

Advancing Our Community (AOC) and  
the Sitka City Commission on Health Needs and Community Services (CHNCS)  
January 10, 2006; 1:30 pm

In attendance:

David Voluck, Cheri Hample, Grace Brooks, Althea Buckingham, Martina Kurzer, Pat Alexander, Michael Lande, Chris Bauman, Matthew Turner and Kayla Boettcher

Background:

This group was convened to discuss the city's past practice of distributing grants to community organizations. Several years ago, the money was revenue sharing, and was once primarily designated for social service agencies (specifically SAFV and SCPS). In the last couple of years, more and more agencies have applied for these grants that now come from the city's general fund, and the assembly's process for allocating the funds appears to be arbitrary. AOC, as a coalition that represents many of the local social service agencies, has had members of its steering committee raise this issue at a recent meeting. Several AOC member agencies would like to explore the possibility of helping the city to develop a list of criteria and priorities for awarding the grants. These AOC members invited members of the CHNCS to join the discussion.

Discussion:

Members of CHNCS reported that the city indicated that they could handle this process on their own and didn't need the commission's assistance (this was about 6 months ago).

Pat collected some information about how this process works in Juneau. She used to sit on a similar commission in Juneau, and they used to have a cumbersome process for distributing money. They now have a 6-page application (which Pat distributed at this meeting) that helps the assembly determine priorities for the city and how to distribute the money. There are also criteria listed for what successful proposals/projects would look like (also included in hand out).

Pat's recommendation: the commission doesn't have the manpower to rate the applications, but they may be able to help them identify priority areas and scoring criteria.

Althea believes the city used to have a committee established to determine how to distribute excess money – 10 years ago? They made their own criteria for that money.

SEDA gets a bunch of money, which is essentially money taken away from non-profits, pitting non-profits against one another. These agencies have needs – we don't want to see any of them suffer, but also sad to see them have to compete for limited dollars. Having established criteria makes the agencies accountable, and makes us consider sustainability. The group that determines the process may need to be an independent body appointed by the city, since many commission members are also non-profit reps, but the point is that it's unfair – it appears as though assembly members can fund their "pet projects". To give big money to SEDA when several non-profits are barely eking by does not feel good. SEDA is a nonprofit, but not human services - they got 26% of the pot last year – it is the opinion of

this group that the City should be funding SEAD as a city department instead of allowing them to compete for this funding.

The money used to be primarily given to SCPS and SAVF. Last year or two years ago was the first time that other agencies received.

There are 2 issues at stake:

What is allocated – how much

What is the process – how it's allocated (could it/should it be only human services, and not SEDA or Isabel Miller)

Perhaps there are two or three pots of money created – one for human services, one for others, like arts camp, museums; one designated for SEDA. Economic development issues should not be thrown together with non-profits, and we should also distinguish human services as it's own category.

Need to determine between community's needs and wants.

We need to make city aware of these concerns and educate them about what the organizations do and why this money is important. Non-profits depend on being able to show some local support when they apply for other grants. Commission can potentially provide this education to assembly in work session, with help from experienced non-profit leaders.

City needs to be reminded of how other comparably sized cities fund their community services – most of them contract out with services like ours to provide those services – Sitka does it very differently than others – many others designate a specific percentage to these needs. Ever since the revenue sharing ending, the % of money given from the city has dwindled.

How to proceed?

The group agrees that the priority is to find a way to help the city understand that they need to determine priorities and criteria, and develop a fair and transparent process for distributing the money. Important points to explore:

- Get City to set standards ahead of time so their allocation process does not seem arbitrary or politically motivated.
- Dividing money into 3 groups, designated for human services, other non-profits (like arts groups), and SEDA (although this step may be too ambitious to accomplish this year)
- Developing a list of priorities based on the community's needs
- Develop a list of criteria for the grant applications and for the recipients to meet with their award
- Put pressure on City to increase the pot of money available for these grants (education about the percentage given in other comparable communities, include the money given out to community agencies throughout the rest of the year)

Steps of the process were not determined at this time, but may include:

- Educating the assembly members about the importance of supporting their local human service agencies
- CHNCS approaches city through a work session to educate them and help develop criteria and priorities
- AOC members have a continual presence at assembly meetings and/or approaching assembly members to keep this issue on the surface
- AOC and CHNCS together with the City find a mutually satisfactory way to develop a process (perhaps this is through an independent group appointed by the city)

What's next?

- CHNCS members agree to get more information from city about how funds have been distributed over the past; including who applied and wasn't funded, if possible.
- CHNCS are meeting on Thursday (1/12) to discuss their long-range plan – they would really like to introduce the idea that the commission could focus on helping to establish criteria
- Put it on City's radar that these discussions have begun (through commission?)
- AOC members will develop a resolution to be passed by the coalition at their next meeting
- Begin process of determining priorities and criteria

As needs and information emerge, future meetings will be scheduled.