

City and Borough of Sitka

Parks & Recreation Committee -

100 Lincoln Street • Sitka, Alaska 99835

Date: 6/10/14

To: Mark Gorman, Municipal Administrator
Mim McConnell, Mayor and Assembly Members

From: Hans vonRekowski, Chair and Sitka Parks and Recreation Members

Subject: Sitka Seawalk adjacent to the Kettleon Library

The Parks and Recreation Committee (SPRC) members met with staff and Monique Anderson during the public planning phase for the Centennial Building and Kettleon Library renewal project. The Committee appreciates having the opportunity to discuss the projects with the planning team and being a part of project development.

The SPRC members are pleased to hear that the Centennial project is fully funded to include the exterior improvements and Sea Walk. The library project has many of the exterior improvements as additive alternates. At our June 5, 2014 meeting, the Committee unanimously passed a motion in support of the continuation of the Sea Walk by the Library. Members would like to see the paver strip for the Sea Walk adjacent to the library as a first tier additive alternate or included in the project. It was the consensus that it is important to either include the paver strip for the Sea Walk or at least set up the sidewalk construction so that it can be added at later. Another less expensive alternative would be to use colored concrete to match the existing Sea Walk and paver strip.

Committee members are grateful for the opportunity to comment on these plans and we appreciate the time City Staff and designers take to meet with us and hear our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hans vonRekowski". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Hans vonRekowski, Chair, Sitka Parks and Recreation Committee

Cc: Michael Harmon, Public Works Director
Stephen Weatherman, Municipal Engineer
Monique Anderson, Anderson Land Planning



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

**Department of Transportation
and Public Facilities**

ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY SYSTEM
Office of the General Manager

7559 North Tongass Highway
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901-9101
Main: 907.228.7250
Fax: 907.228.6875

6/11/2014

The Honorable Mim McConnell
Mayor of City and Borough of Sitka
100 Lincoln Street
Sitka, AK 99835

Re: F/W/S 2014-15 Marine Highway Schedule Comment

Dear Mayor McConnell,

Thank you your letter dated April 1, 2014 regarding additional northbound ferry service to Sitka. Upon receipt of your letter, I asked Alaska Marine Highway System staff to evaluate the possibility of adding an additional northbound sailing per week to Sitka. While we are not able to include an additional northbound sailing to Sitka in the formal schedule during the 2014/2015 Fall/Winter/Spring season due to both business and operational challenges, the Alaska Marine Highway System is willing to continue to work with the community on schedule alterations for unique events – such as travelling school groups.

Alaska Marine Highway System schedules balance the need between essential service to all of the communities in Southeast Alaska and routes that have high utilization, primarily the mainline routes that connect with road-heads, which provide revenue to the system. Sitka has had the current schedule pattern for several years. While other options have been explored, given current equipment levels, maintenance/project timelines and budget constraints, the current schedule is Alaska Marine Highway System's best effort to accommodate the community of Sitka while balancing the needs of other communities in Southeast Alaska, and the Marine Highway System as a whole.

As you are aware, the Alaska Marine Highway System is dependent upon system generated revenues and additional state subsidies, to provide critical service to coastal Alaskan communities. In the past six years Alaska Marine Highway System has attempted to focus on providing consistent schedules that meet the needs of the traveling public, because the public has

"Keep Alaska Moving through service and infrastructure."

requested this and Alaska Marine Highway System ridership data demonstrate that consistency increases ridership. Statistical data shows that ridership in Sitka has remained relatively steady over the last six years, and that the traffic numbers are a substantial increase over years prior to 2008 when Sitka did not have schedule consistency. Statistical data also shows ridership on Sitka sailings is significantly lower than vessels providing service to the Alaska Marine Highway System hub in Juneau or to the communities of Haines and Skagway, Prince Rupert or Bellingham - the final destinations or connection points for many travelers. Alaska Marine Highway System attempted to address this issue many years ago by allowing 'thru-fares' for passengers travelling through Sitka on sailings to their final destinations if no other options were available. Thru-fares apply to not only passengers but vehicles, which results in lost revenue for Alaska Marine Highway System.

A primary challenge in providing parity of service, i.e., additional Alaska Marine Highway System service to Sitka, is basic geography. Additional service to Sitka presents the Alaska Marine Highway System with significant operational impacts to the system as a whole. Addressing the tide related navigational constraints to/from Sitka can require large delays in the schedule that are not an issue in Lynn Canal. Therefore, one additional trip to Sitka requires substantially more time than a route that is not dependent on tide and current constraints. Given these constraints, adding an additional northbound stop in Sitka with the Prince Rupert vessel would require a schedule that provides no insulation for weather delays and other unforeseen events that often occur. The Southeast Alaska Marine Highway System schedule as a whole would have much less flexibility to accommodate changes for school and community events. Altering the schedule of the LeConte (or Aurora when it is used in Southeast) was considered, however past attempts at re-routing these vessels through Sitka were not well received due to the inconsistencies of the schedule and the inconvenience to riders (middle of the night arrivals and departures). Also, the current negotiated contracts and US Coast Guard requirements for the LeConte make trips to Sitka difficult. Additionally, changing the LeConte schedule to add an additional Sitka stop would impact the village schedules enough that notification would need to be provided.

Operational challenges were encountered when reviewing schedule alterations to accommodate Sitka school events as well. The addition of another northbound sailing per week for Sitka would not provide Sitka schools with the necessary connections needed to reach school event destinations in a timely manner without additional schedule changes that adversely impact the system as a whole. Another challenge the Alaska Marine Highway System encounters when attempting schedule changes to add a northbound sailing to Sitka is that none of the school districts south of Sitka could utilize the north/southbound sailings that include Sitka stops due to the additional length of time. This creates a "zero-sum" effect where ferry service is essentially taken from one user and given to another user.

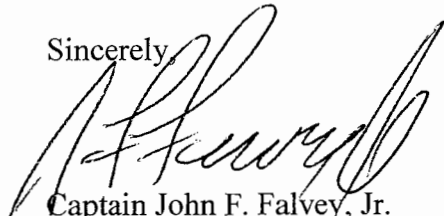
Your request that Alaska Marine Highway System and DOT&PF detail the costs and benefits of a Baranof road is beyond the scope of a reply to comments on the proposed 2014-15 winter

schedule. However, there is no doubt that avoiding Peril Strait would reduce the cost of service to Sitka and would facilitate a higher level of service to Sitka while addressing the problem of east-west travel on north-south routes. The Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan update is the first step in a detailed analysis, with an environmental document to follow if recommended by the Plan. The plan should be released soon and will no doubt facilitate further discussion of this concept.

Given the operational and business challenges addressed above, the Alaska Marine Highway System is not able to accommodate the community's request for an additional weekly northbound sailing in the 2014/2015 Fall/Winter/Spring schedule. As part of the review conducted by the Alaska Marine Highway System, it was noted that all major Region Five Sitka-related events have been accommodated over the past several years by the Alaska Marine Highway System. We would like to continue our commitment to work with the community to accommodate schedule alterations – including occasional additional sailings - for community and school events. The 2014-15 winter service schedule is further constrained by the need to put new engines in the Chenega at the same time as a major refurbishment project for the LeConte. Furthermore, the status/operating hours of the LeConte in the future will not be clear until after the current round of union negotiations are concluded. When all these issues are resolved, we may be in a position to increase winter service to/from Sitka for the winter of 2015-16.

The Alaska Marine Highway System and the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities looks forward to a continued positive working relationship with the City and Borough of Sitka.

Sincerely,



Captain John F. Falvey, Jr.
General Manager

JFF:gn

cc: Reuben M. Yost, Deputy Commissioner, DOT&PF
Captain Anthony G. Karvelas, Operations Manager, AMHS, DOT&PF
Matthew A. McLaren, Business Enterprise & Development, AMHS, DOT&PF
Kerri L. Traudt, Vessel Schedule Coordinator, AMHS, DOT&PF
Danielle J. Doyle, Marketing Manager, AMHS, DOT&PF
Jennifer A. Black, Program Coordinator, AMHS, DOT&PF