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# Citizens' Taskforce Minutes

Monday, November 09, 2015 6:00PM

Sealing Cove Business Center

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**Citizens' Taskforce Members:** Rob Allen, Maxwell Rule, Lawrence SpottedBird,  
Dyan Bessette, Cynthia Gibson, Mary Magnuson  
Tristan Guevin (Assembly Liaison)

## I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Allen called the meeting to order at approximately 6:01PM.

## II. ROLL CALL

Present: Rob Allen, Maxwell Rule, Lawrence SpottedBird, Dyan Bessette, Cynthia Gibson,  
Mary Magnuson (arrived at 6:03PM)

Absent: None

Assembly Liaison: Tristan Guevin

Staff: Municipal Administrator Mark Gorman, Administrative Coordinator Renee Wheat,  
Utility Director Bryan Bertacchi, Public Works Director Michael Harmon, Chief Finance and  
Administrative Officer Jay Sweeney, Assessor Wendy Lawrence, Harbormaster Stan Eliason,  
Acting Fire Chief Al Stevens, Chief Sheldon Schmitt and Lieutenant Jeff Ankerfelt

## III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**M – Rule/S – Bessette moved to approve the minutes from October 26, 2015. Motion carried unanimously.**

## IV. REPORTS

Chair – Allen thanked Rule for keeping him informed in his absence, suggested after presentations to discuss how the Taskforce will move forward and noted staff will be out of the office next week.

Members – None.

City Staff – None.

Assembly Liaison – Guevin relayed Hugh Bevan put his name forward for the Taskforce vacancy, his application is on the agenda for the November 10, 2015 Assembly meeting.

Other(s) – None.

## V. PERSONS TO BE HEARD/CORRESPONDENCE

Hugh Bevan told he spoke to CBS Assessor regarding charter taxes.

Pete Esquiro thanked the members for their service, he asked the Taskforce to consider where to cut operating costs, overhead and tax exemptions before increasing taxes. He had a listing of 2014 Community Purpose Exemptions. Chair Allen asked Mr. Esquiro to turn in the document and stated staff will post it to the Taskforce website.

## VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

## **VII. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Fire Department Presentation**

Acting Fire Chief Al Stevens stated the Sitka Fire Department (SFD) has three fire engines and three ambulances, responses are slowly increasing, he noted in a 25 year period the department has grown by half of a position but tasks have increased, 90% of paid staff time is spent training volunteers, also there is a high turn over in volunteerism, Search and Resue has been absorbed into the SFD. Acting Chief Stevens stated the Operating Budget has been supplemented by donations. Discussion followed regarding SFD debt vs. assets, rates charged on calls, who provides volunteers their equipment and various types of fees for services. CFAO Sweeney stated there is a sinking fund set up designed to pay for needed equipment over time until it needs to be replaced. There is a charge for calls based on advanced life and basic life support systems, fees have not been reviewed recently, billing is outsourced, Sitka rates are competitive, and fees have not been indexed for inflation.

### **B. Harbor Department Presentation**

Habormaster Stan Eliason spoke to the Harbor Master Plan wherein engineers assessed the infrastructure to determine life of each harbor and cost to start replacements. The Master Plan totals \$28,000,000 and is based on CBS receiving grant awards. Harbormaster Eliason reviewed the moorage rates from 1990 to 2015. CFAO Sweeney advised the State grant award caps at \$5,000,000 and Eliason Harbor alone is \$35,000,000 to replace. Discussion occurred on demand of our harbors to fund that type of structure, drop in 50 foot class boats, and fish tax to Harbor Fund. Administrator Gorman told of risk of the State discontinuing the harbor matching grant program, denial of grant funds for Crescent last year, if the matching grant program is discontinued \$5,000,000 will have to be made up for Crescent. CBS will not be able to maintain all current harbors without State grants. Rates will need to be raised to replace infrastructure, which may cause a decline in harbor users. Harbor Master Eliason relayed \$100,000 of the fish tax goes to the general fund and the remaining goes to the Harbor Fund, it was noted there is no fuel tax in Sitka.

### **C. Police Department Presentation**

Chief Sheldon Schmitt stated he has been with Sitka Police Department (SPD) since 2002, he thanked the Taskforce for their service to our community. He asked Lieutenant Jeff Ankerfelt to give the SPD presentation, Lieutenant Ankerfelt stated the complexity of crimes have grown over time, mostly illegal drug trafficking, domestic abuse, assaults and sexual assaults of minors which are labor intensive. There have been cuts to the DA's office and jail funding, the probation officer retired and had not been replaced, relayed there is only one detective in Sitka, told of staff cuts and vacancies, challenges that involved the SPD building, and gave an overview of the organizations the SPD collaborates with. Discussion occurred on staffing cuts, Chief Schmitt stated staff has gone from 37.5 to 32.5, due to either budget cuts from CBS and the State or reallocation, Administrator Gorman told of a study paid for by CBS regarding the need for a new jail, Public Works Director Harmon advised of the challenges to remodeling the facility and reviewed potential cost for a new facility.

### **D. Assessor Presentation**

Assessor Wendy Lawrence relayed her department has three full time employees responsible for the valuation of 1.01 billion dollar taxbase, told of 6,900 City properties

evaluated one by one over a four year cycle, reviewed the process of assessing each property, recommended to exempt all personal property or at least the first \$250,000 to focus on real property which would in turn create more CBS revenue, she relayed 60% of staff time is applied to real property valuation with revenues of 5.7 million and 40% of staff time to personal property valuation with revenues of \$492,200, recommended hiring trained appraisers and spoke of Federal and State funding being phased out. The State does not have any broad based tax system in place other than oil and gas taxation and is in a budget shortfall. The CBS relies heavily on State funding. She gave examples of other municipalities tax structure and strengths, noted Sitka's taxation policy and gave examples of exemptions both State and City. She explained the capped mill rate which does not cover the natural population growth and burden for services to citizens was then shifted to other tax streams such as sales tax, she explained the advantages of having a budget driven mill rate which does not cap and relayed many other municipalities use this form of taxation. Discussion occurred on process of changing tax and mill rate, Assessor Lawrence explained it was in the charter and would have to be ratified by the voters to change.

**VIII. PERSONS TO BE HEARD**

Hugh Bevan asked for Assessor Lawrence's presentation to be posted to the Taskforce website and for the Core Services Matrix to include what services can be privatized.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

**A. Set next meeting date**

Discussion occurred on future presentations and agenda items for the next meeting. Agreement was reached to review a Core Services Matrix to include all tax exemptions. The next meeting date was set for Monday, November 23, 2015.

**M – Magnuson/S – Rule moved to adjourn. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:31PM.**

Attest:  
Renee Wheat, Administrative Coordinator