

March 21, 2025

City and Borough of Sitka, Assembly
100 Lincoln St, Sitka, AK 99835

Subject: Recommendations for Improving the Nonprofit Grant Program

Dear Assembly Members,

This letter is written by a group of nonprofit leaders in Sitka to express our collective interest in helping to improve the current City Nonprofit Grant program. We deeply appreciate the Assembly's commitment to supporting community organizations through this program and have some recommendations to improve the efficiency of the process.

The current process presents several challenges:

- **Lack of Consistency:** Subjective decision-making can lead to inconsistent outcomes and a lack of transparency. This ambiguity is awkward for Assembly members and potentially unfair for applicants.
- **Time-Consuming and Resource-Intensive:** The current application process demands considerable time and effort from both applicants and City staff. Given the limited amount of grant funding available, the substantial investment of time and resources may not always yield a proportional return on investment for the community.
- **Limited Impact:** The current funding levels within the grants program may not be sufficient to significantly impact the vital work of local nonprofits.

We recommend the following improvements to the program:

- **Develop Standardized Criteria:** Implement clear, objective, and measurable criteria for grant applications. This will enhance transparency, consistency, and fairness in the evaluation process. The Ketchikan Gateway Borough (KGB) recently revised their grant program with successful new criteria and we encourage the Assembly to explore their model as a potential benchmark.
- **Streamline Application Process:** Explore ways to streamline the application process to reduce the administrative burden on both applicants and City staff. One option would be to allow an external third party, like the Sitka Legacy Foundation, to collect applications, review submissions, and provide a recommendation to the Assembly, or directly disperse funds.
- **Consider Future Funding Levels:** To ensure a meaningful impact, we recommend that, if municipal budgets allow in future years, the Assembly consider returning funding to prior higher levels. In FY2011 levels, the Assembly made \$170,000 available for the program. As another model, the KGB sets aside 6% of sales tax returns.

The nonprofit sector plays a crucial role in the vitality of Sitka. We leverage the city's investments with other public and private funds to provide a wide range of essential services, including:

- **Community Health and Social Services:** Supporting mental health services, housing, and healthcare access.

- **Youth Education and Development:** Providing after-school programs, marine safety training, youth sports, and educational enrichment opportunities.
- **Infrastructure Maintenance:** Supporting the upkeep of community parks, trails, cabins, and other public spaces.
- **Cultural Enrichment:** Offering arts and cultural programs, festivals, and community events.
- **Tourism Enhancement:** Supporting local attractions such as Fortress of the Bear, the Science Center, and Sitka's renowned trail system.
- **Fisheries Enhancement, Working Waterfronts, and Workforce Development:** Supporting the health of regional fisheries, the success of Sitka's fishermen, and local access to wild seafood

We believe that a well-structured and adequately funded grants program is essential to support the continued growth and success of Sitka's vibrant nonprofit community.

We urge the Assembly to carefully consider these recommendations and work collaboratively with the nonprofit sector to develop a grants program that is both effective and efficient in supporting the needs of our community.

Sincerely,

Andrew Hinton,	Sitka Homeless Coalition
Andrew Thoms,	Sitka Conservation Society
Arleigh Reynolds,	Sitka Sound Science Center
Ben Hughey,	Sitka Trail Works
Jay Stilwell,	Fortress of the Bear
Joel Hanson,	Southeast Alaska Independent Living
Kristina Tirman,	Friends of Sitka Animal Shelter
Leann Cyr,	AMSEA
Linda Behnken,	Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association
Randy Hughey,	Sitka Community Land Trust
Roger Schmidt,	Sitka Fine Arts Camp

