TO: Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee

FROM: George Schaaf, Parks & Recreation Director

DATE: December 30, 2022

RE: Restructuring Parks & Recreation Boards and Committees

The Parks & Recreation Department supports five citizen advisory boards and committees, requiring 43 volunteer members:

1. Parks & Recreation Advisory Board
2. Treadwell Arena Advisory Board
3. Aquatics Board
4. Jensen-Olson Arboretum Advisory Board
5. Youth Activities Board

The Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) was established in the 1980s and charged with making recommendations to the Department and Assembly on all matters affecting recreation in the community. This broad mandate was eroded over the last 15 years as new committees were created to focus on specific issues or facilities (i.e. the ice rink, arboretum, pools, etc.). While most of these committees were intended to be temporary, they were all made permanent. Having so many boards engaging in different areas of the Department has resulted in a number of problems and challenges:

- It is very difficult to recruit and retain 43 engaged volunteers who are interested in recreation. With over 30% of these board seats vacant, meetings are frequently cancelled or unable to proceed due to lack of quorum. More than 40% of Aquatics Board meetings since 2019 were cancelled due to lack of quorum; the Treadwell Arena Advisory Board cancelled 75% of its meetings this year for the same reason.

- Supporting five boards and committees requires over 1,000 hours of staff time each year. While about half of this time is devoted to supporting the Youth Activities Board, this workload diverts limited resources away from delivering core services and programs to the public.

- The ability of citizens to influence decision-makers is reduced when each facility or operation is represented by a niche board or committee. Fewer boards representing a larger portion of the community would be more effective and impactful.

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- Board morale suffers when meetings have no purpose or no meaningful action is taken.

It is imperative that the public have meaningful opportunities to provide input and recommendations to staff and the Assembly regarding the services and programs delivered by the Parks & Recreation Department. With so many boards and committees, however, little has been accomplished: The Aquatics Board has approved one regulation in the eight years since it was established and the Treadwell Arena Advisory Board has not taken any action in three years. The Friends of the Jensen-Olson Arboretum, a private nonprofit organization, has grown significantly and largely replaced the Jensen-Olson Arboretum Advisory Board's role in fundraising, planning events, and recruiting volunteers. Considering the staff and volunteer resources required by more than 40 public meetings every year, there are more efficient ways to engage the public.

Juneau uses a "council-manager" form of government where elected officials set policy and the manager oversees day-to-day operations. According to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), "Because decisions on policy and the future of the community are made by the entire governing body rather than a single individual, council-manager governments more often engage and involve their residents in decision-making. Residents guide their community by serving on boards and commissions, participating in visioning and strategic planning, and designing community-oriented local government services."[i] A 2009 report by the University of Tennessee distinguished between various standing committees that typically exist in city government (planning commissions, park boards, etc.) and "citizen panels that are appointed to investigate or review a single issue *and that are disbanded once recommendations on that issue have been delivered to the governing body*."[ii] An informal survey of parks & recreation agencies nationwide by CBJ staff found that the vast majority use just one citizen board or committee. Only very large cities like Miami or Chicago have more than four advisory committees, mainly to represent large geographic areas rather than specific programs or facilities, such as pools.

The community would be better represented by a single, well-managed Parks & Recreation board that provides for diverse representation of the public in all of the Department's programs, facilities, and services. This approach would not only reduce the burden on staff, but also allow board members to accomplish meaningful and needed work throughout the year. The ordinance introduced on December 12, 2022 restores and expands the PRAC's original mandate to advise the Assembly and the Department on all issues affecting parks and recreation in Juneau, including Aquatics, Treadwell Arena, and the Jensen-Olson Arboretum. To ensure that the PRAC continues to be a robust body that represents the community's interests in meaningful ways, the ordinance explicitly requires that it review critical actions, including: planning and development of projects and programs; the Department's Capital Improvement Program; fee schedule; adopted and proposed legislation, including regulations; acquisition or disposal of lands managed or dedicated for park purposes; and naming of parks and facilities.

In recent weeks, staff met with the chairs of the Aquatics Board, Treadwell Arena Advisory Board, and Jensen-Olson Arboretum Advisory Board. Staff also presented information about the proposed restructuring to the Jensen-Olson Arboretum Advisory Board and the Aquatics Board (the Treadwell Arena Advisory Board has not called a meeting since March 2022). Understandably, some board

members expressed disappointment, but none of the boards or committees recommended against adopting the proposed ordinance.

The Assembly referred the proposed ordinance to the Human Resources Committee, which will consider it on January 9, 2022 at 5:30 p.m.

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[i] (International City/County Management Association)
[ii] (Angerer, 2009)