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INFORMATION RELEASE
March 15, 2017

Community Wellness Strategy to tackle homelessness, housing, crime & addiction

As the capital city continues to grapple with heroin and opioid abuse, increased crime and blighted properties, housing and homelessness, the City and Borough of Juneau is working toward developing a cohesive plan to improve community wellness.

City Manager Rorie Watt said a Community Wellness Strategy would factor in what's already being done by nonprofit service agencies, Juneau Police Department, Bartlett Regional Hospital and CBJ, as well as long-term measures and proposals.

"How do we dive into all the efforts and data to come up with the best way to address these complex, multilayered and inter-related issues?" Watt said. "The goal is to get the Juneau Assembly and the public to focus on issues and possible solutions in context to each other."

CBJ has long been involved with issues of homelessness, housing, addiction and crime. CBJ had a Health and Social Services Department, but it was disestablished in 2000. The Juneau Recovery Hospital, now known as Rainforest Recovery Center, was absorbed by Bartlett Regional Hospital. The mental health services division was absorbed by Juneau Alliance for Mental Health, Inc. Through grants administered and allocated by the Juneau Community Foundation, CBJ still annually gives out about \$850,000 in funds and utility waivers to organizations that address homelessness, suicide prevention, substance abuse, mental health, hospice and relief for victims of violence.

In the past couple of years, CBJ has engaged in several direct efforts to address community wellness. For example, CBJ hired a Chief Housing Officer, gave \$1.5 million and an additional \$1.8 million in bridge funding to the Juneau Housing First Project, started the Mobile Home Loan Down Payment Assistance Program and Accessory Apartment Grant Program, and began a needle collection/disposal program.

"Our approach sometimes feels disjointed and reactionary. It is hard to gauge the real impact of these efforts," Watt said. "A Community Wellness Strategy would clarify the city's involvement and future direction."

In CBJ's ongoing efforts, community partners remain vitally important. A Community Wellness Strategy would be more inclusive of efforts taking place throughout the community.

"Community partners play a substantial role in identifying community issues, providing expertise and best practice information, and calculating need. They are the ones that implement housing, service, and wellness programs for the benefit of the community," Watt said. "Effectively addressing community wellness concerns

requires clear communication and collaboration with our partners. In some instances, enhanced coordination would help greatly.”

Partners include Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, the more than 40 organizations that form the Juneau Coalition on Housing and Homelessness, the Juneau Re-entry Coalition, and many others.

Looking to the future, ideas to address community wellness include grant funding for a Rapid Re-Housing program that would quickly re-house and stabilize people experiencing homelessness, a year-round campground near downtown, a second phase of Housing First that would include 20 additional units, a new sobering center and a medically-assisted treatment outpatient center. These proposals are part of the ongoing discussion.

The Juneau Assembly plans to discuss the Community Wellness Strategy during its March 20 Committee of the Whole meeting. Read Watt’s “[Addressing Community Wellness](#)” ahead of the work session that starts at 6 p.m. in Assembly Chambers.

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