

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Future directions for Senior Centers - April 2022

1. What is happening?

The Senior Services Council of San Juan County also called the “Senior Council” is moving into a new organizational structure to become the three separate organizations.

2. What is the SCSJC and how is it currently structured?

The Senior Services Council of San Juan County (SSCSJC) is a private, nonprofit corporation with three District Committees (DCs). Each DC operates Senior Centers somewhat independently in its own community. The one overall corporation, however, is accountable for the actions of all three DCs, which are not corporations. Members of the district committees are elected, and each DC selects three of its members to serve as Directors of the Corporation on its Board. The Board of Directors has the authority and responsibility for achieving the organization’s mission and if necessary, changing the corporation’s governing documents.

3. Why is the board making this change?

Since its inception, three DCs within the corporation have operated under a single Employee Identification Number (EIN) for charitable and tax purposes. When the corporation was founded 45 years ago, this arrangement allowed for collective support and growth of senior services provided by the three DCs. The structure served that purpose well, and today the three DCs are essentially independently functioning bodies able to make decisions appropriate and most beneficial for their own communities that not only do not need central coordination, but can be hampered by it.

For example, when applying for charitable or federal grant funds, all of the DC’s end up being limited by whether and how the other DCs want to participate. Sharing one EIN confounds contract negotiations and has led to incorrect deposits, especially as staff and volunteers change. Resolving such misunderstandings has required extra work, and therefore unnecessary expense to identify, explain and correct. As an operational matter, each DC essentially runs independently. Yet under the “one EIN” approach, challenges in one DC can have an outsized, negative impact on the others.

4. Is this a new idea?

A recommendation to disband the corporation and move into three separate nonprofit organizations was first presented by a member of the Orcas DC in 2010. The reasons cited then for separation persist today, inhibiting the success of all three local Senior Centers. In April 2019, San Juan District proposed to the corporation that it assume the EIN as sole agent for the corporation. That did not occur.

Following that, in 2020 SSCSJC Directors from all three Districts conducted a “Stay or Go” discernment process to weigh the pros and cons for staying together or moving into separate nonprofits as referenced in the 2017 bylaws. After that process, Directors made no formal decision – again, reflecting the corporation’s limited ability to act with one voice.

5. What are the planned changes, and how will they occur?

The Board of Directors has considered several options. The option selected by resolution is outlined below. See the resolutions document for details.

Goal:

Transition from one overarching nonprofit into three separate nonprofits with minimum disruption to client services and business partners in order to increase and enhance services for seniors and adults with disabilities in San Juan County.

Course of Action:

Each District may either form a nonprofit corporation or align itself with an existing one in its geographic district as a program or project of that existing non-profit.

All assets under each District Committee’s administration will move under the control and management of the relevant new nonprofit (whether newly formed or already-existing, as discussed above). In either case, the non-profit in each District carrying the work forward will need to be a geographically local, IRS 501(c)(3)-approved, nonprofit organization that performs the same mission-oriented work in that District.

The SSCSJC will make a detailed, chronological plan to complete the course of action chosen.

Finally, the SSCSJC Corporation will dissolve after all transfers of duties and assets are complete.

6. What do the changes mean for people who use the Senior Centers, Donors, and Business Partners?

A careful approach will be implemented to minimize disruptions to services and business. We expect classes and activities will continue as they have. Contracts, grants and agreements with employees, vendors, partners and donors will be updated and renewed in collaboration with the parties involved. As in the past, future donations will continue to go to the senior centers which the donors designate. The changes will allow better clarity for the public, donors, and business partners. A less complex organizational structure will facilitate better, more efficient senior center management designed to provide better, more responsive services to our communities.