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Juneau Independent

The True Local Newspaper of Alaska's Capital City

November 28, 2025

'Possession vs preservation'

Telephone Hill residents again face quick eviction as judge agrees with city that demolition is a separate issue

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Three people still living on Telephone Hill are again facing eviction within 15 days after their attempt to link their removal to a civil lawsuit challenging the city's redevelopment plans for the neighborhood was rejected by a Superior Court judge on Wednesday.

The city as the owner of the property has the right to evict tenants renting houses there, which is a separate legal issue from the civil lawsuit, Assistant City Attorney Clinton Mitchell said while presenting arguments at the Juneau courthouse.

"What the city keeps hearing is the tenants shouldn't be evicted because they might be successful at preventing teardown," he said. "The

city's position is that whether the tenants reside there has nothing to do with whether the city is eventually allowed to demolish the buildings."

Judge Amanda Browning, presiding over the hearing remotely from Sitka, said she agrees "possession versus preservation are two separate issues."



Bella Godkin, 6, performs the ceremonial first cutting of a turkey with the assistance of longtime volunteer Jerry Harmon during the annual community Thanksgiving dinner hosted by The Salvation Army Juneau Corps at the Juneau Yacht Club on Thursday, Nov. 27, 2025.



MARK SABBATINI / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

A life-giving holiday feast

Hundreds gather for Juneau's annual communal Thanksgiving dinner

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Michelle Carroll says her family came from Seattle last year to visit in-laws in Juneau who are longtime volunteers at a communal Thanksgiving dinner and "we loved it so much this is going to be our tradition every year." But providing help to people during a time of struggle took on a far more personal meaning this year.

"We lost our son. He was with us last year,"

Carroll said, referring to her son, Jackson, 23, who died unexpectedly in March. "And so we have these aprons made in his honor. And now every time we serve we wear them.

A total of 345 people signed up for meals this year, although more meals were packed into to-go boxes as extras for people attending in person and for delivery to places such as the Glory Hall shelter, according to officials keeping track for The Salvation Army Juneau, which hosts the event.

Homeless campers say intruders try to set tent on fire

People say they're in 'safe zones' recommended by local officials, but other violent incidents have occurred

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Adrian Barrett says she sought out a friend's tent amidst a homeless encampment near the airport last week because "there's safety in numbers." But during the early morning hours a couple intruders she says were teenagers tried to set the tent on fire and threw a metal fire pit inside, striking her friend.

It's not the only instance of trouble since a large encampment on Teal Street that had stood for several months was dismantled by city officials 10 days ago, forcing people experiencing homelessness to seek out other sites around town, Barrett said.

That means there's also an ongoing conflict between people seeking places to pitch tents, and residents and businesses near those sites who may resent the campers' presence.



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Thousand for a life-giving holiday feast

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Voices

What Juneau's 'deficit' panic reveals

By ANGELA RODELL

When the Affordable Juneau Coalition collected signatures earlier this year to place two affordability measures on the ballot, it triggered an outsized reaction inside City Hall. The goal of the petition drive was straightforward: let voters decide whether Juneau should reduce the cost of living and allow residents to keep more of what they earn.

Instead of using the moment to foster a clear, fact-driven conversation about spending priorities, the Assembly responded with alarm. Officials warned of impending shortfalls, promoted worst-case scenarios, and rushed to float a new seasonal sales tax to fill what they described as an “in-

evitable” \$10 million to \$12 million deficit. In the weeks before the Oct. 7 election, residents were told that failure to adopt this tax would lead to deep cuts and fiscal turmoil. What went largely unacknowledged was that the deficit was only a projection — one constructed on top of already padded budget assumptions.

Then came the election results. Juneau voters decisively approved the tax-cutting measures and rejected the seasonal sales tax. They signaled confidence that the city could live within its means and skepticism toward the fear-based messaging.

A proposed middle ground for RCV

By MICHEAL RIEDERER

If ballots are like Baskin Robbins with many flavors of ice cream, we don't need to choose between the pistachio and rum raisin. Notably, at the state level we have primary races to limit the top-of-the-ticket ranked ballot to four candidates. If it's inevitable that CBJ is to pass ranked choice voting (RCV), let's do it right and not force frivolous ranking at the expense of clarity. Let me explain.

For fishermen, choosing the right rain gear comes down to a few trusted options. I prefer Norrøna for style, but if it's raining hard I might need Grundéns. For the dirty work in the engine room, Carhartt is the answer. These three options have gotten me through whatever Juneau brings.

Top-three RCV works the same way. Almost all of the

useful information comes from a voter's top three choices. Ranking a long list adds very little, but it does make the ballot busier and harder to read, especially when many candidates choose to run like in the 2023 and 2024 CBJ Assembly elections. Smaller boxes and tiny text lead to more mistakes and less clarity.

Allowing each voter to simply rank a personal podium — first, second and third — is intuitive to understand and statistically robust. Let the instant runoff calculations do the rest to reach a majority consensus. Nothing nefarious, just a good representation of the public opinion while encouraging more candidates and avoiding the vote-splitting pitfalls of pluralism.

How not to restore trust in government

By RICH MONIAK

Last week, Gov. Mike Dunleavy approved the deployment of Alaska National Guard members to Washington, D.C., “to help the Trump Administration restore public trust.”

But if that was really important to him, he'd start by telling the president that incompetence, rank hypocrisy and retribution aren't part of the formula.

In August, Trump issued an executive order declaring a crime emergency in DC. “I'm deploying the National Guard to help reestablish law, order and public safety,” he declared, “and they're going to be allowed to do their job properly.”

However, you don't reestablish law and order by break-

ing the law. Which is what federal judges have ruled the Trump administration did by ordering deployments to DC, Portland, Chicago and Memphis.

You don't restore trust by making up facts to justify the deployments. Trump referred to Portland as a “War ravaged” city with “our ICE Facilities under siege from attack by Antifa, and other domestic terrorists.” He said “anarchists” were trying to “burn down buildings, including federal buildings.” The judge determined those statements were “simply untethered to the facts.”

Juneau Independent

What is the Juneau Independent?

The Juneau Independent is a nonprofit, online newspaper founded by a team of local journalists and community supporters. It seeks to report news of local interest and importance without allowing commercial or political influences to interfere, while also providing a forum so all voices of the community who wish to be heard are given the opportunity. Funding comes from donations, ads and grants.

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Improve current ferries, forget Cascade Point, locals tell DOT

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Provide bus service to the existing Auke Bay Ferry Terminal, and improve the frequency and reliability of ferry service to all communities. Don't build the Cascade Point Ferry Terminal far out the road — let alone consider a "Chilkat corridor" that would also extend the road system south from Haines toward Juneau.

Those were the dominant comments, along with scattered other suggestions, from dozens of people attending an open house last Thursday at the Mendenhall Valley Public Library hosted by state officials seeking feedback on proposed updates to the Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan. The plan is essentially a 20-year lookahead blueprint that's been updated occasionally since 1980.

The public input process for the current revision is in the initial stages, according to the Alaska



MARK SABBATINI / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

Stephanie Lawlor writes suggestions on a sticky note during an open house focusing on possible transportation plan changes at the Mendenhall Valley Public Library on Thursday, Nov. 20, 2025.

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. The Juneau open house followed a similar event in Ketchikan last Wednesday, and two virtual open houses are scheduled at Tuesday, Dec. 16, from

10-11:30 a.m. and 5-6:30 p.m. The transportation needs and wishes expressed by Juneau residents were largely predictable since ferries are the literal "marine highway" between Southeast communities — and ridership is down more than half from the 1990s as the aging fleet is increasingly out of service and route schedules have been slashed. The Duneavy administration earlier this year said it is reviving the Juneau Access Project — declared dead by former Gov. Bill Walker in 2017 — with an eye on extending roads linked by shorter ferry routes. A centerpiece is the Cascade Point terminal 30 miles north of Juneau, which a state economic study says has mixed transportation impacts, but would be a boon to a proposed gold mine and other possible development.



Church's lawsuit ends, questions about its social mission remain

Judge supports new congregation council that ousted pastor; dispute fueled by extent of homeless help

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A lawsuit between two groups claiming leadership of Resurrection Lutheran Church was brought to an end Monday by a judge, who upheld the removal of a former pastor and church president by a newer congregation council elected last year.

However, questions about what the dispute will

mean for the church's food assistance and other social services remain, parties involved in the litigation said Tuesday. RLC has in past years had a high community profile as a host of one of Juneau's main food pantries and a former winter warming shelter for people experiencing homelessness.

The lawsuit was essentially nullified by a higher power — specifically, a finding in favor of the newer group by the Synod Council in Alaska for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, state Superior Court Judge Larry Woolford declared in an order Monday. The synod determined the elec-

tion of a new congregation council and subsequent actions by its members were properly conducted, contrary to claims of former leadership alleging irregularities.

"No neutral principle permits the court to ignore the procedure set out in the church's own governing documents, and no conceivable conception of this court's power allows it to regulate the mission and policies of this church in crisis," Woolford wrote.





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Sports

Wrestlers take title at Kayhi

JDHS' Schooler, Wrangell's Carney, earn girls, boys honors at Bill Weiss Invitational

By KLAS STOLPE
Sports Editor

The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé boys grapplers spoiled the Colony Knights' vision of traveling to Ketchikan and claiming Southeast for their Palmer fiefdom Saturday with a championship win at Kayhi's Bill Weiss Invitational Wrestling Tournament.

"Our underclassmen really continue to improve at a rapid pace and a lot of that has to do with the mentorship of our upperclassmen," JDHS coach Adam Messmer said. "It wasn't really improvements as much as it was executing what we have



CHRISTOPHER MULLEN / KETCHIKAN DAILY NEWS

Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior Alexzondro Marx-Beierly wrestles Ketchikan junior Cayden Harney, in the boys 160 160-pound championship final of the 2025 Bill Weiss Wrestling Tournament at the Clarke Cochrane Gymnasium on Saturday, Nov. 22, 2025.

been working on in practice."

JDHS and Colony were tied at 260 points

apiece after Friday evening and Saturday morning matches, with the Crimson Bears qualifying eight for the finals and the Knights seven.

Five Crimson Bears would win championships as JDHS totaled 287 points to Colony's 280 in the 14-team tournament.

JDHS 160-pound senior captain Alexzondro Marx-Beierly improved to 26-8 on the season in arguably the state's toughest weight bracket. Marx-Beierly defeated Ketchikan junior Cayden Harney (9-2 on the season) 8-5 in sudden death for the title. He also won by 22-4 technical fall over Petersburg sophomore Andrew Beavers (8-7) at 4:37, pinned Mt. Edgecumbe junior Gerasim Nelson (4-2) at 4:41 and pinned Metlakatla senior Micah Broncheau (8-4) at 3:52.



JDHS plays Palmer tough across the ice

By KLAS STOLPE
Sports Editor

The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé Crimson Bears hockey team played their best period of the weekend on Saturday as they exchanged shots with defending state champion Palmer before falling to the Moose 4-0 at Treadwell Arena. JDHS lost 7-2 Friday.

"I thought Palmer came out really fast tonight in the first period," JDHS coach Matt Boline said. "They looked a lot different than they did last night...and then in the second and third periods we just really snuffed them out. They only had five

shots between the two periods. We just snuffed them out."

JDHS and Palmer, both Northern Lights Conference opponents, had seven shots apiece in the first period.

The Crimson Bears' front line of senior Paxton Mertl and juniors Caden Morris and Tricen Headings, and defensive line of seniors Isaac Phelps and Elliot Welch, were up to the challenge from the faceoff as both sides tested the opponent's netminder.



KLAS STOLPE / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

JDHSs Paxton Mertl (7), Ryker Nelson (39), and Elliot Welch (36) battle for a puck with Palmer's Zane Anderson (54), Chase Ringler (4) and Clayton Conrad (17) during the Crimson Bears' 4-0 loss to the Moose on Saturday, Nov. 22, 2025.





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