
Health Needs and Human Services Commission Agenda

Wednesday, December 18, 2024 12:00 p.m.

Harrigan Centennial Hall

Commission Members:

Crystal Duncan, Annette Evans, Amanda Roberts,
Lawrence “Woody” Widmark, Paul Bahna, Michelle Kavouras
Assembly Liaison: JJ Carlson

- I. **CALL TO ORDER**
- II. **ROLL CALL**
- III. **CORRESPONDENCE /AGENDA CHANGES**
- IV. **PERSONS TO BE HEARD** (*For items OFF the agenda - not to exceed 3 minutes*)
- V. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
 - A. November 20, 2024
- VI. **REPORTS**

Chair:
Commissioners:
City Staff:
Assembly Liaison:
Other(s):
- VII. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**
- VIII. **NEW BUSINESS**
 - B. Approving the recommendations from the Child Care Working Group
- IX. **PERSONS TO BE HEARD** (*For items ON or Off the agenda – not to exceed 3 minutes*)
- X. **ADJOURNMENT**

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 15, 2025, at noon in Harrigan Centennial Hall.

Health Needs and Human Services Commission Minutes
Wednesday, November 20, 2024 12:00 p.m.
Harrigan Centennial Hall

Commission Members:
Crystal Duncan, Annette Evans, Amanda Roberts
Lawrence “Woody” Widmark, Paul Bahna, Michelle Kavouras
JJ Carlson (Assembly Liaison)

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Duncan called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Crystal Duncan, Annette Evans , Michelle Kavouras, Amanda Roberts, and Paul Bahna

Commissioners Absent: Woody Widmark

Assembly Liaison: JJ Carlson

Staff Present: Jess Earnshaw, Deputy Municipal Clerk

III. CORRESPONDENCE /AGENDA CHANGES

IV. PERSONS TO BE HEARD (*not to exceed 3 minutes*)

None.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. October 16, 2024 minutes

Evans move to approve the minutes of October 16, 2024. Motion passed unanimously by a voice vote.

VI. REPORTS

Chair – Duncan stated that Commissioner Roberts has resubmitted her application for a seat on the HNHS Commission.

Commissioners – None.

City Staff – None.

Assembly Liaison – Carlson reported on Strategic Plan meetings.

Other(s) – None.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

B. Presentation from Betty Eliason Center Board President Joel Markis

Markis gave an update on the progress made in the community through the Early Childhood Coalition. He discussed the current enrollment numbers, the center's goals, and the challenges it is currently facing.

Childcare Services

Evans reviewed the issues identified by the childcare services workgroup, which included the following:

Problem 1: Sitka faces a shortage of available and affordable childcare to meet the needs of its current population.

Problem 2: Sitka’s childcare crisis is not only affecting parents, childcare workers, and businesses, but is also having a broader impact on the community, significantly affecting the local economy.

Problem 3- Sitka’s demographics

Community Transportation

Bahna provided a background on transportation. He mentioned the concerns from the community regarding accessibility of transportation in Sitka.

He reviewed the challenges and recommendations provided by the transportation working group.

Elder Services

Bahna provided a background on the elder services that were currently being offered in Sitka. He also reviewed the recommendations that the elder working group had suggested.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

None.

XI. PERSONS TO BE HEARD (*For items on or off the agenda, not to exceed 3 minutes*)

None.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Duncan moved to adjourn the meeting. Seeing no objections, the meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Attest:
Jess Earnshaw, Deputy Municipal Clerk

Community Childcare Collaboration

Annette Evans, Crystal Duncan

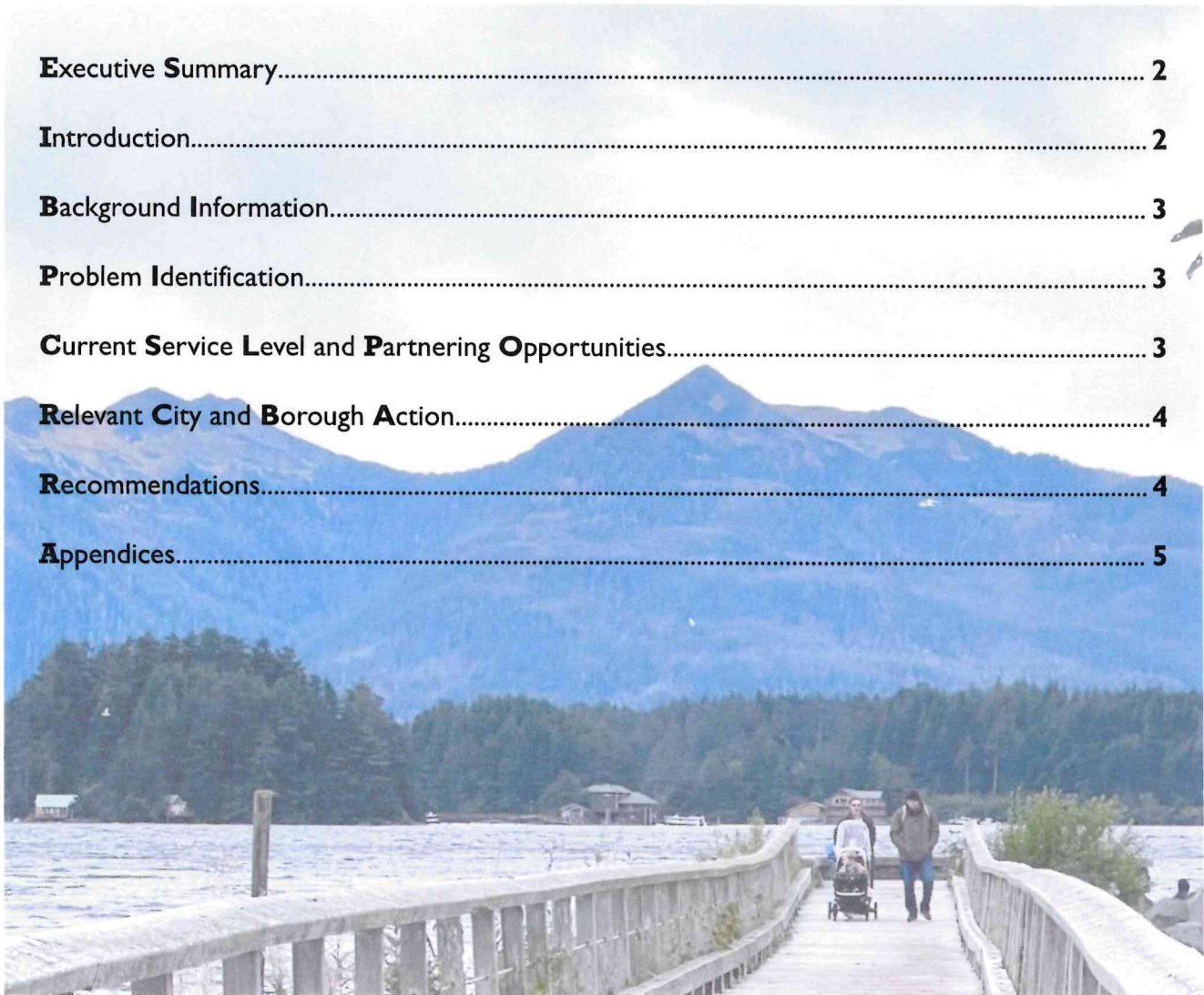
Date: December 11, 2024

Goal: To help Develop a Community-Wide Strategy to Improve Access to Childcare



Community Childcare Collaboration





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“I admire those who are brave enough to have children today.”

- Parent offering feedback at a public meeting with staffer from the offices of Senator Dan Sullivan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

The Health Needs & Human Services Commission (HNHS) prioritized that a report on childcare would be one of its 2024 goals. Firstly HNHS would like to thank the City and Borough of Sitka's (CBS) Assembly for requesting our commission research and make recommendations on this issue. We are excited to see the future action you will take on this issue and hope to continue to be a support as you move forward.

Further, the HNHS Subcommittee on Childcare Services would like to recognize the response from individuals and groups in our community to support the gathering of information for this report. A special thank you to: Sitka's Early Childhood Coalition (ECC), Southeast Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC) and executive Director Blue Shibler, Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA), local childcare providers and their governing boards, Joel Markis- Betty Eliasson Child Care Center Board President and parent, THREAD Alaska, Sitka Chamber of Commerce, CBS strategic workgroup, and other volunteers who are helping to address this issue for Sitka including Kari Sagel and Lauren Wild of the ECC.

Annette Evans

Annette is a parent of two and has been working in the early childhood field for over 25 years. Her college studies began with a focus on early childhood education and psychology. In 2004, she received her Montessori Teacher's Certification for children ages 2.5 - 6 yrs, and followed up with an Infant-Toddler Caregiver certification and has begun studies in Children's Behavioral Health.



She currently works as the Therapeutic Preschool Manager and Lead Teacher at Sitka Counseling. Previously she owned and operated a licensed childcare center in Montana for over 15 years in the private sector which served children in Infancy through Kindergarten.

Born and raised in Sitka, Annette returned home fall of 2020 and has been actively advocating locally and at the state level for early childhood recognition and support. Annette joined the Health Needs and Human Services Commission in February 2022.

Crystal Duncan

Crystal is a lifelong Sitkan who was elected to the City & Borough of Sitka Assembly in October 2020. For the duration of her service she signed on as the Health Needs and Human Services Commission Assembly Liaison and voted in support of requesting the HNHS Commission provide recommendations on how to improve childcare availability and program services in Sitka. Upon completion of her term, she was appointed to the Commission as a community member. In June 2024 she moved into the Chair role and currently serves on two subcommittee groups: Childcare Services, Elder Care Services.



Crystal has spent the entirety of her career in service to her Indigenous community. She has been employed at SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, Sitka Tribe of ALaska, University of Alaska Southeast, and currently works as a remote employee with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC). Her cultural background has shaped her collectivist approach to the community. Though not a parent, she adheres to the quote shared by Liz Medicine Crow, Liz summarized “if everyone older than us is an elder, and everyone younger than us is a youth, then everyone should be taken care of.” Gunalchéesh.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Recent Timeline of Childcare Issues:

- Pre-pandemic: the Early Childhood Coalition was established and began supporting families, creating networking activities for parents and children, and investigating early childhood problems and possible solutions for Sitka.

- CARES Act funds were allocated to Sitka to support childcare. AEYC distributed these funds to CBS. CBS gave those funds to STA to distribute appropriately to childcare programs.
- April 26, 2022: The City Assembly charged the Health Needs and Human Services Commission to work on solutions for Sitka.
- May 2022: STA with Stellar Group, published their Child Care Needs Assessment which captured findings with four recommendations:
 - 1) Provide supplemental funding for wages to help existing providers increase capacity
 - 2) Ensure increased capacity, both short-term and long term, addresses specific needs of tribal families
 - 3) Development an early childhood education advocacy agenda
 - 4) Consider a childcare center partnership with other large employers to subsidize costs and increase community-wide capacity.
- September 15, 2022: The Sitka Health Summit identified childcare as their goal.
- September 27, 2022: The City Assembly unanimously adopted the Sitka 2022-2027 Strategic Plan which directly outlined childcare as an action step.
- April 2023: Alaska's Governor assigned a Child Care Task Force: "The purpose of the Task Force is to develop a plan to improve availability and affordability of quality child care throughout Alaska. The Task Force will consult existing resources, including strategic plans and needs assessments on child care, to develop specific policy recommendations for the governor with the goal of increasing access to high-quality and inclusive child care for Alaskan families. The three major components of a child care system are affordability, accessibility, and quality- none of which can be achieved without a well compensated child care workforce. It is essential for the state to receive input from employers, nonprofit organizations, child care providers, tribal entities, and elected officials to comprehensively address child care challenges statewide," (Office of Governor Mike Dunleavy, Administrative Order No. 346). Task Force Members: Heidi Hedberg, Kathy Moffitt, Cathay Munoz, Robert Barr, Stephanie Berglund, Matthew Bitinas, Kati Capozzi, ep. Julie Coulombe, Kim Hays, Jennifer Patronas, Jennifer Taylor, Sen. Loki Tobin, Bridie Trainor, Heather Weafer.
- June 19, 2024: The HNHS unanimously adopted childcare as part of its three goals to focus on through the remainder of 2024. A report as well as presentation will be provided to the Assembly in January 2025.
- July 2024: SBI89, which includes the landmark Child Care Bill HB89, officially became law. "The Child Care Bill represents one of the largest state investments in child care in Alaska's history, with significant annual increases earmarked for expanding child care assistance and supporting business tax credits," (Thread Alaska/Learn & Grow News, July 26, 2024).

- October 8, 2024: The Sitka Chamber of Commerce kicked off their fall speaker series. Over the course of six sessions, the community will hear from experts in the area of childcare about how to identify and pursue solutions when it comes to childcare.
- November 21, 2024 Sitka Strategic Plan 2022-2027 was revised as stated:

Goal 1: Preserve the quality of life + affordability for all Sitkans

Action Item 1.4: Continue to Facilitate community partners to develop a community-wide strategy to improve access to childcare.

- December 2024: State Child Care Task Force presented 2nd and final report and recommendations to the Governor.
- CBS FY25 Legislative Priorities stated: “Support for Economic Resilience Funding to expand housing and childcare access.”
- CBS FY26 Legislative Priorities will go before the Assembly January, 2025, and will again note Childcare as a priority.

<https://www.aeyc-sea.org/index.html>

<https://www.threadalaska.org/>

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Sitka’s child care issue is not unique to Sitka, and where once “child care deserts” were talked about, we now recognize childcare as a nation wide crisis. A national solution is not realistic, but community-wide strategies are possible.

Our nation is experiencing a child care desert. Defined by the Center of American Progress as an area with at least 30 children under the age of 5 with either no child care providers at all, or so few that there are more than three times as many children under the age of 5 as there are childcare spots available.” <https://Childcaredeserts.org/2018/>). This lack of childcare availability is a problem, however, that our federal government has been unable to address as a nation for several reasons, one reason being that each state is different and each community has unique struggles and resources available. Therefore, solutions for community childcare issues need to start at the community level with municipal involvement that is aimed to address childcare as part of its long term infrastructure. There are three problems that need to be addressed in order to make headway on this issue:

Problem 1 - Sitka is lacking available and affordable childcare spots to meet the needs of our current population.

The reasons for this lack of ability to enroll more children into programs, or to start a new program opening more places for local children, are echoed by providers and their governing boards in Sitka:

- Providers can not recruit and retain employees
 - Low non-livable wages
 - Inability to provide benefits
- Failed business model where budgets cannot be balanced with current expenses to revenue without raising tuition costs
 - Raising tuition risks inequity; childcare becomes an option only for the wealthy
 - Raising tuition risks losing clientele because it is unaffordable, and therefore contributes to problems such as more children entering the public school system ill prepared, and/or more parents out of the workforce to provide at home childcare

Problem 2 - Sitka's childcare crisis is not just an issue for parents, child care employees, or businesses, lack of childcare is affecting our community on the whole as it greatly impacts our economy.

The US Chamber of Commerce Foundation compiled a report in 2021 to illustrate the *Value of Childcare: How Childcare Impacts Alaska's Workforce Productivity and the State Economy*. Their top finding was that childcare issues result in an estimated \$165 million loss annually for Alaska's economy.

Problem 3 - Sitka's changing demographics

According to Alaska Public Media publication July 2024, Alaska is experiencing an increase in outmigration. A strong theory is that younger families, or those wishing to start a family, are unable to do so in communities like Sitka due to the unavailability of childcare, and the high cost of living. Fewer people will be able to move into Sitka with these factors, and therefore the city's average age is rising. This in turn means lower workforce and because of Sitka's sales tax and property tax exemptions, a smaller tax base.

CURRENT SERVICE LEVEL AND PARTNERING OPPORTUNITIES



City and Borough of Sitka:

While the city has both the Parks and Recreation department as well as Library department that offer programming and activities for children, the City is limited in resources devoted to providing childcare services. Rather, they rely on a partnership with the Sitka School District to help address the needs of our community.

The Sitka School District is currently recruiting for a Venture’s Coordinator, until then, operations for this after school program have halted. The district also received approval from the school board to develop a preschool program that would begin in the 2024/2025 academic year.

Community Partners and Non-Profits in Sitka:

In 2020, Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) conducted a childcare assessment. At that time there were an estimated 1,222 children under the age of 13 living in Sitka. 13.32% of them are enrolled as tribal citizens of STA. STA has a number of programs that support children and families including child care assistance as well as development of a program so in-home day providers can assist with child care needs.

Sitka’s Early Childhood Coalition (ECC), a local group of early childhood advocates consisting of parents, local childcare providers, business owners and city employees, has been collecting data and advocating for possible solutions within Sitka, and advocating at the state level for support as well. ECC compiled a data sheet for fall 2023 noting Sitka’s lack of available childcare:

- Infants: 93%
- Toddlers: 88%

Age Group	Number of kids currently enrolled in licensed facility (approx.):	Estimated children in Sitka of this age:	Coverage %
<i>Infant (2-18 mon)</i>	9	120	7%
<i>Toddler (19 - 3 years)</i>	16	120	13%

- Preschool: 56%
- School age: 99%

Their data further supports this table showing child care coverage in all of Sitka (see graphic).

Sitka’s current options include: Betty Eliason Child Care Center, Mt Edgumbe Preschool, Sheldon Jackson Child Care Center, Sitka Counseling and Prevention Services, Woonch.een Head Start, and 3-5 Preschool plus smaller in-home child care options.

RELEVANT CITY AND BOROUGH ACTION

The nation’s childcare desert is now being discussed at federal and state legislative tables, with action being taken here in Alaska. We summarized other relevant communities to provide examples of their approach to addressing this issue in their community.

Anchorage

- 2023 Voters approved a proposition dedicating all the municipality’s marijuana tax revenue to boost child care access and early education programs. This tax is expected to bring in \$5 million per year.
- Mayor and Assembly Created a Task Force
- As of January 2024, money has been accumulating in the fund.
- September 2024 Task Force proposed \$8 million budget for spending the Anchorage Child Care and Early Education Fund
 - Recommended Spending Breakdown:
 - \$2 million to Subsidize cost of childcare for childcare workers and early education
 - \$2.4 million to grants to existing licensed child care and early education organizations to help with operation costs.
 - Remaining set aside for board administration and tax collection.
 - Additional revenue from 2024 used for “innovative pilot projects” (strategic projects)
 - \$500,000 as capital funding grants to support existing facilities in small-scale minor improvements
 - \$200,000 start-up grants to new in-home child care facilities.

Juneau

- In 2012, AEYC started investing in the childcare workforce, training early childhood providers, granting money awards to participants as they completed steps along the training pathway. AEYC partners with the City and Borough of Juneau via a signed MOU agreement, still carrying out contractual agreements with the capacity to take on other governments interested in developing similar programming.
- In November 2018, the City and Borough of Juneau (CJB) Assembly Child Care Committee was formed
- In 2019, The Mayor assigns the Assembly Childcare Committee with its charge:
 - Committee Recommendations to Assembly:
 - 1) That the CBJ identify what, if any, public and school facilities may be used to provide child care.
 - 2) That the CBJ establish a revolving loan fund for use in business start-up and on-going programs.
 - 3) That in FY20, the CBJ fund existing child care and early education programs.
 - 4) That the Best Starts model be funded with some structural changes to clearly delineate how the program would prioritize increasing capacity until child care demands are fulfilled (FY21).
 - 5) That with the FY21 budget proposal to the Assembly, the CBJ Administration present an implementation plan for Recommendation #4.
- In 2020, a large amount of Cares Grant funding was made available as part of the pandemic response:
 - AEYC distributed funds to Sitka, Ketchikan and Juneau for childcare support.
- When Cares funds ran out, CBJ implemented a childcare line item as part of their annual operating budget.
 - AEYC handles the distribution to providers. Providers fill out a form monthly, and then receive \$ / child AND \$ / staff.

Valdez

- In February 2023: The City of Valdez established a Child Care Crisis Task Force (CCCTF).
- Additionally they secured funds from thread's Community INNOVATION Grant in the amount of \$880,000.
 - With this grant the task force: created a plan focused primarily on the logistics of creating an initial licensed child care facility in the community, suggesting that the

City of Valdez take on a role as the facilitator of the facility rather than directly owning and operating the child care facility.

- January 23, 2024, the CCCTF reported recommendations for addressing Valdez’s chronic child care shortage to the Assembly.
 - Valdez Vision of a Community-supported child care center is one that:
 - Provides high-quality care and early learning opportunities for children, contributing to increasing school readiness
 - Ensures employers in Valdez can attract and retain the workforce they need
 - Creates jobs and contributes to the community’s economic vitality
 - Preserves the City’s family-friendly status with the Coast Guard.
 - Valdez Task Force Plan’s five priorities:
 - **Sustainable Child Care Workforce Pipeline**
 - Recruit and provide monetary support to train an initial cohort of early educators and work toward making Prince William Sound College into a training hub for the profession
 - Assess the minimum pay and benefits needed to retain a professional workforce
 - **Site Selection**
 - Select possible locations
 - Contract with an architect to assess timeline for financing and renovation of space
 - **Management Structure and Licensing**
 - Potentially a public-private partnership
 - Create a community support system to help navigate licensing process and gain access to other existing financial and professional development supports
 - **Sustainable Funding**
 - Create a Child Care Endowment to fund grant programs aimed at supporting the childcare and early childhood education sector and build community partnerships with local stakeholders to maintain funding
 - Establish a discretionary sales tax on alcohol, tobacco and/or marijuana to directly provide revenue to the fund in perpetuity.

■ **Communications and Advocacy**

- Communication tools to connect families to quality care
- Advocate at the State and Federal levels for support of local child care efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to list childcare as a high priority on the annual CBS Legislative Priorities list.
2. Resolution of support at state level for future ongoing support of child care actions. CBS representative(s) to join boards/commissions as opportunities become known.
3. Advisory vote to assess the appetite of the community with regards to funding/supporting childcare.
4. That CBS identify what, if any, school or city owned facilities may be used to provide child care facilitated by CBS, operated by independent business.
5. That CBS identify a facility and support the attainment of a facility (if necessary) where development of a Community-Supported Childcare Center can begin.
 - Explore real estate in Sitka where an independently managed, community-supported childcare center can operate (Stratton Building, SEARHC hospital after move out to new facility, other large employer/property owner with space, etc.)
 - If in a City of Sitka owned facility, offer free or reduced rent.
6. That by FY26, CBS fund existing childcare and early education programs.
 - a. Build a line item budget appropriate for Sitka's childcare operating cost needs.
 - i. State Child Care Calculator can be used to determine adequate operating costs.
 - b. Ballot measure on October 2025 municipal ballot: Ordinance to create sustainable fund for Early Childhood Education (ECE)
 - i. Transfer Tobacco tax from Sitka Community Hospital (SCH) to ECE
 - ii. Add a 2% excise tax on alcohol in Sitka; 2% dedicated to ECE

- c. Explore developing MOA/U with AEYC to distribute municipal funds to early childhood licensed providers, and other available grant funds for childcare programs.
- 7. That CBS Subsidize utilities, discount utilities, or Free utilities for all licensed child care centers.
- 8. Offer a tax break to businesses that are supporting their employees with childcare (contributing to tuition costs, or offering childcare within their business facility at discount to employees).

Action is needed on CBS strategic plan goal when plan is updated for next five years. Sustainability, keep childcare at the forefront. Thank you for including child care in this strategic plan. Shows importance.

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

- Do you live in a child care desert? <https://Childcaredeserts.org/2018/>
- Early Childhood Education & Childcare in Sitka, compiled by Early Childhood Coalition member Lauren Wild , September 2023; updated October 2024.
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation: How Childcare Impacts Alaska’s Workforce Productivity and the State Economy.
www.uschamberfoundation.org/solutions/early-childhood-and-k-12-education/untapped-potential
- Alaska demographers predict population drop, a switch from prior forecasts
<https://Alaskapublic.org/2024/07/23.alaska-demoprahers-predict-population-drop-a-switc-h-from-prior-forecasts/>
- www.threadalaska.org/thread/policy-and-research/take-action/return-on-investment/
- CBJ Assembly Child Care Committee, Final Report, April 19, 2019
- CBJ Assembly Child Care Committee letter from Chair to Mayor, April 19, 2019
- Sitka 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, SSW Consulting, September 1, 2022
- Sitka 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, Goal I revision, November 21, 2024.
- Sitka Tribe of Alaska Child Care Needs Assessment, Stellar Group, May 2022
- Anchorage Daily News: Group Proposes first child care spending budget for Anchorage’s marijuana tax, Emily Goodykoontz, September 5, 2024
- Valdez Child Care Task Force Final Recommendation to the Valdez City Council, January 23, 2024
- Southeast Association for Education of the Young Child
<https://www.aeyc-sea.org/index.html>
- Office of Governor Mike Dunleavy, Administrative Order No. 346
<https://gov.alaska.gov/admin-orders/administrative-order-no-346>
- Task Force on Child Care, Project Reports
https://ddaalaska.com/alaskachildcaretaskforce_project_reports/

- Thread Alaska/Learn & Grow News: *Alaska Child Care Bill Becomes Law!*
<https://www.threadalaska.org/learn-and-grow/blog/alask-child-care-bill-becomes-law>

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