

ASSEMBLY FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

February 7, 2024, at 5:30 PM

Assembly Chambers/Zoom Webinar



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A. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 pm by Chair Weldon.

B. ROLL CALL

Committee Members Present: Chair Beth Weldon; Michelle Hale; Greg Smith; Paul Kelly; Ella Adkison; Wade Bryson

Committee Members Present Virtually: Wáahlaal Gíidaak; Christine Woll; Alicia Hughes-Skandijs

Committee Members Absent:

Staff Members Present: Katie Koester, City Manager; Angie Flick, Finance Director; Adrien Wendel, Budget Manager; Robert Palmer, City Attorney; Alexandra Pierce, Tourism Manager

Others Present: Liz Perry, Travel Juneau Executive Director; Frank Hauser, Juneau School District Superintendent

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. January 10, 2024

The January 10, 2024 minutes were approved as presented.

D. AGENDA TOPICS

2. Audit Extension

Angie Flick, Finance Director, stated that at the January 10, 2024 Assembly Finance Committee meeting Staff presented a memo that recommended the Assembly extend the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) contract with Elgee Rehfeld to continue their auditing work for Bartlett Hospital, Juneau School District (JSD), and the larger CBJ audit. She continued that she had spoken with the president of the Bartlett Board as well as Bartlett's CFO and CEO, and that they had confirmed their approval of extending this contract for the year, with an expectation of looking at a Request for Proposal (RFP) for auditing services in the fall. She stated that the Assembly could choose to halt the extension and start an RFP now, otherwise Staff would work on the one-year extension.

Assemblymember Bryson asked how the JSD financial situation fit into the audit work with regards to the contract extension or future contracts. He asked if the audit could prevent financial deficits moving forward.

Ms. Flick replied that the auditors will continue to look at transactional data, testing, and bring forth concerns as they see them.

The Assembly Finance Committee voiced their consent of extending the audit contract with Elgee Rehfeld for one year.

Assemblymember Alicia Hughes-Skandijs joined the meeting via Zoom at 5:39 pm.

3. Fund Balance Discussion

Katie Koester, City Manager, introduced the memo on page 8 of the packet which followed up from the retreat discussion on what the Assembly wanted to spend the debt capacity and fund balance on. She clarified that although the memo showed \$22 million in the unrestricted fund balance, this number was misleading because of the recommendation that the Assembly reserve \$9 million for a cash flow cushion. She stated that the actual amount in the unrestricted fund balance was \$31 million.

Ms. Koester continued that this memo would help the Assembly be aware of near-term fund balance expenditures like the Title 49 rewrite and wastewater infrastructure projects. She explained that as Staff worked through the budget process, they were trying to draw out any one-time expenditures to relieve pressure on the operating budget. She stated that the memo discussed debt capacity and used a recommended target of \$70 million, set by the Finance Director based on other factors such as interest rates.

Ms. Koester pointed to page 9 of the packet which showed a list of near-term projects that needed to be funded this year. She stated that the largest of these projects was the public safety communications infrastructure which included the radio system for first responders, Capital City Fire Rescue (CCFR), Juneau Police Department (JPD), and Transit. She stated that infrastructure replacement was critical due to its aging.

Assemblymember Bryson asked if the \$16.5 million set aside for the new City Hall proposal was a part of the \$31 million unrestricted fund balance.

Ms. Koester replied that the \$16.5 million was not a part of the \$31 million unrestricted fund balance. She explained that there was a note on the memo which stated there would be expenditures for City Hall renovations and tenant improvements and that that amount had not been rolled into the fund balance because it sat in a dedicated CIP.

Assemblymember Hughes-Skandijs asked if Ms. Koester would speak more to the public safety communications infrastructure project including what funds had been set aside and how encryption fit into the project.

Ms. Koester responded that CBJ had half a million dollars in appropriated funds, \$2 million in congressional directed funds pending at the federal level, and \$1.5 million scheduled for FY26 from 1% temporary sales tax.

Erann Kalwara, JPD Public Safety Manager, introduced herself and stated that part of her job was to support the radio system which is integral to JPD and CCFR first responders. She stated that the public safety communications system was severely aged and had components that could not be replaced. She explained that the project would update the parts of the system needing replacement and move it towards being technologically modern. She stated that a radio study's results showed compelling data that suggested they join the Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) system, which would require substantial upgrades.

Assemblymember Smith asked if there were grants for this type of system.

Ms. Koester stated that the congressionally directed spending was a form of grant and that Ms. Kalwara and herself were searching for grants in their own capacities.

Ms. Kalwara added that they had received several Homeland Security grants which had enabled them to replace the dispatch radio consoles in the command center. She stated that smaller pieces of the system were upgraded with the help of smaller grants but that there weren't any sizable grants available to complete the entire project.

Chair Weldon asked if the project entailed replacement of major equipment or smaller equipment like walkie-talkies.

Kalwara clarified that the project included everything from minor to major equipment. She stated that her team had identified points of failure in the system which had caused communication gaps for first responders.

Assemblymember Bryson asked how the ability to communicate with Alaska State Troopers (AST) and CCFR could change with the update in encryption.

Ms. Kalwara answered that by going digital the communications with AST and CCFR would improve and by joining the ALMR system they could communicate with others on the system statewide.

Ms. Kalwara introduced Derek Bos, JPD Chief of Police who started in his new position in the beginning of February.

Assemblymember Woll asked about the \$9 million cushion suggested for the fund balance and if there were any cash flow issues.

Ms. Flick answered that there were no cash flow issues and that this cushion was suggested so that the Assembly could take advantage of one-time events or opportunities that come along throughout the year.

Assemblymember Hale stated that there was also restricted budget reserve on hand to cover unforeseen expenses.

Ms. Flick responded that the intention of the restricted budget reserve was to provide two to three months of buffer for operating the city in the case of a dramatic event, such as a pandemic or a recession. She stated that this reserve had \$19 million in it to cover the two to three months and that it might need another \$1 million in funding to be considered whole.

Assemblymember Smith stated that at the retreat the Assembly discussed and agreed to support the Title 49 rewrite. He asked if the \$3 million discussed was needed this year or if it could instead be spread out over multiple years.

Ms. Koester replied that a memo in the January 29 Committee of the Whole meeting packet outlined a three-year plan and that the amounts funded get larger in the 2nd and 3rd year.

Assemblymember Smith stated that wastewater, water systems and the public safety communications system would be good candidates for general obligation bonds.

Assemblymember Woll stated that \$17 million for the public safety communications infrastructure was a lot of money to ask from the voters and suggested they split up the funding of the project between general fund and bonds.

Assemblymember Hughes-Skandijs expressed support for utility projects and the public safety communications infrastructure as strong candidates for bonds. She stated that there was potential for one-time spending for housing in addition to the Affordable Housing Fund.

In response to questions regarding the required balance in the restricted budget reserve, Chair Weldon stated that the recommended balance was based on a resolution and wasn't binding. She stated that to use the restricted budget reserve there had to be a plan to pay back the amount withdrawn.

Assemblymember Bryson stated that keeping money in the restricted budget reserve reduced the need for the \$9 million cushion. He stated that if the restricted budget reserve was funded slightly above two months operating cost then there would be less pressure on the floor of operating capital. He recommended funding the restricted budget reserve to the full amount.

Chair Weldon clarified that the restricted budget reserve was not in a deficit of \$1 million but that Staff had brought that amount back as a recommendation for this year. She stated that the restricted budget reserve was currently healthy. She also expressed support for funding the public safety infrastructure as well as utility projects.

Assemblymember Hale commented that a bond for utility projects would potentially lower or prevent an increase in utility bills which would help lower income residents.

Katie Koester expressed that she heard the Assembly in their desire to draft a bond proposition this year for critical infrastructure, utility projects, and some portion of public safety communications infrastructure.

4. School District Discussion

Ms. Koester introduced the memo on page 143 of the packet which outlined the Juneau School District (JSD) funding request. She stated that by the end of the meeting Staff needed direction from the Assembly on FY24 and FY25 cash assistance for the school district as well as the outline of a loan. She stated that those three requests would be brought back as separate ordinances to the Assembly at a special meeting later in February.

Ms. Koester summarized the January 30 joint meeting with JSD. She stated that the Manager's Office recommended covering a three-to-five-year loan with conditions of financial awareness, sharing of staff, and a plan to start paying back the loan starting in FY26. She stated that the formal request from JSD covered portions of facility maintenance, utility costs, property insurance, and operations. The proposal was for \$4 million in direct spending by CBJ in FY24 and an additional \$4 million in FY25.

Ms. Koester presented page 144 of the packet which outlined the Manager's Office proposal for the JSD deficit assistance. She explained funding details for FY25 and stated that the recommendation beyond FY25 was for CBJ to take on facilities maintenance, which would relieve JSD's budget of \$1.6 million for the foreseeable future. She continued that the recommendation was for JSD to begin repayment of the

loan in FY26 with three years of equal payments of \$2.63 million at zero percent interest. Additionally, they would recommend transitioning the JSD maintenance supervisor to a CBJ employee in order to have access to all facility maintenance data contracts and files.

Assemblymember Hale stated that page 144 of the packet showed a loan for \$6.3 million but that the three payments of \$2.63 million actually equaled \$7.89 million.

Ms. Koester acknowledged the mathematical error.

Assemblymember Smith asked why a decision of FY24 shared services support needed to happen outside the normal FY25 budget process. He asked if the size of JSD's FY25 structural deficit was known.

Ms. Koester replied that JSD had requested the funding for FY24 as a mechanism to reduce the amount they would have to borrow because that would result in less cuts in subsequent years to meet the debt obligation.

Ms. Flick added that the FY24 request addressed prior years deficits as well as the current year's deficit. She stated that one reason the Assembly needed to look at FY24 and FY25 was because the continuation from a balanced budget in FY24, and the replication of cost sharing into FY25, would get JSD closer to starting FY25 with a structurally balanced budget.

Ms. Koester stated that JSD had to submit their FY25 budget to the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) by March 15th and in order for them to do that they needed to know how the Assembly was going to act on the funding request.

Assemblymember Adkison stated that the Alaska Administrative Code declared that local contribution was defined as money appropriated to a district school operating fund by a city or borough. She asked if there had been discussion with DEED about CBJ taking over JSD property insurance. She expressed concern that these efforts could later be halted if they were found to be outside State law.

Ms. Koester responded that funding utilities, property insurance, and facilities maintenance had some legal risk to it which was why the Manager's Office had not included funding these areas in their recommendation. She directed the Assembly to pages three and four of the memo which discussed options if the Assembly wanted to go beyond the Manager's recommendations.

Assemblymember Woll asked if Robert Palmer, City Attorney, could answer the question about the level of specificity.

Mr. Palmer stated that Frank Hauser, JSD Superintendent, and himself had had a preliminary conversation with DEED but no agreements had been made. He explained that DEED regulation did imply that municipalities could provide insurance, utilities, and maintenance of facilities but that if the funding was related to education it had to be accounted for in the operating budget. He explained that if the funding was considered to be unrelated to education then it would be considered special revenue and there would be no cap.

Assemblymember Bryson expressed concern for fully digging JSD out of their current budget deficit.

Chair Weldon asked for clarification that legally the loan had to be paid back.

Mr. Palmer confirmed this.

Assemblymember Kelly asked how JSD arrived at the percentages of maintenance utilities insurance costs that were considered instructional and non-instructional.

Mr. Hauser stated that they found the instructional day to be nine and a half hours long and explained the percentages found during and outside of that time frame for the costs shown in the memo.

Assemblymember Hughes-Skandijs asked if the Manager's recommendation for FY25 was to communicate to JSD that the Assembly would fund up to the cap, fund \$2.3 million above the cap, and reduce the budget expenses to them by \$1.6 million through shared costs.

Ms. Koester replied that this was a correct summary of the recommendation for FY25.

Assemblymember Bryson asked whether the non-instructional expenses covered utilities such as heat overnight and if the city could take over these expenses that were outside of the time students were in school.

Mr. Hauser replied that that was correct.

Assemblymember Smith asked what the best guess for the JSD FY25 deficit was, assuming the State raised the Base Student Allocation (BSA) to the flat funding level.

Mr. Hauser replied that he believed it was too early to assume the State would raise the BSA and that a ballpark estimate would be nine to eleven million dollars in deficits for FY25.

Ms. Koester pointed to the next section of page two of the memo which covered Staff recommendations to the Assembly if they decide to do more than the Manager's recommendation. She explained her justifications for the percentages that Staff came up with regarding facilities maintenance, utilities, and property insurance.

Assemblymember Bryson asked if the Assembly could fund the JSD request completely with a loan and not give any additional funding outside of that loan.

Chair Weldon confirmed that and stated that those details were shown further in the memo.

Ms. Koester continued by stating that the Manager's proposal recognized that absorbing facilities maintenance would cause an ongoing operating budget pressure for CBJ. She stated that the Assembly could choose to increase the mill rate to help with funding. She stated another option was for the Assembly to fund unrestricted general fund balance, with the caution being that if that became a reoccurring expenditure then future Assembly bodies would be put in a difficult financial position.

Assemblymember Smith asked if the \$3.5 million for facilities maintenance in FY26 would reduce the JSD deficit or if that just included the additional cost to provide what was considered more adequate maintenance.

Ms. Koester answered that it would relieve their budget of \$1.6 million that they are currently spending on facilities maintenance.

Assemblymember Smith asked if it was correct that by following the Manager's recommendation for FY25, JSD would need to make about \$7 million in cuts.

Ms. Flick confirmed that was true.

Assemblymember Smith asked if JSD would need to continue to make cuts after the \$2.1 million yearly repayment for three years, starting in FY26, to have a structurally balanced budget.

Ms. Flick responded that JSD would need to make cuts to about a half a million dollars each of those three years to be structurally balanced, assuming the Assembly funded JSD at the same level as in FY25.

Mr. Hauser stated that JSD was in the process of working with accounting software to integrate their systems more seamlessly to provide reports on staffing, budget, and expenditures.

Assemblymember Smith asked what the general range of possible savings was in the model for school consolidation efforts.

Mr. Hauser discussed the example of closing an elementary school, with potential savings from the change in staffing of about \$688,000 on average across all six elementary schools. He stated that this example at the middle school level would save about \$933,000 and at the high school level it would save about \$1.3 million. He stated that there could be more savings if JSD returned a building to CBJ ownership.

Assemblymember Adkison asked if those numbers accounted for hold harmless.

Mr. Hauser replied that they did not because the enrollment numbers after a potential restructure were not known at this time.

Assemblymember Smith stated that after a potential school consolidation, JSD would still need to significantly reduce staff at the remaining schools to balance their budget.

Committee recessed at 7:23pm

Committee reconvened at 7:41pm

Ms. Koester introduced the first item on the Manager's recommendations list for one-time funding in FY24 from the unrestricted general fund balance for \$1.65 million.

Motion: by Assemblymember Hale to direct staff to draft an ordinance with one-time funding from unrestricted general fund balance for \$1,650,405 in FY24.

Objection: by Assemblymember Bryson.

Amendment: by Assemblymember Woll to change the amount of one-time funding to \$3,922,787.

Assemblymember Woll expressed concern for JPD's ability to provide quality education if they weren't fully funded. She expressed more interest in an Assembly decision to fund the maximum amount versus funding the lower amount with regards to the resulting community feedback.

Objection: Assemblymember Bryson.

Objection: Assemblymember Hale for the purpose of asking the maker of the amendment if she intends to recommend the same maximum funding level for FY25.

Assemblymember Woll confirmed that she intended to make the same recommendation for FY25.

Assemblymembers Adkison, Smith, and Hughes-Skandijs each expressed support for the amendment.

Chair Weldon asked for clarification on whether the amendment was for up to \$3.9 million or strictly at that amount.

Assemblymember Woll clarified that her amendment was for up to that amount.

Objection: Chair Weldon for the purpose of expressing that funding at the higher amount would take away from other city projects that had been prioritized.

Roll Call Vote on Amendment

Ayes: Woll, Smith, Kelly, Adkison, Hughes-Skandijs, Wáahlaal Gíidaak

Nays: Bryson, Hale, Chair Weldon

Amendment Passed. Six (6) Ayes, Three (3) Nays.

Objection to Original Motion as Amended: by Assemblymember Bryson.

Roll Call Vote on Original Motion as Amended

Ayes: Hale, Hughes-Skandijs, Wáahlaal Gíidaak, Adkison, Kelly, Smith, Woll

Nays: Bryson, Chair Weldon

Motion Passed. Seven (7) Ayes, Two (2) Nays.

Ms. Koester introduced the second item on the Manager's recommendations list for one-time funding in FY25 for \$1.65 million.

Motion: by Assemblymember Hale to direct staff to draft an ordinance with one-time funding from unrestricted general fund balance for \$1,650,405 in FY25.

Objection: by Assemblymember Adkison for the purpose of making an amendment.

Amendment: by Assemblymember Adkison to change the amount of one-time funding to \$3,922,787 for the same reasons Assemblymember Woll described in the previous vote.

Objection: by Assemblymember Bryson.

Assemblymember Hughes-Skandijs stated that she believed having healthy funded public schools was a commonly shared value in Juneau and that funding \$1.65 million in FY25 seemed like a responsible choice, in-line with following a step-down approach.

Assemblymember Smith asked if the Assembly could act during the regular budget process to add funds if JSD still needed costs covered.

Ms. Flick responded that as the Assembly they had an option to pass supplemental appropriations.

Chair Weldon stated that the Assembly had already approved \$4 million in funding for FY24 and approving another \$4 million would wipe out the JSD deficit, so they wouldn't need a loan from CBJ.

Adkison expressed concern for the effects on the community of not fully funding JSD, especially with regards to attracting families to move to Juneau.

Assemblymember Hale stated that JSD had lost 1,500 enrolled students since the year 2000 and that during that time a second high school had been built. She expressed concern for funding the maximum amount of \$3.9 million in FY25, stating it would send the wrong message to the schools. She expressed support for \$1.65 million for FY25.

Assemblymember Bryson expressed concern for the precedent that this would set, to bail out a department and wipe out \$8 million in unrestricted general fund balance that the city had saved.

Assemblymember Smith expressed opposition to the amendment, stating that JSD needed to make the necessary structural changes and there would still be time for the Assembly to adjust and help more if it was necessary later on.

Assemblymember Woll asked the maker of the amendment if the proposed amount was up to \$3.9 million in funding or precisely at that amount. She also asked Mr. Palmer if the Assembly could change the funding amount after hearing feedback from the public.

Adkison confirmed the amendment was for up to \$3.9 million.

Mr. Palmer stated that the Assembly could change the funding amount through the budget process later if they wished to do so.

Assemblymember Kelly stated that this decision was about the Assembly giving direction. He explained that he would rather the Assembly come in at a low funding amount and have the flexibility to go higher after hearing feedback. He expressed opposition to the amendment.

Chair Weldon declared a two-minute at ease.

Roll Call Vote on Amendment

Ayes: Adkison, Wáahlaal Gíidaak, Woll

Nays: Bryson, Smith, Hale, Hughes-Skandijs, Kelly, Chair Weldon

Amendment Failed. Three (3) Ayes, Six (6) Nays.

Objection to Original Motion: by Assemblymember Bryson.

Roll Call Vote on Original Motion

Ayes: Hale, Smith, Kelly, Adkison, Woll, Hughes-Skandijs, Wáahlaal Gíidaak, Chair Weldon

Nays: Bryson

Motion Passed. Eight (8) Ayes, One (1) Nay.

Ms. Koester introduced the third item on the Manager's recommendations list for a \$4 million loan to JSD with zero percent interest. She stated that the recommended term was five years with the first-year payback in FY26 and equal payments remaining for those three years.

Ms. Flick stated that the FY24 assistance directed by the Assembly would leave a deficit of roughly \$2 million dollars for FY24 and that with Assembly direction for a maximum \$4 million loan, that would give JSD the structural balance needed for FY24 according to DEED's requirements.

Motion: by Assemblymember Hale to direct Staff to draft an ordinance loaning up to \$4 million to the Juneau School District at zero percent interest with a five-year term, with the first year of payback in FY26, and equal payments for FY27 and FY28, to be paid from the restricted budget reserve. She asked for unanimous consent.

Assemblymember Hale spoke to her motion stating that the restricted budget reserve was there for emergencies and that the current JSD deficit situation did constitute an emergency. She stated that there was a clear plan to pay it back and that it wouldn't affect the unrestricted general fund balance.

Motion passed by unanimous consent.

5. Travel Juneau Program Update

Ms. Flick introduced Travel Juneau as this month's partner agency to provide a program update. She stated that while Travel Juneau may share some aspirations for the upcoming year, this was not a budget presentation.

Liz Perry, Travel Juneau President & CEO, introduced their 2023 annual report, found on page ten of the packet. She introduced the Travel Juneau staff and pointed to their FY22 and FY23 balance sheet as well as the 2023 visitation numbers. She stated that they've seen a rebound in visitation from the Covid era.

Ms. Perry continued to discuss Travel Juneau's marketing strategy, website, and social media channels. She explained how they've seen a rebound in the number of paid partners coming into the organization that would impact their ability to collect revenue. She pointed to the Travel Juneau long term goals and strategies found on page 22 of the packet and stated that one of their goals was to increase the number of fully independent travelers visiting Juneau.

Assemblymember Woll asked if the organization had discussed the short-term rental situation in Juneau and how that might impact visitors and tourism employees, stating that that was one of the Assembly's priorities to act on this year.

Ms. Perry stated that they had discussed short-term rentals in relation to the shortage of available hotel rooms in the summer and tourism staff housing.

Chair Weldon asked Staff to clarify whether Travel Juneau's budget was already in the Assembly budget and if no action was needed.

Ms. Flick confirmed that was true and stated that the Assembly could possibly hear from Travel Juneau to sponsor community requests for items above the base budget. She explained that through the resolution on the hotel bed tax, CBJ was treating Travel Juneau somewhat similar to a department and reviewing their budget through the normal Manager's budget review process.

6. Passenger Fees

Alexandra Pierce, CBJ Tourism Manager, summarized the passenger fee ordinance that required CBJ to solicit passenger fee recommendations from the public. She explained that after their budget was compiled, feedback would be requested from the Assembly before putting the budget back out for public review.

Ms. Pierce continued with details about the program stating that there were efforts to bolster and modernize it. She discussed the Juneau Economic Development Council (JEDC) mobile data purchase program which used cellphone data to see which areas in Juneau tourists were visiting. She expressed her opinion that the cellphone data should be sharable with other entities.

Assemblymember Smith asked about the issue of public WIFI connectivity downtown.

Ms. Pierce stated that the CBJ IT department had conducted research which suggested they could utilize a traffic optimization protocol to capture visitor internet traffic and reroute that traffic to help with downtown WIFI bandwidth.

Assemblymember Adkison asked why the public downtown bear-proof garbage cans needed \$100,000 in funding.

Ms. Pierce answered that the director of Parks and Recreation had confirmed that the bear-proof garbage cans downtown needed to be replaced.

Assemblymember Woll asked why private dock funding was still on the list of passenger fee items.

Ms. Pierce stated that she was actively working on an agreement with the private docks that would settle the funding discussion but that funding for restrooms and security is in line with the funding CBJ's Docks and Harbors receives from passenger fees, as funding for these purposes is considered a benefit to the public.

Assemblymember Hale asked when the Assembly could act if they disagreed with some of the funding recommendations.

Ms. Pierce answered that the Assembly was welcome to make a recommendation tonight or they could wait until April during the budget process discussion.

Assemblymember Hughes-Skandijs asked about the negotiations between the cruise ship companies, the two private dock owners, and CBJ.

Ms. Pierce responded that the private docks had long-term lease agreements for around five years. She stated that one of her goals was to encourage cruise ships to use the city docks with the option to plug into city shore power but that this shore power still needed to be installed. She explained that a rate study would likely enable city docks to raise their rates in competition with the private docks, stating that a competitive rate structure across the port would allow for more flexible agreements to moving ships, to maximize time on shore power.

Chair Weldon expressed concern with the Downtown Business Association funding in the proposal. Ms. Pierce stated she would seek out additional information regarding this funding request.

E. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

7. School District Funding Request

These materials were discussed under Agenda Topic #4.

F. NEXT MEETING DATE

8. March 6, 2024

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:04 pm.