
Health Needs and Human Services Commission Agenda

Wednesday, July 16, 2025 12:00 p.m.
Harrigan Centennial Hall

Commission Members:

Michelle Kavouras, Annette Evans, Amanda Roberts,
Lawrence “Woody” Widmark, Crystal Duncan, Sterling “Chip” Camden
Assembly Liaison: JJ Carlson

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

III. CORRESPONDENCE /AGENDA CHANGES

IV. PERSONS TO BE HEARD *(For items OFF the agenda - not to exceed 3 minutes)*

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. April 16, 2025

VI. REPORTS

Chair:

Commissioners:

City Staff:

Assembly Liaison:

Other(s):

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

B. Discussion on the purpose and role as a commission

IX. PERSONS TO BE HEARD *(For items ON or Off the agenda – not to exceed 3 minutes)*

X. ADJOURNMENT

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 20, 2025, at noon in Harrigan Centennial Hall.

Health Needs and Human Services Commission Minutes

Wednesday, April 16, 2025 12:00 p.m.

Harrigan Centennial Hall

Commission Members:

Michelle Kavouras Crystal Duncan, Annette Evans,
Amanda Roberts, Lawrence "Woody" Widmark, Sterling "Chip" Camden
JJ Carlson (Assembly Liaison)

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Kavouras called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Crystal Duncan, Annette Evans, Michelle Kavouras,
Amanda Roberts, Chip Camden, and Wood Widmark (via zoom)

Commissioners Absent:

Assembly Liaison: JJ Carlson

Staff Present: Jess Earnshaw, Deputy Municipal Clerk

III. CORRESPONDENCE /AGENDA CHANGES

None.

IV. PERSONS TO BE HEARD *(Public participation on any item off the agenda. All public testimony is not to exceed 3 minutes for any individual, not to exceed 3 minutes)*

Callie Simmons, a representative from a local food coalition, expressed interest in the Health and Human Services Commission's potential support for removing the sales tax on food to alleviate the cost of living for low-income community members.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. March 19, 2025

Duncan moved to approve the minutes of March 19, 2024. Motion passed unanimously by a voice vote.

VI. REPORTS

Chair – Kavouras mentioned that HNHS still has one vacant seat.

Commissioners – Duncan wondered if the board training was going to be recorded.

City Staff – Earnshaw thanked Holley Bayne for help during her absence.

Assembly Liaison – Carlson reported that the 2025 Goals passed at the April 8th Assembly Regular meeting.

Other(s) – None.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

B. Review of workgroup assignments for 2025

1. Suicide Prevention and Postvention
2. Enhancing Communication and Empowering Assembly Initiatives

The Commission reviewed the approved goals and established subcommittees to work on them. Duncan spoke about the timeline, structure, and format of the report, and expressed a desire for HNHS to mirror the way the Sustainability Commission presented their goals to the Assembly. She noted that the fifteen-minute presentation time limit was not adequate and suggested a standalone work session for the 2026 goals.

C. Discussion/decision on Sitka Food Coalition advocating removal of sales tax on food
Callie Simmons is a member of the Sitka Food Coalition. Sitka Food Coalition is an organization that actively advocated for the removal of sales tax on food in Sitka as a step toward greater food justice and economic equity. The Coalition believed that eliminating this tax would ease the financial burden on families, improve access to nutritious food, and support a more resilient and affordable local food system. For the Coalition, removing sales tax on food wasn't just about saving money at the checkout—it was about making healthy, essential items more accessible to everyone in the community. She mentioned why it mattered: groceries were a necessity, not a luxury, sales tax disproportionately affected low-income households, and many communities across Alaska and the U.S. had already taken steps to remove sales tax on food. She noted in the future they would be asking the HNHS Commission for a letter of support.

I. PERSONS TO BE HEARD *(For items on or off the agenda, not to exceed 3 minutes)* None.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Kavouras moved to adjourn the meeting. Seeing no objections, the meeting adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

Attest:
Jess Earnshaw
Deputy Municipal Clerk

MEMORANDUM

To: Health Needs and Human Services Commission (HNHS)

From: Michelle Kavouras, Chair & Annette Evans, Vice Chair

Date: July 10, 2025

Subject: Follow-Up from Assembly and Clerks Meeting – Clarification of Commission Purpose & 2025 Goals

Dear Commissioners,

During a meeting with the Sitka Assembly Liasons and Municipal Clerks, we received key clarifications about our role, responsibilities, and the outcomes of prior goal-setting efforts.

We were referred to **Sitka General Code Chapter 2.30.060**, which confirms our mandate to **educate and inform the Assembly** about community health and human service needs.

We also received important apologies from Assembly Member Kevin Mosher and Vice Deputy Mayor JJ Carlson. Both expressed regret over recent lapses in communication. Kevin Mosher expressed that the Assembly was somewhat surprised by the amount of detailed and valuable information we provided in both of our reports, and that they were not fully prepared to receive such comprehensive materials. These acknowledgments affirm a mutual commitment to improved collaboration moving forward.

SGC § 2.30.060: Commission Responsibilities

Per city code, the Commission is tasked with:

1. **Identifying Needs** – Monitoring and highlighting community health and service issues.
 2. **Coordinating Awareness** – Supporting collaboration among providers, agencies, and citizens.
 3. **Educating the Assembly** – Sharing data, lived experiences, and insights to inform policy understanding.
 4. **Supporting Public Efforts** – Contributing to public health education and outreach.
 5. **Facilitating Communication** – Acting as a liaison with municipal leadership.
 6. **Encouraging Engagement** – Promoting public participation in addressing local challenges.
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2025 Commission Goals

In 2025, the Commission adopted two primary goals:

1. **Health & Racial Equity Initiative**
2. **Mental Health & Suicide Prevention/Postvention Program**

These goals are designed to raise awareness about pressing community health issues and to contribute foundational knowledge and data to future citywide strategic planning efforts.

Next Steps for the Commission

In alignment with our clarified role and today's discussion, we suggest focusing on the following priorities:

- **Workgroups:**
 - Health and Racial Equity
 - Mental Health, Suicide Prevention, and Suicide Postvention
- **Strengthen Communication Channels:** Work with City staff to establish a consistent process for information flow between the Commission and the Assembly. Attend the Assembly meeting regularly.
- **Expand Outreach and Visibility:** Make the Commission's role and work more visible to the public and invite greater participation from stakeholders and residents.
- **Stay Connected with Providers:** Continue engaging with local health and human service agencies to remain informed of current trends, needs, and gaps.

Once our 2025 Commission goals are presented to the Assembly, Assembly Liasons would be requesting of the Mayor, in advance, a plan to schedule a work session to continue the discussion of the report presentations.

We look forward to discussing this further at our next meeting and working together to ensure our efforts are clear, collaborative, and impactful.

Respectfully,

Michelle Kavouras, Chair

Annette Evans, Vice Chair

Health Needs and Human Services Commission