



155 S. SEWARD STREET ▪ JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801
PHONE: 907-586-5278 ▪ FAX: 907-586-4552

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 20, 2017

When it comes to city services, CBJ asks the public – What do you prioritize?
CBJ to host focus group sessions & survey as part of new 'holistic' budgeting process

Contact: Mila Cosgrove, Deputy City Manager, 586-5240 or mila.cosgrove@juneau.org

The City and Borough of Juneau is seeking public input to determine what programs and services the community values most. Public participation through a survey and a series of focus group sessions will inform the Juneau Assembly and city staff on community priorities, and help guide spending decisions as the capital city prepares for even tighter budget times.

“It’s the expenditure of tax dollars that we’re trying to be really careful with,” City Manager Rorie Watt said. “So we’ve expanded our budget process to help reevaluate and realign programs and services to match available revenue streams. We may experience lower state and local revenues as a result of the state government downsizing that is taking place.”

Of the city’s \$318 million total budget for fiscal year 2018, \$73.8 million is used for general government functions – like fire and rescue, police, parks and recreation, Capital Transit and streets – which are mostly paid for with local tax dollars. In the last four years, the city looked for efficiencies, cut positions and reorganized departments, reducing the budget for general government services by \$3.8 million. At the same time, the Assembly increased revenues through a review of local taxes and fees for service.

“All of that combined to stabilize the budget and it was all done with minimal reductions to programs and services to the public,” Watt said. “We’ve streamlined. We’ve raised revenues. We think the next leg of the stool is to look at adjusting or reducing our programs and services.”

Bringing in the public voice is just one part of a new priority-based budgeting process that’s been ongoing for about six months.

A few months ago, the Assembly identified four key community priorities: 1) quality, family-oriented community; 2) reliable, well maintained infrastructure; 3) safe community and 4) vibrant local economy. City staff then created an inventory of more than 100 public programs and services the city currently offers, and evaluated how they meet those community priorities.

“Now we’re at the phase where we’re looking for the community to provide us feedback on that process – to review, validate, correct what we’ve done,” Watt said. “We hope this process provides a holistic approach to potential service realignment and reduction.”

The end product – scheduled to be complete in early March – will be a tool the Assembly can use when reaching budget decisions and considering the realignment of programs and services.

CBJ plans to roll out a public survey at the end of this month. Focus group sessions will start in early February. In the next several weeks, CBJ will provide the public more information on the budget. Be on the lookout for a website devoted to the process.

CBJ is holding two public meetings on the new priority-driven budget process. The first is at 7 p.m. on Feb. 2 in Assembly Chambers; the second is at 10 a.m. on Feb. 4 at the Valley Library.

If you're interested in taking part in a focus group session, contact Deputy City Manager Mila Cosgrove at mila.cosgrove@juneau.org or 586-5240.

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