

Sitka Long-Range Tourism Plan Collaborative Process
Stakeholder Meeting #3
27 March 2006, 5:30-8:30 p.m.
Centennial Hall Exhibit Room

Meeting summary: Stakeholders continued having dialogues in pairs about their top concerns regarding visitors who come to Sitka. Those concerns were then collected from the group, clarified, and categorized.

In attendance:

Stakeholders: Wendy Alderson, Linda Behnken, Stacy Boles, Harvey Brandt, Lisa Brendle, Chris Bryner, Jeff Budd, David Clarke, Raine Clarke, Ken Corson, Vern Culp, John Delong, Greg Dudgeon, Janet Eddy, Dorrie Farrell, Jeff Farvour, Angela Filler, Chris Fondell, Kathy Fritz, Peter Gorman, Roger Hames, Scott Harris, Judy Johnstone, Mike Litman, Bill Marx, Mim McConnell, Liz McKenzie, Mary Jo McNally, Tina McNamee, Karen Meizner, Mary Beth Nelson, Richard Nelson, Michael Nurco, Judy Ozment, Lucy Phillips, Ken Rear, Darryl Rehkoff, Tonia Rioux, Scott Saline, Linda Speerstra, Andrew Thoms, Floyd Tomkins

Steering Committee: Brian McNitt, Julia Smith, Stef Steffen

Facilitators: Matthew Turner and Kayla Boettcher

Matthew provides a brief background for this process: the Assembly charged the Long-Range Planning Commission with the task of creating a long-range tourism plan. The LRPC decided to use the collaborative process and involve community members with a diverse representation of Sitka. The LRPC formed a Steering Committee, and the Steering Committee assembled a larger group (the “Conveners”) to brainstorm the list of Perspectives and Experiences that would be necessary to have represented in this process. Based on those P&Es, the Stakeholder group was brought together to begin working on the content for the plan.

We’re in Phase 2 of the Process Map, which has the goal of building a shared understanding about visitors and what they do when they come to Sitka.

Tonight’s Agenda:

- Introduction
- Revisit question from last week: “When you think about visitors and what they do in Sitka, what concerns you the most?”
- Break – emergent issue categorization
- Define information needs
- What others have suggested
- Next steps
- Debrief

Housekeeping:

Website (www.sitkatourismplan.org) – the website is part of the Steering Committee’s attempt to make this a public process and keep as many other people as possible engaged in the process. The Steering Committee wants to help people know and understand who the

Stakeholders are; with their permission, we will take photos of the Stakeholders and put them on the website next to a bit of biographical information (# of years in Sitka, work/former work, what do you like about Sitka?) Stef will be taking some photos during tonight's meeting.

Radio Call-in Show – April 4 on KCAW – this will be an opportunity to discuss this process with radio listeners. Matthew asks the Stakeholders to consider what that should look like, and if any of them would be interested in being on the air. SH perspectives would be interesting – purpose is not to talk about what the content of the plan might be, but what this process is about.

- SH suggestion: interview on Splash TV? Matthew indicates that we'll put that out to the Steering Committee to consider

Recap of last week

Last week we came up with our first operating definition of this event:

A *visitor* is a non-local who comes to Sitka for a short term with a specific reason for being here.

Stakeholders carefully chose to keep the focus broad at this point and talk about all visitors to Sitka; the focus may narrow to discuss tourists specifically in the future. By keeping the focus broad, visitors that come to Sitka for a conference, for example, will also be considered in Stakeholder discussions.

Then the Stakeholders started to look at their concerns about visitors to Sitka. They were asked, "When you think about visitors to Sitka and what they do, what concerns you the most?" SH individually brainstormed their answers, chose their top 3 concerns, and then began to discuss those concerns in pairs. During their discussions, the goal was for the listener to listen carefully following the rules of "dialogue" (not "debate") and ask clarifying questions to understand the other's perspective better. In responding to the questions, the goal was to help people refine their lists and clearly articulate their concerns.

Tonight's activity:

There are two levels of process right now:

- Some folks who started this process last week have their individual lists with them or on the wall – in a moment, they will take that step one more time, talk to someone new, ask questions of them, rethink their lists, and clarify their concerns
- Other folks who weren't here last week will start brainstorming individual lists, and will enter into the dialogues after that.

[Stakeholders (SH) work individually or in pairs]

Group brought back together; Matthew asks, "How are these dialogues changing your perspective?"

- SH reply: Broadening my perspective of what a wide issue this really is
- SH reply: We're not that far apart and I think there are solutions
- SH reply: I was using words like "sustainability" which was really broad, by talking it out with someone else I was able to better articulate what I was trying to say.

[SH do another round in pairs]

Group brought back together; Matthew asks for responses about this part of the process:

- SH comment: I'm having a hard time finding people to talk to that I don't agree with – I'm concerned that we don't have enough diversity/balance in the values represented here.
 - *Matthew response: So maybe we're not getting the cross-section we were hoping for – this is a concern we need to be aware of and address.*
- Another SH: Our lists were almost identical, but we looked at the concerns differently and in talking about them we learned more from each other.

Matthew notes that at the end of the evening, we'll check in on this concern again and discuss what we need to do.

SH comment: It feels like we're really getting to the essence, getting to the work now – it feels good to get to this point.

[SH work in new pairs – people who haven't heard much diversity in opinions get the first pick for partners]

Group is brought back together – Matthew now instructs them to discuss their individual lists of concerns with all the people sitting at their table. As a group, they need to decide on their top 5 concerns, write each one on a half-sheet of paper, and it will be posted on the wall.

[SH work at tables; each table presents Matthew with 5 concerns from their table]

List of concerns in response to the question, “When you think about visitors to Sitka and what they do, what concerns you the most?”

- Benefits of industry distributed widely among Sitkans
- Local hire/training
- Absence of tourism planning
- Dominance by one part of tourism
- Outside interests controlling visitor industry
- Loss of local ownership
- Emotions trumping open-mindedness
- Cost/value of visitor industry
- Demand for infrastructure
- Impacts on limited marine resources, like fisheries
- Risk of resource over-utilization
- Reality of deduction
- Visitor industry impact on housing opportunity
- Protect and promote Sitka's uniqueness
- What if tourists stopped coming?
- Impact of cruise ship dock
- Soundscape
- Impact on natural resources
- Some visitors more valued
- Affordability for visitors

- Optimal carrying capacity
- Crowding downtown
- Contention twixt commercial, sport, and charter
- Tourism recession
- Quality of life
- Cumulative impacts to historic settings
- Character
- Impact on infrastructure
- Continued population growth
- Resources management
- Local ownership/input
- Impact on fishing, water, air, noise
- How do we keep Sitka whole/undivided about tourism
- What is the true cost of the visitor industry
- Affordable housing

SH Question: Because of the definition we came up with last week, should we be talking about “visitors” or is “tourists” okay?

A: If people were thinking about the definition, if they wrote “tourists” then they must mean those specifically

Stakeholders asked for clarification on the following (responses were given by the table that wrote the card):

- Reality of deduction – if there’s no more tourists, what would we do then?
- Soundscape – want to have a peace and quiet place, not a lot of helicopters, buses, traffic, etc.; also noisy processors in the harbor
- Optimal carrying capacity – need a clear understanding of what’s enough and what’s too much
- Character – what is it about this place that brings people here; perspective not represented here is return visitors – why do they keep coming back?
- Continued population growth – of residents

SH are giving some verbal feedback, some of which is on the verge of passing judgment or debating the content of the concerns. Matthew calls for a time out – he revisits the debate vs. dialogue poster and points out that many of these concerns can have different levels of connotation, depending on how you look at it. He reminds the Stakeholders that they don’t have to take sides at this point, they just need to understand what the writer meant when he/she wrote that card, and everyone has the chance to see the diversity of concerns our community has about this issue.

[15-minute break]

Returning from the break, Matthew reminds the SH again that many of these cards can be interpreted in different ways. Right now it is important to understand the perspective of the person who wrote it, and then have the opportunity to make another card to represent your thoughts on that concern if it differs.

Then he tells the SH that they will go through this process again, and present him with any additional concerns from their lists that haven't appeared on the wall yet. What generally happens after that in this process is that we'll sort these concerns into general categories and create clusters of issues. Each cluster of issues will be given a name. This is useful for helping to cluster our future conversations too. Right now it's as big as the world because we will talk about each concern individually. When we have clusters, we will be able to break down each of these issues. People should not be concerned that their issues will get lost – what will happen is they'll get held until the time to debate them. But if we get lost in debating them all now, we'll get in people debating the importance of each one. Once they're categorized, we can open up each cluster for debate in a more structured way.

Matthew prompts the SH to provide the next group of concerns for the wall. He asks that for now, SH look for issues that are missing from the wall so far. He encourages them to try not to respond to what's already up there, and trust that they will have the chance to respond later when we discuss the clusters of issues.

[Tables each provide 5 more cards for the wall.]

Next list of concerns:

- Degradation of Sitka's appeal
- Creation of false economy
- Conflict between visitors and tourists for local space
- Laws, rules, standards same for all
- Are all players visible?
- Traffic, pedestrians
- Diminished wilderness experience
- Taxation without representation
- Planning and zoning
- Crowding outside town
- Altering Sitka to attract visitors
- Perception of charter industry
- Industrial tourism vs. cottage or local tours
- Compromising cultural values
- Loss of local businesses
- Tourists in all seasons
- Off-season development
- Seasonal hiring
- Greed factor vs. quality experiences (becoming jnu, ketch, skag)
- Revenue generated by bed and sales tax
- Level of stewardship in industry
- Locally sponsored small cruise ship
- Aesthetics
- Industry gets too big or too small
- Impact on wilderness
- Native culture
- Lack of respect
- Impacts on subsistence
- Sharing indigenous cultures (accurate info)
- Visitor effect on native community (culture concerns)
- Visitors' perspective
- Negative perception of certain visitor groups
- Visitors are seasonal
- *Not all segments of visitor industry will be considered (pulled – see below)*

Matthew asks if there are any that need further definition/clarification?

Clarification was provided on the following items:

- Not all segments of visitor industry will be considered – I'm not confident that everyone is considering all aspects of the visitor industry. Most of these concerns seem to pertain to summer months. Lots of visitors have big impacts on things outside of the summertime.
 - After some discussion, the SH who wrote this concern agrees this is a question about the process; it is pulled and will be discussed later
- Are all players visible? Refers to industrial tourism – if a larger business comes in, they could have bigger influence on policies and other decisions that effect our

- community – they don't necessarily have a democratic process or transparent approach;
- Card is changed to read “transparency in influence” – policy decisions made by companies behind closed doors.
 - Creation of false economy – i.e. a store decides to carry goods/services that cater to tourists but don't help local needs and displace local goods/services; distortion of local economy
 - This table is asked to rewrite their card to more clearly articulate this; they create two new cards: “Visitor industry create non-local markets (that may displace local markets)” and “Displacement of local services and goods”
 - Taxation without representation – hidden taxes that support the tourism/visitor industry that people don't even realize they're paying; i.e. property tax raised 3 mils for infrastructure to support the industry
 - Industrial tourism vs. cottage or local tours – i.e. industrial tourism would be if the dock goes in, Princess brings in their buses and puts others out; cottage is the smaller businesses – everything in town now is a locally owned cottage business
 - Off-season development – should we develop the off-season or not? Need discussion on this one.
 - Locally sponsored small cruise ship – Sitka missed the boat by not doing it, could still recycle the idea; have all the resources available – may be more of a solution, but it may be about revisiting missed opportunities

Matthew comments: “Clearly there are a lot of issues we need to continue to explore. Because of the time (it's about 8:00), we're going to leave this conversation for a bit. If we had another hour, we might go back and engage in dyads and further clarify some of these things. It's hard to engage in meaningful dialogue in a group this size – there are ways to do that, which we will do at a future meeting, and we will continue to look for more concerns and clarification about each others' concerns.”

The next step would be to see how these things cluster together in categories. Some people enjoy doing this, others hate it. Doing this process with this many concerns and people might take an hour, but we would end up with maybe about 5 categories. Matthew asks for a small group of people to order/cluster the group. There is a suggestion that some stay on to cluster them tonight after the meeting – the Stakeholders agree.

Preview of next steps:

After the concerns are put in categories, the next question will be: “What do we need to know to make good decisions on these issues?” This will help the Stakeholders start to define the information they need. We have some suggestions already; but we're not going to take those only – SH need to determine the information they need.

Then, based on the categories of concerns, we'll form sub-committees per category to digest the information for that category. We'd like to try to have a representation of the SH group in each sub-committee so the diversity of perspectives is still represented. Those committees will look at the information needs for that category, develop a plan for getting that info and how to present it to whole group. The Steering Committee will be responsible for helping to get that information to SH. Once we get the info, up to committees or content experts to present to the whole group.

Discussing the concern about Stakeholder diversity:

Matthew says he has heard a lot, especially tonight, some concern about SH diversity within this group. There is a long history, which has been documented, about how we arrived at the group that is here. Matthew asks the group, “What may be unbalanced here?”

- People in the community that may be part of a visitor industry that don’t realize it; people that fish might be considered visitors, but aren’t represented here. And the one person Alaska Native who attended the first SH meeting isn’t here.
- Stef (Steering Committee member) comments that he looked at sign-up list for tonight and there are 14 people from last time who are not here tonight. 7 of those people are from business community – that segment was underrepresented tonight. The Steering Committee needs to follow up on that – we should call people that don’t come and see if they’re losing interest. The SC should do this on a weekly basis; if we have a problem we need to replace those folks. It’s difficult to get business people to come, they’re busy, and it’s hard to trust a public process when you’re used to running your business the way you want to. Stef promises the SC will follow up and plug those people in. We need to have consistency, need the SH to come to every meeting – if voices are missing we’ll lose our credibility. We also had 8-9 new people...we don’t want to discourage new people, but it’s difficult to have consistency when new people constantly have to catch up.
 - A SH replies that she feels there is a lot of business represented here tonight; she asks them all to stand up. There are quite a number, and she states she feels businesses are over-represented.

Matthew mentions that the Steering Committee is the group concerned with the process, and with issues like the make-up of the SH group. They are having a meeting this Thursday, March 30, at 6:30 in Centennial Hall – that would be a good time to address the SC about these concerns.

SH suggestion: There is a tendency for organized groups to meet at the same time in the same place, but it might be refreshing to meet in new places. If we continue to have a lack of Natives or youth participation, perhaps the meetings should be on their turf?

SH comment: I can’t be here every Monday, but I have a sub – she keeps track of the minutes too, and we represent the same views.

SH Suggestion: Maybe you should write a formal letter to tribal council to ask for their participation.

SH suggestion: Once we get to the point of having presentations from the experts, maybe we can go back to the SH list and invite a representative of those missing groups in as an expert to answer some of our questions. That would help to fill in the gaps in some ways.

Matthew also reminds that each SH is charged with dialoguing with the public and bringing others’ comments into this process.

SH comment: I think we do a good job of representing other people when they are absent: even if I’m the only one that shows up, I can bring their thoughts with me; it isn’t always

good enough to just say things and not hear it from them, but we can work hard to represent those that aren't here.

Next meeting:

Saturday, April 1, 9:30-1:30, hopefully at SJ. We'll let you know via email or phone.

Stakeholders debrief at their tables, indicating how they feel about the process so far.

Special Announcement:

The co-author of the cruise ship ballot initiative will be giving a presentation about that initiative on Saturday night, 7:00 pm Centennial Hall.

A few Stakeholders remained after the meeting to cluster the list of concerns. Here are the groupings they came up with:

Culture and History:

Preserve Russian history
Sharing indigenous culture(s)/accurate info
Cumulative impacts to historic settings
Visitor effect on Native community (cultural concerns)

Quality of Visitor Experience

Visitors' perspectives
Greed factor vs. quality experiences (becoming Juneau, Ketch, Skag)
Affordability for visitors

Resource Environment (?)

Impact on natural resources
Impacts on limited marine resources (fisheries)
Impact on wilderness
Resources management
Impacts on subsistence
Impact on fishing, water, air, noise
Risk of resource over-utilization

Local Industry vs. Big Business

Outside interests controlling visitor industry
Are all players visible? (transparency in influence)
Loss of local ownership
Local hire/training
Local ownership/input
Negative perception of certain visitor groups
Industrial tourism vs. cottage on local tours

Quality of Life

Aesthetics
Crowding downtown

Soundscape
Protect and promote Sitka's uniqueness
Diminished wilderness experience

Community Issues

Conflict between visitors and tourists for local space
Some visitors more valued
Emotions trumping open-mindedness
Character
Lack of respect
Contention twist commercial, sport, charter
Demand for infrastructure
Laws, rules, standards – same for all
Visitor industry impact on housing opportunities
Perception of charter industry
Traffic/pedestrians
Affordable housing
How do we keep Sitka whole? (undivided about tourism)

Cruise industry concern (?)

Impact of cruise ship dock
Level of stewardship in industry
Dominance by one part of tourism

Planning

Planning and zoning
Tourists in all seasons
Off-season development
Crowding outside town
Altering Sitka to attract visitors
Seasonal hiring
Absence of tourism planning
Optimal carrying capacity
Degradation of Sitka's appeal
Revenue generated by sales and bed tax
Compromising cultural values
Taxation without representation

Economics

Industry gets too big or too small
Impact on infrastructure
Tourism Recession
Continued population growth of Sitka
What is the true cost of the visitor industry?
Cost/value of visitor industry
What if tourists stop coming?
Distortion of regular economy
Reality of deduction

Visitors are seasonal

Visitor industry create non-local markets (that may displace local markets)

Displacement of local services and goods

Benefits of industry distributed widely among Sitkans

Loss of local business

Locally sponsored small cruise ship