Sitka Long-Range Tourism Plan Collaborative Process
Stakeholder Meeting #6
April 10, 2006 5:30-8:30 p.m.
Centennial Hall Exhibit Room

Summary:
Stakeholders were introduced to the idea of the Parking Lot – a place where discussion topics could be placed if the group feels it is impeding their progress. Hugh Bevan gave the first information presentation to the group – it was some basic visitor data as compiled by the McDowell Group in their annual State of Sitka's Economy report. The Stakeholders then debriefed the presentation, giving feedback on both the manner in which it was presented, as well as the usefulness of the report itself. The Steering Committee gave an update on where we are in the process and where we're hoping to get. Finally, the Stakeholders finished prioritizing the information they have requested, indicating which questions need to be answered most urgently.

In attendance:
Steering Committee members – Hugh Bevan, Julia Smith, Stef Steffan

Stakeholders – Wendy Alderson, Harvey Brandt, Chris Bryner, Jeff Budd, David Clarke, Tom Clarke, Tom Corso, Ken Corson, Vern Culp, Helen Cunningham (for Linda Speerstra), Greg Dudgeon, Janet Eddy, Jeff Farvour, Chris Fondell, Peter Gorman, Roger Hames, Scott Harris, Judy Johnstone, Mike Litman, Dave Malone, Bill Marx, Mim McConnell, Liz McKenzie, Mary Jo McNally, Karen Meizner, Richard Nelson, Judy Ozment, Ken Rear, Darryl Rehkopf, Tonia Rioux, Tim Ryan, Scott Saline, Brittaney Steffey, Andrew Thoms, Floyd Tomkins, Dirk White.

Facilitation Team: Matthew Turner and Kayla Boettcher

Agenda:
Intro/announcments
Revisit ground rules
Parking Lot
Presentation – Basic Visitor Data (Hugh)
Debrief presentation
Process Review (Stef) – budget, time, product
Finalize Needed Information/Priorities – urgency first

Announcements:
Kayla started to cluster the information by where the information might come from – helps to make the list seem slightly more manageable. Hopefully by the next meeting, Stakeholders have in their hands the needed information we have and how to look at it in different ways.

Are there any new Stakeholders here tonight? Two fill out questionnaires

Website plug – keep up on the process by reviewing the notes and other documents on the website (www.sitkatourismplan.org). These documents are also in a binder at the library.

Review of Ground Rules
Matthew reminds the group that the idea behind this process is that we're not here to debate individual perspectives, but to learn as much as possible about the perspectives and attitudes in the room and work together to find a way for everyone to win. He reads the list of Ground Rules that were created in the 2nd SH meeting.

Parking Lot
There is a long list of identified concerns and information that we need to gather, and some of them concern topics that may be too big for this group to influence, or that may be too contentious to keep our momentum rolling. Recognizing that we have limited time and resources, Matthew suggests that we may want a place where we can put topics to the side when we come upon a topic that we just can't work through at this time. He offers IFQs as an example – determining those parameters may be outside this group's realm of influence.

- One Stakeholder takes exception to this example – first he corrects Matthew by saying he's actually referring to the issue of allocations, not IFQs, because IFQs are already set. Then he says that if this group can't discuss and try to reach consensus about who can catch what fish and give the Assembly a recommendation about that, then this is not a collaborative process – it is a cover-up and a waste of time.
- Other Stakeholders voiced some agreement about this particular example. Someone comments that we should focus on how visitors impact fishing. Another says city policy and visitors do impact allocations…a lot of these issues are going to be controversial. There may be agreements that we can make through this process that deal with city-wide issues about resources. Decisions we make here may not affect state or federal policies, but could affect city policy.
- Matthew agrees that it was a bad example to use. The point is that when we put a topic in the parking lot, it doesn't mean it's out of the discussion or that we don't care about it, but we may recognize some things that we can't get to by October 31. Doesn't mean it's over, just that we have until Oct 31 and then go to Assembly with a presentation about where we are at that point.
- A Stakeholder clarifies that when an item is put into the Parking Lot, the intention is not that it will go away, but that we will revisit it at another time. Matthew affirms this, saying that this may help us keep our momentum and get us through more topics by October 31. We likely will not reach the final product by October 31, but we could get through more if we don't let ourselves get hung up on the really difficult issues now.
- Another SH asks if we'll have to have consensus in order to put something in the Parking Lot – Matthew says yes.
- Stef adds that some items may end up in the Parking Lot because they need deeper work, and we'll eventually need to develop a strategy on how to do more work on that particular issue.
- The Stakeholder who originally expressed discomfort about the Parking Lot (specifically about putting the allocations issue into the PL), said that he wasn't going to block this conversation any more. He still isn't comfortable, and expressed some concern that some people are trying to hide the important issues and not deal with them, but he's going to stay and roll with it. Matthew responds by saying he clearly voices his concerns because his stakes here are very high, and we clearly need to find a way to get a strategy through that one and some of these other issues.

Presentation from Hugh – Basic Visitor Data
Every year, SEDA hires the McDowell Group to report on the State of Sitka's Economy. McDowell gave a public presentation in March – Hugh is replaying that presentation. He introduces it by saying it's a broad report on Sitka's economy, with an added emphasis on tourism. Hard copies are available at the library, and the presentation slide show and full report will also be on the website.

Comments/questions during the slide show:

- Q: What's trade (on employment sectors)? Hugh isn't sure – someone else guesses that it's retail.
- Comment from McDowell: By far, Sitka has the most balanced economy in the state;
- Hugh: people are worried about the decline in "all other SE population" (excludes SIT, JNU, KET)
- One-year spike in Sitka's cruise traffic next year while they work out a dock issue in KET
- SCVB, SCBOA, SEDA contributed to a market status report – available now
- From the airport survey – 0% dissatisfactions with visitor impressions of Sitka – in 25 years, McDowell has never seen that.
- Any stats breaking out charter clients? Hugh has a charter boat operations report that will be available to the Stakeholders.
- How does length of stay compare to other SE communities? Someone believes Ketchikan was the only one that was higher.
- Someone comments that there are lots of other cultural activities…this seems to be a survey of limited sector,
    - Hugh suggests it would be good to look at the raw data and glean more from that.
- Someone asks what "ex-vessel" and "first wholesale" mean – ex-vessel is the payment to the fisherman, first wholesale is the payment to the processor.

Processing the presentation
Matthew indicates that the next few meetings will start to look something like this, where an expert or a group that has studied some of the requested information will make a presentation about that data. Then there will be a processing of that information by the Stakeholders. He says that this presentation was arranged tonight because it included some of the requested pieces of information.

Matthew first asks the Stakeholders about the process of presenting this information. In order to meet their needs for receiving this information, he would like to know what worked about this presentation, and what would make it better. Stakeholders offered the following feedback:

- Not able to sync the questions with the information – hard to remember what we asked about and didn't ask about along the way. Wish to have the info in front of me.
- Love to see info before the meeting so we can evaluate it before hand – if it's available. Could have read it ahead of time and saved us all this time here.
- It might be better to have small groups digest all the information for each category and then present to the group. Getting a presentation from one viewpoint (i.e. a

presentation just from McDowell) fractures the group – the sources of information can be as contentious as the info itself.

- This presentation may have given us more information than we were asking for, may have opened up new issues – any way to get just the answers to our questions? Have the presenter cut out the excess information that hasn't been requested.
- Either have expert on hand or process for gathering questions and getting responses – Hugh couldn't answer our questions about this report because he isn't from McDowell.
- Try to deal with bias/credibility issues before the information from questionable sources is presented. Hard to delete the information from our brains if it's already been presented, but we might decide the source isn't credible enough to consider this data.
- At least we need to have time at the meeting to discuss the perceived biases – hear from Stakeholders and address credibility in debrief.
- Might have been nice to break up this presentation into sections and discuss as we go through it, instead of hearing the whole thing at once.
- Would it be possible to identify issues that aren't so contentious and receive that information first? We could go through the easy ones and not spend so much time on harder issues at first because we may want 2-3 different sources on the more difficult issues. Several of the identified issues/questions can be answered fairly quickly.
- Had a hard time picking out of this report what was useful, what we'd requested – didn't have the list of requested information in front of us; waste of 1/2 hour.
- We need a method of separating facts from opinion – are we supposed to accept all of this as fact, or was some of it speculation? If we're only presented the facts, won't have to deal with credibility issues. If it's a fact, tell us, if it's a guess, it's not worth our time.
- Would like to know what the original request was that led to this study and who asked for it.
- Issue of not knowing when the study was done, how long, what time of year, etc. More significance if we know that information.
- Can we do our own survey sometime this summer?
    - Stef will discuss how we're doing with resources later in this meeting
    - When we get to the point of discussing strategies, we can identify a survey as one of our priorities
- This presentation was based on McDowell's notes to himself - reminder that we don't know what the presenter would have said about those things

Next Matthew asks the group for feedback about the presentation they just saw. What stood out to them, thoughts on the credibility of the data, etc.

- Seafood and dollar value in Sitka
- Visitation is primarily consumptive
- Sitka does a good job of "selling" fishing, but we may not be selling some of our other visitor attractions
- Missing information, i.e. how many boxes of fish going home is enough?
- Distinguish between big ships and small ships in the industry – different people, different approaches to travel
- Nice to know how many of the charter fishers are local

- It gives the numbers of Sitka employment, but no breakdown of seasonal help
- Need to clarify that this study does not talk about cruise-related charters; this is air-only, no information about what cruise passengers do with charters
  - Could get info from Mike Wallace?
- For something that has such a major impact, tourism only employs 11%
- Sitka's on the bottom of the average monthly wages; how does that equate to cost of living?
- Dollar value of the gas, lodging, physical property – comparison of commercial and charter
- Regarding the definition of visitor – a lot of those statistics were about charter only, but there are visitors that work on boats, seafood processing, in visitor industry, etc. (this request is already on the needed information list)
- How many jobs go to summer season? (already in needed info list)
- Stef: have to realize data was gathered for a specific purpose, sift through what's useful and determine how it's useful; obviously this isn't the most useful way to do this part of the process, but we're learning as we go through this
- Surprised to see that tourism employment is only 11% - expected it to be higher; important to me because a lot of voices out there say that tourism gives us the things we need – but it's not the end all be all;
  - Need another pie chart that divides by economics
- Nice to know from employment pie chart – break out portions of employment overall
- Passenger volume – ferry down 16%; need clarification about if they feel that's a trend, or based on current situation
- Helpful to know which businesses/orgs are considered "tourism" businesses – hard to know where the pie chart figures come from.
- All of the industries are close in size – equal parts of pie – all important to economy

Matthew wraps up this discussion by saying this was available ready-to-present data, and we wanted to start somewhere. The Stakeholders' feedback is helpful – and we'll keep that in mind as future presentations are prepared. At this point, rather than working what seems to be a weak resource, we will just recognize it as such, and include it in our pool of information as we get into strategizing.

Stakeholder Q: What is it about the credibility of McDowell? What are the reasons people don't trust them? Are there facts for everyone slamming them?

- Material we're going to get from any of these sources is credible, we just need to decide if it answers our questions. The studies were conducted for specific purposes. We need to ask good questions and find answers to our questions from multiple sources; also need to have faith that they're not going to lie, but need to understand what each study was trying to answer.
- Understanding about how McDowell does business – someone hires them to answer a particular question, they get the data, sometimes they're hired to interpret it – most of their reports include recommendations, and then there's a public interpretation after the presentation. We're going to make our own conclusions – we need to take care that we only look at the data they gathered and make our own conclusions based on that, while understanding how/why they gathered that data. We can get objective on most things that way.

- Folks shouldn't tell us what to think, just give us the information – this presentation included some of those editorial comments and recommendations.

Stakeholder Q: Did McDowell do a phone survey about the downtown deepwater dock?

- Yes – it was vaguely worded, maybe 52% of respondents did not object to the dock in their study. When SJ did their own poll, it was 3:1 against a dock.

Steering Committee report on process

Matthew asks Stef to speak briefly about the current situation and future of this process:

- Budget – burning through it fast, but we've decided we'd ask for more when necessary; we have a total budget of $31,600; $24,000 remaining as of March 15.
- Timetable – little behind where we wanted to be right now, that's normal – tried to guess how long each step would take, but hard to guess – it's a process
- What we hope to accomplish by summer is a list of strategies to provide to plan writer that will give him ideas to pursue. The planner may be Chris Beck – we might get him down here during the summer to work on some of the pieces. It would be nice to be at the strategy point by May 4 – the day of the public meeting. Our hope was to get the contract in place with the planner over the summer to draft the report. The final product presented to the Assembly in October will be guidelines for the Assembly to make decisions on.
    - Staekholder Q: The mission statement was essentially put in the parking lot. In order to meet your timeline, isn't it about time for the group to really know what our mission is?
        - Better to do that after we've educated ourselves a bit more, processed some information – Chrislip preaches spending time learning how to work together and sifting through the data before jumping into things like that.
    - Stakeholder Q: The mission statement has disappeared – you're trying to steer us, but how can we be steered if we don't know what we're doing here?
        - Matthew refers to the Process Map, showing that revisiting the mission statement is still in the plan after this information stage. The more familiar we are with working together and the material we have, the easier it will be to work through the mission statement
        - Stakeholder comment: I had similar skepticism about the mission statement originally, but I've grown more comfortable with the process – I trust the process and that we'll revisit it.

In response to Stef's reference to doing some work in the summer, a Stakeholder expressed concern about trying to do anything during the summer. It's a busy time, hard to get all of us together. He suggests that maybe before May 5 we decide what we CAN work on over the summer, develop a game plan for the summer.

Stef acknowledges that we're in a bit of a conundrum – there's not a lot of time, but we have lots of information to sort through. Experts that he's talked to say they need 4 weeks to develop presentations. He suggests that if we divide into subgroups by category, those groups can pull together all the information they can for that category and present on it. That might eliminate much of this inefficiency.

- Stakeholder comment: Subgroups sound like a good plan. But I think we really need to define the questions that need to be answered and do that as a large group. What information do we really want – formulate specific questions to be answered.

Finalize the prioritization of the information needs

In the last 30 minutes of the meeting, Matthew asks the Stakeholders to finish ranking the information needs, specifically those that were added last week that weren't prioritized. Doing this will help to put together plans for the order we should try to get this information to you. He asks the group to nominate four facilitators: Greg, Peter, Nels, and Dirk were nominated. Those four people were put in charge of one small group each. Each group gets two of the information categories, and Matthew asks them to rank the urgency of the items within their groups. If they get through urgency and still have time, then they could rank the accessibility of the requested information. The table facilitators will turn in the master copy for each category.

Two final items:

- Kayla calculated the numbers on represented Perspectives and Experiences present at this meeting – they were displayed on the wall.
- There will be a Steering Committee meeting on Thursday at noon at Centennial Hall.