

Mr. Mayor, Assembly Members:

I come before you this evening as a representative of an ad hoc group dedicated to preserving the Hames Community Center. Our group cuts across all sectors of Sitka society with members from both the public and private sector. We represent mothers, fathers, teachers, healthcare, public safety, and free enterprise, in short, we are your constituents. We are a diverse group dedicated to the cause of a community recreation center.

In the spring of 2007, at the community Health Summit, Sitkans identified a Community Recreation Center and Gym as a top priority. There are many reasons for this. Community Rec. centers do more than just provide a “place to go” or a “hangout.” It is well documented within the scientific literature that cities and municipalities with accessible community recreation centers have higher rates of employment, lower rates of school drop-out, lower healthcare costs, higher standards of living, and lower rates of poor mental health. An opportunity now presents itself to us, the citizens of Sitka, to acquire such a center.

Many have raised the question, “why not just build a new facility?” According to figures from the City and Borough of Juneau, a new pool, based upon the figures for the Mendehall Valley pool approved in Tuesday’s election, would cost \$19.8 million. From Ketchikan, the figure is \$15 million. And these numbers are just for a pool.

The current facility is a functional and structurally sound building. Repairs and maintenance are needed, but nothing to the tune of what a new facility would cost, and nothing that is beyond the reach of what the citizens of Sitka have already demonstrated they are willing to put toward city-based recreational facilities. (\$1.78 million for the multiuse fields)

Since it’s inception, 90% of all users of the Hames Center have been community, not SJ, members. They include, among others, 178 SEARHC program-based clients (Bill Brady Healing House, Raven’s Way Treatment Program, WiseWomen); 200 kids everyday, Monday through Saturday for Youth Basketball (Dec – March); 1,551 current Hames Center members; 200 active duty Coast Guard members and 300 family members. The center is used for basketball and volleyball tournaments, triathlons, sports practice, Coast Guard training, Trooper Academy training, Community gatherings and Potlatches.

We are not asking the city to take on an indefinite lease with Sheldon Jackson. Nor are we requesting a bailout of SJ. Rather, we are asking for a year’s time during which the ad hoc group which I represent will actively seek out measures to keep the Hames Center within the community domain. Currently, we are exploring options ranging from city ownership, acquisition by a non-profit, and the formation of a community cooperative—all measures which would keep the Hames Center from reverting back to SJ. If desired, we are willing to help the Assembly craft a ballot initiative asking voters to approve a bond issue.

Social capital, of which the Hames Center is a crucial part is, to paraphrase the World Bank, the glue which shapes and holds society together. (The World Bank (1999) 'What is Social Capital?', *PovertyNet* <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/whatsc.htm>) For 20 years, Sheldon Jackson College has subsidized the Hames Center for our community, it is now time for us to take firm control of our community assets by supporting the transition of the Hames Center into the community domain. Thank you.

References/Resources:

'Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions... Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together' (The World Bank 1999).

In high social-capital areas public spaces are cleaner, people are friendlier, and the streets are safer. Traditional neighbourhood “risk factors” such as high poverty and residential mobility are not as significant as most people assume. Places have higher crime rates in large part because people don’t participate in community organizations, don’t supervise younger people, and aren’t linked through networks of friends. Smith, M. K. (2007) 'Social capital', *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/biblio/social_capital.htm

A growing body of research suggests that where trust and social networks flourish, individuals, firms, neighbourhoods, and even nations prosper economically. Social capital can help to mitigate the insidious effects of socioeconomic disadvantage. Smith, M. K. (2007) 'Social capital', *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/biblio/social_capital.htm

There appears to be a strong relationship between the possession of social capital and better health. ‘As a rough rule of thumb, if you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying over the next year in half. If you smoke and belong to no groups, it’s a toss-up statistically whether you should stop smoking or start joining’ (ibid.: 331). Regular club attendance, volunteering, entertaining, or church attendance is the happiness equivalent of getting a college degree or more than doubling your income. Civic connections rival marriage and affluence as predictors of life happiness Smith, M. K. (2007) 'Social capital', *the encyclopedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/biblio/social_capital.htm

http://www.infed.org/biblio/social_capital.htm
<http://www.cpra-web.org/pdf/ROLEParksandRecreationStats.pdf>
<http://www.urban.org/publications/410998.html>,