUNEAU ECONOMIC PLAN

Kirsten Walker explained that the development of the plan is on schedule. Seven initiatives will be fleshed out at two upcoming town meetings (work sessions with the community) on October 21 from 7-9pm at 320 W. Willoughby, and October 29 from 7-9pm at UAS, Egan Classroom 112. The seven initiatives are: Housing; Neighborhood Liveability; the Senior Economy; Next Generation Workforce; Federal Jobs; the Capital; and Business Incubation, Recruitment and Support. Commission members were encouraged to participate in these work sessions, and especially provide input for the Senior Economy topic.

NEW BUSINESS

Juneau Access Improvements Project (JAIP): The State DOT recently mailed information on its process for seeking comments on the JAIP Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). Public Comments are being sought until November 10. The document is available online at http://dot.alaska.gov/sereg/projects/juneau_access/index.shtml

An Open House is scheduled in Juneau on October 14, at Centennial Hall from 1:00pm to 9:00pm to explain the project to residents. Public comments will be accepted at the same location between 5:00pm and 9:00pm. The Commission discussed the issue, and determined it would resubmit its earlier letter on the subject to the Assembly, with a cover note tying it to the Alternative which best fits the Commission's concerns.

CONCLUSION

The next meeting will be on Thursday, November 13, at 9:30am at the Senior Center.

The meeting adjourned at 11:15 am.