



CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

Minutes - Draft

Planning Commission

Wednesday, June 16, 2021

6:30 PM

Harrigan Centennial Hall

****Special Meeting****

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Present: Chris Spivey (Chair), Stacy Mudry, Wendy Alderson, Thor Christianson (Assembly liaison)

Absent: Darrell Windsor (Excused), Katie Riley (Excused)

Staff: Amy Ainslie, Ben Mejia

Public: Pat Kehoe, Chris McGraw, Loren Olsen, Sabrina Jenkins, Trish Prewitt, Amy Sweeney, Charles Bingham, Ariadne Will (Sitka Sentinel)

Chair Spivey called the meeting to order at 6:28PM.

II. CONSIDERATION OF THE AGENDA

IV. PERSONS TO BE HEARD

VII. THE EVENING BUSINESS

A [MISC 21-09](#)

Discussion/Direction on Short-Term Tourism Plan

Ainslie introduced the Gateway Community Planning Assistance document as requested by the Commission in a previous tourism planning meeting. The document was produced for Sitka by the National Park Service in 1997. Ainslie explained that the document provided a series of design recommendations related to visitor use management for the city to adopt. Ainslie highlighted the proposed shuttle service, parking analysis, downtown traffic layouts, and range of planning alternatives listed in the document.

Christianson recalled that a hop on hop off shuttle had been tried in the past with not much success and noted that a similar service may be possible via existing operators though cautioned that a pedestrian downtown would also restrict bus access.

The Commission opened the floor for public comment.

Charles Bingham commented that with increased cruise passengers, there would be increased demand on sidewalks especially on Lincoln Street as well as additional pressure on WIFI and cell services in town. Bingham suggested that improved bike lanes and bicycle infrastructure would provide non-motorized alternatives for commuting and local transportation, thereby reducing burden and impacts of streets. Pat Kehoe expressed interest in making Lincoln Street one way, as detailed in the gateway community plan, paired with an electric shuttle providing service through Lincoln Street.

Alderson voiced support for the recommendations provided in the gateway community plan as a good starting point for new planning efforts, and expressed interest in the possibility of increased pedestrian access through alleys and small streets. Spivey noted that the plan's recommendation was consistent with current public comment about the need for additional signage.

Ainslie introduced the Transit Services Contract. Ainslie explained that this year's contract was bid through an RFP open January 2020 where the city offered \$1.07 per passenger, paid for by Cruis Passenger Excise Tax (CPET) funds, for transportation from Old Sitka Dock to Harrigan Centennial Hall. The contract was awarded to Halibut Point Marine Services who subcontracted to Alaska Coach Company. Christianson noted that Assembly approval of future contracting services was not predetermined and may require additional conditions be met by the bidder going forward. Christianson stated that this may be the way to establish an incentive to move toward electric buses. Mudry replied that, in speaking with Chris McGraw, she understood electric buses to be approximately one million dollars, Christianson responded that he had spoken with companies that could provide them for half as much.

Spivey voiced concern over a comment made by the coach operator in a previous meeting, where it was explained that having multiple drop off locations would be cost prohibitive. Spivey questioned the purpose of discussing changes to transportation and dispersion methods if this were the case. Spivey asked if the minimum 48 passenger capacity of the buses were a limiting factor in the viability of multi-point drop-off or other drop-off locations. Christianson commented that 48 passengers was comparable to a school bus, and that many of the contractor's buses are larger. Christianson commented that 8,000 passengers a day at any single location would be too much of a burden, Spivey responded by asking if downtown could handle 8,000 passengers in a day.

Ainslie identified potential criteria for a new contract; looking into more than 1 drop off location, providing an incentive for electric buses, investigating the appropriate bus size, as well as the potential of implementing new bus run times to reduce impacts to traffic.

The Commission opened the floor for public comment. Chris McGraw commented that bus size varied from 48 passengers to 62 passengers. McGraw stated that to meet contract obligations and with a 30 minute round trip for a bus, it requires 16 buses on a 6,000 passenger days. McGraw explained that smaller buses required more buses to move passengers while larger buses meant fewer buses on the road. McGraw commented that dispersion through new attractions would alleviate some of the burden placed downtown and suggested that while 2 or more drop off points may be possible, it may contribute to visitor confusion as well as burden independent excursion providers who would need to service 2 locations as opposed to 1. Bingham commented that perhaps a collaborative bid to an RFP could disperse passengers.

Ainslie provided some additional context to CPET fund use, and stated that the funds were intended for services provided directly to vessel as well as enhancing safety and efficiency. Ainslie explained that any use of funds would need to be reasonable and stand up to any audit. Spivey requested staff to collate a list of examples of CPET funded projects from other communities.

Ainslie explained the information provided in the 2022 cruise calendar, highlighting large passenger days, the days of the week of the large passenger days, and the

times of cruise disembarkation and embarkation. Alderson noted that the earliest arrivals were between 6am and 8am, potentially conflicting with rush-hour traffic. Ainslie replied that there would likely be some lag between berth and the beginning of bus runs. McGraw suggested that the 2020 cruise season may be a good opportunity for a trial run of any suggested traffic pattern changes.

Ainslie read public comment from John Stein, who expressed concern for adequate restrooms and suggested a subscription cleaning service to regularly clean and stock restrooms for visitor use with a corresponding map.

No further public comment came forward.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Seeing no objections, Chair Spivey adjourned the meeting at 7:22PM.