



## Jensen-Olson Arboretum Introduction

Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, April 2024

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## JOA Annual Report for PRAC

This annual report is based on calendar year, not CBJ fiscal year.

The state of the arboretum is stable, with high praise and appreciation from the community of Juneau. Weather events and wildlife have affected plant collections and facilities onsite, but not so extreme as to close the grounds or drastically change operations.

Since approximately 2016, winters have become warmer with more snow turning to rain. This is documented by regional professionals from NWS, NOAA, and UAS. More rain with less snow cover has affected SE Alaska's native plant communities and the botanical collections at JOA. The effects of wet soil have rotted plant crowns, caused plants to fall over including native trees, and expose plants to freezing temperatures without snow as a buffer. Consequently, in the late winter of 2023, many *Primula* specimens died from freezing. *Primula* are the base of the arboretum collections. To maintain JOA's Nationally Accredited Collection<sup>TM</sup> for the Genus *Primula*, the manager/horticulturist will perpetually be researching and selecting species and varieties that can adapt to the climate. As part of JOA's duty to maintain the collection, I acquired many new varieties to the arboretum and started them from seed in the fall of 2023.

Another effect of the changing climate is the temperatures increasing and increasing when it is raining. The combination sets the stage for plant funguses to thrive. So far only native fungus has affected plants at JOA. One fungus is a variety that is commonly found on SE Alaska's native shore pine. The fungus also affects an ornamental species of pine onsite, Pyramid Pine. That pine will be monitored and removed if it cannot recover this year.

Outbreaks of black-headed budworm and hemlock sawfly of recent years have left the tops of native trees dead. USFS entomologists believe the outbreaks have waned and encourage landowners to monitor trees for two to three years. They say in the worst case, wind could break off the tops of these

trees. There are several heavily damaged hemlock and spruce at JOA and on Pt. Caroline that are being monitored.

With successful appropriation of non-discretionary funds for updates to the manager's residence at JOA, two major projects were completed. In late spring 2023, CBJ Facilities Maintenance changed out the plumbing and installed a new multi-stage well water filtration system. This was to reduce lead that had been leaching into the tap water from aged plumbing. The filter system has an individual filter to remove iron, as well as carbon and particulate filtration. New testing will be performed in spring 2024. In the summer of 2023, CBJ IT installed business Starlink internet service, improving access speeds over 150X. The manager can now attend and offer online meetings. Additionally multiple staff can access at the same time without slowing down. It must be made clear that I conducted most of the research on options even purchasing personal residential Starlink to prove the service worked at JOA.

The years of weather have also affected the facilities at JOA. The manager's residence still has the single-glaze windows installed when Carl Jensen built the house in 1961. To help mitigate weather, the windows also had storm windows. The storm windows were wood framed and all of them have failed. Many just plain rotted, some became so mis-shaped that they do not attach to the house frame anymore. Exterior paint has been peeling and damaged by the years of extreme weather in addition to plants being too close to the buildings. CBJ Facilities maintenance was aware of the issues and kept the windows and paint on a deferred maintenance list. The two items finally rose to necessity and plans were drawn up in 2023. As soon as I began work at JOA in 2021, I have been removing plants that were too close to the buildings. There is still work to do and that will continue this year. After the plants are moved, I plan to install a 2-foot-wide gravel walking area adjacent to the foundation for maintenance access. CBJ engineering estimates the windows will be done in October-November 2024, and painting will be done in summer of 2025.

There is one fleet vehicle at JOA which is five years past due for replacement. I began the process of trying to replace the vehicle on my arrival in the position in 2021. However, supply chain issues were holding CBJ back from buying new vehicles. I attempted each budget year to replace the vehicle. Due to lack of written procedure and poor communication it has been a challenge. Deputy Parks&Rec Director Lauren Verrelli has suggested that Fleet Service stay observant of fleet vehicles that need replacement. The JOA budget has been applying funds to a vehicle and I have made it clear to Fleet that JOA needs to be on the list for FY25.

During the summer of 2023, the Friends of Jensen-Olson Arboretum hosted Tidepooling for Families, Mother's Day-our biggest visitation day usually sees 200 people, Primrose Day, Alaska Public Gardens Day, Bug Day, a watercolor workshop, and the local garden clubs picnic celebrating JOA's anniversary. FJOA contracts one individual to coordinate the educational events. She recruits volunteers in respected fields to lead programs for families and children. Other events led by myself included a native plant walk, opening of the grounds for holidays, Alaska Arbor Day tree planting, orientation for local tour company, and plant sales. Other uses included the Sons of Norway picnic, a performance by Theater Alaska, one wedding, traditional canoe landing by CES 4H Alaska Experience Camp, planting and harvesting of Tlingit potatoes by TLCC school children, a visit from residents at the Pioneer Home, and a memorial celebration for Cheri Fluck who was a friend of Caroline Jensen. In all, approximately 10,000 guests visited JOA in 2023. (a 2024 Events listing included with this packet)

As part of their duties in holding the conservation easement to the property at JOA, SEAL Trust makes two site visits per year. One is an annual assessment of the grounds visit usually conducted in May. There are less formal visits at other times of the year. SEAL Trust creates a document of the formal visit, it is available upon request.

Over the winter of 2023-2024, I received approval from P&R Director George Schaff to close the arboretum in December. This was for two reasons, low visitation, and my need for vacation. JOA is not well visited in the winter. Weather prevents folks from driving out-the-road, especially if there is heavy snow. It may take a full day before DOT clears the highway. On good weather days, 1 - 4 people might visit. Since our busy season keeps me onsite from generally April - October, I do not take vacations in the summer. I took most of December off and it was nice not to have to find someone to open and close the gate at JOA.

During the winter I work with P&R staff to update the FY budgets. These were completed with adjustments requested by the city manager in February. Other winter tasks include clearing and archiving files, working with FJOA to create the seasonal event program, planning the vegetable garden plant scheme, and starting seeds. I also attend local garden club meetings and have been a regular presenter at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in Seattle in February.

For the past three years JOA has had a returning groundskeeper assistant in the full-time seasonal benefitted position. That person informed me that they would not be returning for multiple reasons. They were of great benefit because they are interested in horticulture. However, that person is a student at UAS and this is their last year. They may have an opportunity for a field biology class which would take them

away from Juneau part of this summer. A large factor for not returning was lack of employment stability. Working only six months of the year made it difficult to find winter work. I have been in discussions with P&R management on extending the hours of this position incrementally over the years, moving to eight months, then ten, and so on. There is administrative work, as well as garden work, that could be done that justifies a second year-round employee. Another reason the benefitted assistant will not return is due to pay scale. Surprisingly, this past winter they found a tourism industry job answering phones that pays more.

For the past three years the second seasonal groundskeeper assistant that is non-benefitted has been different each year. In 2023 this person lived nearby and would return if not for the cost of childcare.

In March of 2024 I am interviewing three candidates so far for the two positions.

A big project I have been working on this winter is the design and cost planning for a new accessible path across the entry lawn at JOA. Cheri Fluck's family donated \$5,000 to FJOA in the summer of 2023. I suggested we use it for a path in honor of Cheri and Caroline who gardened into old age. Over the winter I worked with FJOA to craft a grant application to AARP for additional funds to make the path a reality. The award notice will happen in early May 2024. The path will be 48" wide to meet Alaska ADA standards. It will be constructed of pre-cast large concrete pavers, similar to those leading from the accessible parking to the structures onsite. The path will lead from the gardeners shed to the bench by the rhododendrons and Grand Ol' Apple tree. This is an easy route since it is level and leads to a lovely vantage point. I have also planned three generous wide steps to mitigate the slippery slope in front of the apple tree down to the veggie garden fence. A draft sketch is included with this packet. The total cost is estimated at about \$25,000. FJOA will hire a contractor to do the work, I will manage the design, timeline, and safety onsite.

It was mentioned before that JOA started many new varieties of Primula seed for the grounds. Not only are these for the gardens, but they will be to display in 2025. Next year in May the American Primrose Society, APS, will hold their National Show in Juneau. This is a big event for JOA, FJOA, and the local APS chapter who requested the show be held here. Caroline Jensen was a member of APS, and the previous manager, Merrill Jensen acquired collection status for the JOA primroses in 2012. The show will require rental of conference space in town for one weekend, as well as purchasing of local supplies, catering, and other services. I will focus heavily on tasks in 2024 that will make the show in 2025 a success. APS held a show here in 2018, we are glad to see them return and hope it brings some new faces to JOA.

Thank you for your time reviewing these documents. I appreciate the commitment community members give to CBJ's various advisory committees. I hope everyone on PRAC has been to the arboretum. Otherwise, this is your formal invitation to visit the grounds and see what all the admiration is about. And remember, there is no entry fee!