

Sitka Long-Range Tourism Plan Collaborative Process
Steering Committee Meeting
25 April 2006; 12:00
Centennial Hall

Summary

The Steering Committee with the help of a few Stakeholders made some plans for the public meeting scheduled for May 4. There was also quite a bit of discussion about the level of intensity the Stakeholders are feeling during this phase, and some strategies for supporting them through it.

In attendance: Hugh Bevan, Julia Smith, Sandy Lorrigan, Dorik Mechau, Vern Culp, Mary Beth Nelson, Wendy Alderson, Mike Litman, Stef Steffen, Judy Ozment, Matthew Turner, Kayla Boettcher

Agenda:

Public Meeting – Advertising, Content plan
Debrief
Next Meeting
Summer Plans – meetings, threshold
Steering Committee info

Public Meeting

May 4, 7-9 at the community house
PSAs are in the paper
What other advertising?

Dorik was recently talking with Shannon Haugland (at the Sentinel) about the importance of this public meeting, and she said she thought there could be a Sentinel story. Andy Miller called Dorik, and will be meeting with Dorik and Carolyn this afternoon to learn some of the background to the process. They plan to encourage him to approach a story by focusing on interviews with the Stakeholders and Steering Committee members.

He asks for ideas on where to send Andy, ideally a cross-section of Stakeholders.

Other comments:

- I've heard several people would be worried about a newspaper article. If they interview Stakeholders, they might open controversy and get letters to editor.
- That might be a positive thing, the more questions we get from outside, the broader base we can cover. There will be some controversy one way or another, best way is to deal with it head-on.
- An article could generate as much interest in coming to the meeting as possible, while also not giving false expectations
- Would an article in the paper make some people feel like they wouldn't have to go to the meeting?
- It would ideal to encourage Andy to ask about the process, not content, not bring up controversy
- Important to highlight website
- Julia volunteers to be a contact for Andy.

Other suggestions for advertising for the meeting:

- Could generate interest by listing 8 areas of concern in the paper.
- Point out that it's an especially important public event, opportunity for public to put two cents in this process.
- Push website.

Kayla will draft copy for newspaper ad and send to others for feedback.

Radio:

- Maybe someone could do an op-ed – that seems to reach a lot of people.
- There's also a non-assembly Tuesday before the meeting (May 2) – that time may be open, could do another hour of talking about what's happened in last month.
 - Matthew will check if that time slot is available.
- PSA for both radio stations.

Kayla will draft PSAs.

Cleo made fliers; hopefully those have been distributed.

Meeting Content

Matthew's idea is that it might be interesting to try to convey the feel of the Stakeholder meetings and not just the content that's being developed. We could try to structure it so there are small group conversations happening instead of one overall presentation. A large group Q&A format can lead to one person or idea dominating the whole group.

He'd also like to try to take all the posters and materials and plaster the walls with them.

One way to approach the small groups would be to introduce a process phase (such as identifying the areas of concern), give a brief presentation to the whole audience, and then, if there are enough SH there, form some quick small groups, have them talk about the process of identifying those concerns. Maybe there would be chart paper available in case someone brings up ideas that we haven't considered. Then we could do something similar for the other steps of the process we've been through. This would be a great test of the process and the diversity of the SH. If no one can raise a concern that the SH haven't already raised, we get an A+; if there's new stuff, we can capture it then. Also, the SH can see for themselves if they're really reflecting the community's concerns.

Another idea would be to set it up conference style. People could walk around and have SH stationed at the walls, they can help public understand the certain steps and how we got there.

- Throwing everything up on the walls and having people walk and look at them – it's hard to educate as well as if they're sitting in the audience; if you're talking to 5 at a time about cruise ships, there could be hub-bub.
- But it's not at all about content...

What about the future? We have to say something...

- Probably refer to the process map, here's where it goes and how it comes together to the best we can tell at this point.
- Talk about What are we going to try to accomplish over the summer/fall?

Someone mentions that one thing we haven't talked about yet is how to move into strategy phase. Matthew replies that he and Kayla started to talk about that with David Chrislip on the phone. He talked about what they're working on in Juneau as an approach. There's limitless approaches after the common ground; could go straight into areas of concern and break those down. But one thing he talked about in the visioning phase (ideally a short phase between info and strategy) (Matthew draws grid on the board):

- Horizontal – non creative solutions (left) to creative solutions (right)
- Vertical – low volume to high volume (in terms of numbers of visitors)

In each of these quadrants, you run scenarios. Using Juneau as example – essentially, if you run a scenario in high volume/noncreative, that's status quo (according to Juneau SH); the SH in Juneau really bit into the creative sections, finding creative solutions for high and low-volume tourism. From that, they extracted a vision. The idea is simply to imagine how to solve the community's concerns in each of those quadrants. It's also a neat way to interface with broader community using this method; there would be ways to get high school students involved in one piece of this, for example.

Committee comments:

- I like the scenarios approach – once we've done the data work, there will be some trends that will help inform the scenarios; could base scenarios on increase or decrease in certain types of traffic, i.e. what we could/would do if cruise ship traffic increased/decreased.
- We also need to figure out what happens if we don't do anything, if we were to just let it happen – that's an interesting exercise too, and may spur proactive planning.

So what are we going to say about the future at the public meeting?

- We have Chris Beck in the sidelines – he's said he could help us try to bridge from info to vision; that could be one part of the puzzle – bring him to Sitka and do that exercise; of course we need to make sure we're on parallel tracks with our strategies.
- It might be inspiring to have him come before we go into a lesser amount of meetings – seeing a light at the end of the tunnel; might give a push of energy.

A Steering Committee member asks the Stakeholders present: "What is the energy level of the sub-committees?"

- Speaking for myself, I feel like I'm lost in the forest – it would be nice to have some direction, concept of some direction that we're going in.
- We have some concerns about what we saw last night that we wanted to bring them forward. We keep looking at those 160 questions on the wall – we prioritized those questions at one time and we lost that priority. We haven't looked at the subjects in the priority that we put with them; that might be a way to use time more efficiently; we didn't follow through with that part of the work.
- Another concern from my group – because there's such a strong emphasis on having a complete presentation to the group, people are backing away from presenting because they feel like they don't have enough info. We're at a point where people might back away from coming at all because they can't present complete enough of a report, they don't have time to be so detailed, and they feel that no matter what they present, it will generate questions.
 - But I think that's good – that shows what the group is most interested in hearing more about.

- We had people in my group last night that were reconsidering being involved because they're running out of time; they're getting their businesses ready for the season, getting busy...I'm afraid they're going to quit.
- The process we're using is so rigorous, it's as though we're putting all our emphasis on extracting every possible bit of info in every possible direction. It might be good to go back to priorities – we ranked the info we're looking for according to urgency, maybe we should focus on those first and the harder-to-acquire later. Maybe also discourage the free-for-all questions, which goes off on tangents, and every tangent makes more work.
- This has come up in my conversations with other groups; we don't have enough time to come up with enough info to present. Through the question asked of the presenters, we can self-prioritize...it's obvious that there are issues that everyone would like answers to.
- I had to turn my questions back in last night because I've run out of time to do research – these next two weeks before tourists is critical and I'm behind already.
- There's a lot of guilt and pressure going on right now
- There's a feel in that room of hysteria. That's why there are so many extra conversations going on; people are trying to get as much done as possible. But by having those extra conversations, we're wasting time.
- I think everyone's getting overwhelmed; at some point, it might be good for the group to agree that some questions are undoable.
- That's a great idea, but there's always someone that thinks everything is important. There are some we have definitely talked about whether we can let it go, but someone always brings it up again.

Matthew offers some insight from the facilitator's perspective:

This is pretty much what's supposed to happen in a process like this. This is the stage when people lose hope, it's ever-expanding and doesn't seem to be going anywhere. It's also the phase, as the group gets past it, where we get creative – we're getting into the wilderness where we have to let go and look around; this is where it begins.

There is definitely a lot of frustration in the group, but keep in mind that we've only done this twice – the first time we learned how to make it work as a group; the second we only had a day and a half to prepare; this is the first chance we have to have some time before the next meeting to put presentations together.

The group pressure might be the thing to help people let go of things; some sense of urgency is good, but it can also be frustrating.

Also, in looking at the whole wall at once – my premonition is that as we get half-way through that data set we'll have answered most of them. As you look at them topically, they overlap – we might reach a point where we accelerate through it.

Hysteria is a good word – not arguing that, the mantra I always have is trust the process.

A SC member mentions that in a Steering Committee meeting after the questions were identified, we talked about starting with the top 4 in each category – assuming there is no overlap, that would be 32 topics. We talked about starting with those 32.

Another SC member comments, “The thing that scares me is that people might drop out because they feel overwhelmed,” and adds that going back to the prioritizations might be a way to skim some of that overwhelming feeling off the top.

Dorik asks Matthew if he was presenting an argument against prioritizing in the comments he made earlier – Matthew says no, he wasn't arguing for or against, just offering his perspective on this phase of the process.

A SC member comments that people are getting busier than we anticipated, we didn't realize the prep time involved in getting ready for the tourists. There might be something we could do to reassure the SH – maybe an email to reassure them and discuss that we're going to focus on the items that were ranked with high urgency. Also tell them don't be afraid to present and not have all the data.

One of the SH mentions that she felt a little frustration last night when people felt we were rushing through a questions just to get a red dot. There is some concern about whether we're really getting all the information, or just rushing through it to finish another question.

Matthew comments that there are 4 team leaders/facilitators for the groups; within their group, it was their charge to figure out a strategy for tackling the information. One strategy could be to focus on urgency; those are noted on each item they've been working on. One of the SH remarks that the majority of the issues in her group are ones and twos – it's all urgent.

Matthew continues: I saw a glimmer of hope last night, folks raising their hands but then rethinking and retracting, a little bit of thinking through whether or not it's on track and essential to ask. That's something I'll definitely keep encouraging.

Someone mentions that prioritizing certainly doesn't mean the low priorities get erased from the record – it may be that there are some items on there that could resurface as more important than we originally thought.

The following is a conversation between a Stakeholder (SH) and a Steering Committee member (SC):

SH: It seems we're all going on a trip together – the thing that makes it difficult is that we don't know where we're going; if we knew where we were going, we wouldn't have to collect information from every leaf on every tree.

SC: What do you mean you don't know where you're going?

SH: We don't know what's important and not important. If I was in charge, the first thing I'd do is a survey from the community about what they want tourism to be in 5 yrs and then figure out how to get there from where we're at.

SC: How would you get that consensus from the community?

SH: I would try to engage the public to design the community they want to live in; what level of tourism do they want, do they want stores closed in the wintertime, helicopters overhead, to be able to do out to Viksari and catch halibut, etc.

SC: The point is that we're doing exactly that – we have people with competing interests; we have a microcosm of the community in the end trying to figure out common visions; but to get there we have to all understand common data. If we survey, they're going to have an opinion, but their opinions are based on misunderstanding. We've gone to great lengths to be a microcosm of the community. You'll never get consensus from the whole community, we have to rely on SH to talk to other community members. The goal is to know what the community wants, in visioning stage we want to understand status quo and what we want to

change about that. So maybe we need to explain that next step; maybe people need a carrot in front of them to identify the next steps, how they work, what end results will be...especially now that people are concerned about heavy lifting...

Other comments:

- Not so much about heavy lifting – it's more of an attitude of wanting to do it correctly.
- I've never thought of quitting, it's just that I can't do all this work right now.
- There's also a strategy of getting the experts in to present, instead of taking the responsibility of learning all the data yourself

Matthew asks the group if there's anything they'd like to see emphasized or done differently for the next meeting – what can he do to help allay these fears/concerns, or at least help people feel confident that they're being addressed?

SC member: I think the conversation we've had here is probably on other people's minds. It might be helpful to say these things out loud to everyone, that there's this level of frustration we're feeling, we understand people are concerned about bring info correctly and completely, that we want people to present information even if it's not all the information. If you have info, please present it. In some form this conversation should be brought to the whole group, let them know we have talked about this, and it's important. Also present the idea of looking at prioritization, and encourage them to let go of lower priorities.

SH: We could create an axis of urgency/availability – could see all the items up there, and concentrate on high urgency/high availability quadrant.

SH: Can we somehow ask people to write questions down more, allowing the presenter to prioritize what's critical from those half-sheets?

SH: It's a roomful of over-achievers; they're going to take it to heart, and try to do it at the highest level possible. When you ask the subcommittees to take something on, they don't feel comfortable allowing presentations up there that aren't complete – some people don't feel like they can spend more time on this, or that they don't have the ability to put the information into a better presentation. The way it's going now, the subcommittee could look at a person and say "you haven't done enough", but if the person can't do more, it ends up devaluing that person and his work.

Matthew: One thing I had thought of doing at the next meeting, when we were thinking about it as the last one before summer break – I had initially planned on spending an hour or so on a debriefing the process to let off some steam and get some energy to look forward to what's next. I had pulled back on this idea because we're also just beginning to roll on the info thing, and now Monday already sounds like it will be a full evening with the fish panel...maybe at the May 22 meeting we should do a process debriefing? If this stress is going on, it could be useful. It was helpful last time we hit a roadblock to stop the process, talk about that, and then move through it. This might be something for the SC to consider – if they want to reserve some time to be a closing/ debriefing time at that meeting. We could talk more about individual experiences in one-on-ones, have SH talk about how they feel in this process right now, and acknowledge and validate whatever that is. People are coming to me jazzed, frustrated, concerned about who's here, who's not here – there's lots of that in the air. I'm more reluctant now to not put some time toward that – but when should that

happen? We could start to acknowledge that our standards are high – the group is putting forward a high standard; so some kind of talk about this would be good...

SC member: I think this Monday would be a good time to do that. Maybe start the meeting out with some of these acknowledgements/discussions. Then at last meeting in May, do some more debriefing then, have some discussion about the summer schedule.

SH question: The panel for Monday – do we know the timeframe? Will it take all night?

SH: It will be awesome – it's Tory O'Connell, Bob Chadwick, and John Littlefield, talking about subsistence, sport, ground fish. "Sport" includes some aspects of charter. The person who arranged it has told them about our 5-minute presentation time limit.

SH question: What happened to the industry people? Tina, Roger, Fred, Tim, etc.

SC: Roger's out of town, Tina was at the last one but Stacy was there; Fred was out of town...

SC: There was also concern voiced by the cruise ship group regarding their committee attendance. Solution might be to have a presentation by Fred. That group's facilitator is frustrated because Fred hasn't been there, and the group really can't do work without him.

Back to the idea of going back the priorities that were established originally:

One of the SH mentions that maybe it would be a decision for the whole group to take up – instead of treating it as an aside, let's decide as a group what the first tier of information that we concentrate our energy on. And instead of doing everything we possible can to glean every bit of information about every topic, let's propose that we put our energy toward the important stuff. But let's make this decision as an entire group so there's no confusion.

SH: We also need to help the question time stay on track – Matt's done a good job of doing that, but the group still gets off track, lots of sidebars; I don't know how Matt can be more assertive.

And then, regarding working in groups -

SH: The group work doesn't apply to our group. The individual tasks include going out to get the information, writing a report, and presenting it. No group work, but we're sitting at tables, so we are chattering. Maybe we shouldn't be in round tables, maybe we should all be facing the front.

SH: I didn't want to go back into my subgroup – there was only a constant conversation about one person's presentation and how it wasn't complete, and who was going to help finish it. It made me very uncomfortable because it made one person uncomfortable that he hadn't perfected his report. I don't think there's enough time for the group to come to conclusion or agreement; we just got stuck on it. Nobody was going to move from their opinion in their discussion last night until finally somebody picked up some pieces of it to work on. Instead of 40 people in the room coming up with questions, it was 10 coming up with the same questions. If we put it before the group first, then the group hears the presentation twice.

In summary:

It seems we need to stop the process and refocus it, provide an opportunity to vent observations to people you haven't talked with, and come to some realizations and

conclusions to help refocus and help folks back off on standards. People may not understand they're all sharing the same frustrations; they may also not be seeing the progress being made. Maybe a pep talk is what we need, reassuring the SH that we've heard lots of comments and we're working through how to make it better, plus a reminder that we're here to be supportive, so let's not too hard on each other.