

JOINT ASSEMBLY/JSD FACILITIES COMMITTEE MINUTES

January 22, 2025 at 12:00 PM

Assembly Chambers/Zoom Webinar



<https://juneau.zoom.us/j/87158300522> or 1-253-215-8782 Webinar ID: 871 5830 0522

A. CALL TO ORDER

B. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to acknowledge that the City & Borough of Juneau is on Tlingit land, and wish to honor the indigenous people of this land. For more than ten thousand years, Alaska Native people have been and continue to be integral to the well-being of our community. We are grateful to be in this place, a part of this community, and to honor the culture, traditions, and resilience of the Tlingit people. Gunalchéesh!

C. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Chair Woll; Mayor Weldon; Mr. Steininger; Ms. Adkison; Ms. Sorensen; Mr. Muldoon (present via Zoom); Ms. Cioni-Haywood

City & Borough of Juneau Staff Members Present: Denise Koch, EPW Director; Nate Rumsey, EPW Deputy Director; Jeanne Rynne, City Architect; Breckan Hendricks, EPW Admin Officer; Robert Barr, Deputy City Manager; Katie Koester, City Manager (present via Zoom), Kevin Allen, Tech.

School District Staff Present: Frank Hauser, Superintendent; Kristine Germain, Director of Operations.

D. APPROVAL OF AGENDA - No changes or comments

E. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. September 26, 2023 - Regular Minutes - Approved with no changes

F. ACTION ITEMS

2. Dzantik'i Heeni Playground Project

Director Koch explained the history behind the Dzantik'i Heeni Playground Project. She stated that Engineering and Public Works had discussions with the school district about options for what is achievable with the budget, which were brought forth for the Committee to discuss today.

Chair Woll commented that she is glad the school district requested this meeting, and asked the Committee if they had any questions.

Ms. Adkison noticed that a couple of the options did not include ADA sidewalk. She asked if there was a legal requirement to have ADA sidewalk or what barriers they could run into with that.

Ms. Rynne, Chief Architect, responded that the intent is that the playground itself will be accessible, and there are other ways to achieve that, but the sidewalk is the best option in terms of longevity and maintenance.

Mayor Weldon inquired if the project could be phased so they can potentially add more funding in the future.

Director Koch pointed out that they wanted to provide an option that could get them to a playground that children would be playing on with Option A, but Sections B and C are phased options that make sense if there is an intention to allocate future funds to build out the playground.

Mr. Muldoon stated one issue he struggled with was that two options did not reach ADA compliance, and the only option that did, did not reach the definition of playground. He was in support of a playground being built there, but was nervous about phasing it out.

Ms. Sorensen noted that most of the options didn't include site prep and were mostly rehabs of existing structures. She explained that Option B mainly covers site prep, an ADA-compliant sidewalk, and a base for a potential playground. However, it doesn't meet the definition of a playground and would be dangerous in the winter, as it would remain uncovered, leaving children to play near the road. She pointed out that some square footage comparables exclude site prep, so the cost of the playground isn't as high compared to others, making it more reasonable. She recommended revisiting the numbers for better comparison and emphasized that, from a City perspective, the playground would offer significant community value for the area.

Ms. Adkison asked if there was any intention to seek other community support to be built into a phased plan.

Superintendent Hauser responded that he had conversations with groups providing support for playground construction, and in his conversations with the Rotary Club, he believes there would be interest in potentially helping and support, but nothing firm yet.

Mayor Weldon inquired how this would work with DEED (Department of Education & Early Development).

Superintendent Hauser answered that his understanding is that this would be a capital project for funding that would come through to build the playground, and because it has a community focus as well, he does not believe it will have an impact on the Department of Education funding as far as the local contribution.

Mayor Weldon noted that there are two playgrounds in the Lemon Creek area right now, and both of them are getting money from Parks and Rec this year.

Chair Woll asked about the realistic timeline for the playground.

Director Koch responded that initially, the timeframe was to have the playground built at the beginning of the next school year, but now they are looking at the beginning of the 2026-2027 school year.

Mr. Muldoon inquired what the Borough envisions for District involvement in the process.

Director Koch answered that they would continue to work with the school district, and there is Assembly involvement in terms of the allocation and final decisions in terms of the budget, but they would be deeply involved in continuing conversations regarding the design within an established budget.

Chair Woll added that she believes they are here today to figure that out, as the Assembly has not had a conversation about this project yet, and they are trying to figure out what forward movement looks like, and that will include both JSD and the Borough.

Ms. Sorensen wondered if the playground would go forward as a City project, if it would be different once it becomes a school playground, and if the money spent would be considered contributions to the JSD.

Ms. Adkison responded that they probably do not know, as regulation change is broad, sweeping, and seems to take everything, but if that is allowed to stand, she thinks they may have issues initially but does not know if they will stand.

Superintendent Hauser voiced that they do not know. He pointed out that they have not seen a final draft of what the possible proposed regulation could look like.

Mayor Weldon expressed that she understood Ms. Sorensen's concern. She hoped that since they have already spent money on design, that CBJ is already planning on the project. She noted that she is not against a playground, but does not see the City being able to come up with \$2 million with consideration to the recent need for funding for flood and Eaglecrest projects. However, she can see a possible path forward with some sort of Parks & Recreation bond that could possibly include Eaglecrest and the JSD Dzantik'i' Heeni playground.

Ms. Adkison stated it seems there's a large desire to see a playground at Dzantik'i Heeni, and it is tough looking at the abbreviated versions, as none of them are quite satisfying. She understood concerns about a phased approach with the potential regulation coming from DEED, but based on that regulation change, there are going to be a lot of problems if it passes. She noted that if they start planning for that to pass, they will find themselves in a lot of trouble, so they should move forward hoping that it does not pass. She agreed there are a lot of budget constraints this year, but she would love to see the full project happen, so maybe in the future, with community support, they can build a phased approach that will include multiple sources of funds and something they can all agree to.

Ms. Sorensen voiced that she was at Mendenhall River (Elementary School) when CBJ Risk Management determined the bulk of the playground equipment there was too risky, but today every piece of equipment there has been purchased through giftwrap sales by PTO, so her view of piecemealing a playground together is dim. She said that her experience with the City having a commitment to playgrounds for students is also warped, so she urged that they try to put something more substantial than a large piece of plastic equipment and something that can be covered for safety. She expressed that this is important, as they have a broad age range in that building and need to have more than what any of the options have.

Chair Woll asked about looking at options in between the \$500,000 to \$1.8 million range.

Director Koch responded that if they were directed by the Committee to look at designs between that range, that is doable, and they could come back and present on those options.

Mr. Steininger echoed the concerns on availability of money and DEED regulations. He asked Superintendent Hauser, in thinking about the two paths of the DEED regulations and this project being something that has to fit within the cap, how the project gets prioritized within their budget and how it would fit within other needs they have.

Superintendent Hauser responded that if the DEED regulation passed and had an impact on this project, it would have a broader implication on a lot of the non-instructional support that the Juneau School District receives for things considered outside of the capital, so those would become part of the decision on what they fund from a District perspective, and what programs or staff are they cutting. He noted that is a concerning conversation, which is why the DEED regulation is so concerning to districts across the state that receive non-instructional funding outside of local contribution. He said if it does not pass, there is still a cost associated with it that has to come from somewhere, but they also do not know what public education funding will look like in the future. He added that it is a concern that this school does not have a playground or have access to a safe space to play.

Mr. Muldoon shared that he previously served on the Parks and Rec Special Committee for the Master Plan for 2019, and 11% of the residents lived in Lemon Creek and sought increased accessible recreational opportunities. The Assembly asked the residents to wait a little bit, as they could not afford it, but the Borough's Project Manager for the Master Plan said they were trying to provide accessible recreation to everyone, and they have not accomplished that. He appreciated that times are tough and money is tight, but that will always be the situation, and opportunities like this to build in Lemon Creek and for a school park is not going to come back to them. He added there is a sense of timeliness, and he supported something happening within the next two to three years with this.

Ms. Cioni-Haywood expressed that she sits as the Site Council Rep for Montessori, and they have preschool through 8th grade. She said there is concern about safety for the play area for Montessori with the current setup.

Chair Woll stated that she hopes there is a path forward that achieves their goal of ensuring their kids have equitable access to the same things as others and recognize that the original cost of this project is likely not something the Assembly can afford right now. She suggested sending a few options to the Assembly for them to discuss what they are willing to pull from the budget.

Ms. Adkison moved to direct Staff to draft more options between the \$575,000 and \$1.8 million project cost with projects that more completely include the goals they have discussed today and that are ADA compliant. Motion passed.

G. INFORMATION ITEMS

3. N/A

H. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Ms. Sorensen thanked the City for meeting with them today.

Mr. Muldoon asked what the Borough is seeing as the next steps needed for the District for scheduling purposes.

Chair Woll proposed that when Staff prepares more information, they bring it back to the School Board, who can then provide comments on those options, and then it can be forwarded on to the Full Assembly.

Director Koch confirmed that once Staff prepares additional options, they will go to the School Board for comments on the options, and they will then send those to the Assembly for further discussion and decision making.

Mr. Muldoon asked for clarification that if they follow that timeline, they would not be able to meet deadlines for any construction beginning this fall 2025.

Director Koch answered yes.

Ms. Cioni-Haywood gave thanks for the flexibility and consideration for looking at other options. She noted that she knows they will not meet the deadline for the start of the next school year, but asked for consideration for something to happen mid-school year next year.

Director Koch expressed they will take that under consideration, but they do have a construction season in Alaska, and doing construction for fall and winter is challenging and more expensive.

Chair Woll added that from her perspective, ideally the Assembly will make this decision during the regular budget process and hopes they can be on that timeline.

I. NEXT MEETING DATE

4. N/A – Bond questions for next fall.

J. ADJOURNMENT – 12:56pm

ADA accommodations available upon request: Please contact the Clerk's office 36 hours prior to any meeting so arrangements can be made for closed captioning or sign language interpreter services depending on the meeting format. The Clerk's office telephone number is 586-5278, TDD 586-5351, e-mail: city.clerk@juneau.gov.