

February 27, 2023

Dear Commission on Aging Board Members,

I am writing to the Commission regarding the article in the Juneau Empire dated February 16, entitled "Aging Infrastructure: Juneau commits to its older residents". I was surprised and dismayed at the top three goals cited by Dr. Emily Kane chairperson in the next five years as senior pickleball courts, volunteer network hub, and encouraging proactive age-friendly thinking when developing new infrastructure. As an active senior age 69 and resident of Juneau since 1978 I do not believe pickleball courts for seniors should be anywhere near the top list of priorities for seniors. I believe the top three priorities based on my personal experiences and those of my peers (65-85) are transportation, enhanced and upgraded current CBJ facilities for seniors and supporting CBJ health care needs for geriatric care.

CBJ bus transportation and care a van transportation for seniors is severely lacking in parts of Juneau and grossly understaffed and difficult to access. The bus and care a van do not come "out the road" past DeHarts. If you investigated the assessors database for senior exemption on property tax, I imagine you would find a large percentage of seniors live out past DeHarts. My personal experiences in the last 5 years of qualifying as a senior have shown me how inaccessible services are in my location on LenaLoop. Two years ago I fell gardening and fractured my tibia requiring major surgery. I was ordered to have physical therapy three times a week for three months. I would not been able to do this and recover without friends and family to drive me into therapy. Transportation should not be discriminatory based on location in CBJ. I also have cancer and periodically receive radiation and chemotherapy at Bartlett Regional Hospital. Again, there is no transportation for me to get to a medical appointment with care a van due to where I live. Even if you live in an area where care a van will provide transportation, obtaining a pass to ride care a van is not senior friendly. If you are not aware, you must go to two different CBJ facilities to obtain a pass. This makes it extremely difficult for a senior who already has some physical or mental disability to obtain a ride to get a pass, have that individual park and wait at CBJ main office and then walk down a long hall on the first floor and hope that the electric door is fixed. Then after your photo you need a ride to Mountain view housing, where again you have to go in and discuss your needs and finalize your pass. Perhaps there could be a senior day with bus services to access pools, grocery stores and libraries. A priority in Juneau is for widespread transportation with bus service and care a van services where all seniors live. If that means more buses, more financial support for drivers and more care a vans, then that is "proactive age-friendly thinking."

The second priority that I see for seniors is enhancing and upgrading the current CBJ exercise facilities we have already. We have two beautiful pools, an ice rink, a ski resort, and an indoor walking/running track. None of these facilities have senior hours so you are not competing with families for locker room space or use of adaptive equipment. I am an avid user of the Dimond Aquatics center and am very supportive of the staff and the facility. I have friends that again cannot access it for their physical therapy needs due to transportation. The Turf field house has a wonderful indoor track, much needed in our incimate weather for seniors and is open seven days a week. In order to access the track to walk you must be able to climb a flight

of stairs. There is no elevator in the building. We can enhance a current well used facility with walking hours downstairs on the turf and install an elevator. There are no senior hours at the ice rink or at Eaglecrest either. There has been no advertising for senior classes for over 65 (not 50) at either facility with transportation. The Dimond park area also has a library , walking paths all around the ball fields and over to the trail as well as a walking outdoor track that is part of Thunder Mountain High School. Why not add outdoor lights so seniors can safely walk these areas . Why not add walking hours to the school and rotate so each school on Saturday and Sundays and evenings has indoor walking for seniors. These are CBJ facilities already in existence and need enhancement for seniors. We do not need additional facilities that require more money, maintenance and personnel that are already extremely difficult to locate.

The third priority I see and one that is shared by many seniors over the age of 65 is enhanced health care services for seniors. Juneau no longer has an ophthalmologist, only one to two orthopedic surgeons, no gerontologist, no rheumatologist , no cardiologist and a retiring neurologist. When you talk with seniors about their health care needs they are leaving Juneau daily for medical care in these areas. I think we should support BRH in their recruitment of qualified physicians and much needed care providers for senior services. Many of these medical conditions will deteriorate and require rehabilitation and possibly long term care (LTC). We have limited to no LTC services in Juneau. Wildflower Court is our only LTC facility and is always full. Pioneer home will provide LTC if you were already a resident of the Pioneer home . The new Riverview Senior Living which received a \$2 million grant from the city is much needed. However, if someone needs rehabilitation and LTC they will most likely not be able to remain in their hometown. The Riverview Senior Living is also not on a bus route, nor does it have access to reliable side walks if you could walk to the bus depot across from the Mendenhall Mall. Will those seniors who do drive have covered parking? Who will remove the snow from their vehicles? Is the care a van the only senior transportation? If so , that is not fair to the rest of the Juneau residents that potentially 99 seniors have access to an already overworked and inadequate service.

If the commission is working to encourage proactive age friendly thinking when developing new infrastructure then I think we need to look first at our existing services and facilities before we add more facilities. I think the COA also needs to address the ages of their board members to ensure that all senior age groups are represented. The AARP senior standard of over 50 is not really relevant for planning services for seniors in CBJ . The needs of a working 50-65 year old are vastly different than 65 and up. I think focus groups would help the commission look at each decade of life and those needs looking forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the article.

Sincerely,

Justine Muench