

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Senior Council Districts Separate

At its April 21 meeting the Board of Directors of the Senior Services Council of San Juan County (SSCSJC) voted to transfer the operational functions of its three District Committees to three stand-alone nonprofit organizations.

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, while the Corporation remains accountable for the actions of all DCs.

Since its inception, the 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 the 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 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.

A recommendation to disband the corporation and move to 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 to separate nonprofits as referenced in the 2017 bylaws. After that process, Directors made no formal decision, reflecting the corporation's limited ability to act with one voice.

Directors of the SSCSJC are elected and appointed to act in the best interests of the corporation, so that it effectively achieves its mission to serve seniors and adults living with disabilities. In 2021 the Superior Court of San Juan County concluded that the authority to amend the corporation's Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation rests solely with its Board of Directors.

Directors considered several ways to transition operations amicably and effectively from one overarching corporation to three local nonprofits. Such a change has the potential to simplify and enhance operation of Senior Centers in all three geographic areas.

The separation of Districts is expected to be completed over the next year. With separate nonprofits, patrons of Senior Centers should notice little if any changes other than improved services. The three organizations can collaborate on projects and grants. The goal is to transition functions from one overarching nonprofit to three separate nonprofits with minimum disruption to client services and business partners so that services are enhanced for seniors and adults with disabilities in San Juan County.
