
SITKA TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Monday, February 8, 2010
Harrigan Centennial Hall – Rousseau Room

Mission: To advise and assist the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka regarding its management of tourism in Sitka.

Tourism Commission Members: Steve Ash, Bruce Conine, Matt Lawrie, Rachel Moreno, Theresa Weiser. Two vacant seats.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Steve Ash called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Steve Ash, Bruce Conine, Rachel Moreno, and Theresa Weiser.

Staff: Crystal Duncan, Contract Secretary.

Members of the Public: Sandy Lorrigan, Director of Sitka Visitors & Convention Borough.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION: M/S Weiser/Moreno moved to approve the agenda for Monday, February 8, 2010 with the addition of Lincoln Street Survey Update.

Chairman Ash requested the addition of Lincoln Street Survey Update as item 4 under Unfinished Business.

ACTION: Motion **PASSED unanimously** on a voice vote.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION: M/S Weiser/Moreno moved to approve the minutes for January 11, 2010 Tourism Commission meeting with the following changes:

Ms. Weiser requested that the meeting minutes be amended from:

- *Charter Industry Update* – Ms. Weiser provided the Commission with the following update:
 - This season saw a decrease in business.
 - The expected numbers of charter boats next season is 155 compared to 188 charter boats in 2008.
 - Only 5 charter boats fished more than 100 trips.
 - The number of boats is expected to decrease once “limited entry” takes effect in 2011.

To:

- *Charter Industry Update* – Ms. Weiser provided the Commission with the following update:
 - The 2009 season saw a significant decrease in business of 20% to 40% - you can average it out to 30%; as was reflected in the 2nd and 3rd quarter's finance reports for Sitka.
 - There were 199 charter vessels registered to operate in 2007 which was the peak.
 - There were 188 charter vessels registered to operate in 2008, a decline of 11 registered vessels.
 - There were 155 charter vessels registered to operate in 2008, a decline of 44 vessels from 2007. And the last time there were 155 charter vessels or less registered, was back in 1999.
 - During 2009, there were only 5 charter vessels that ran 100 days or more, as compared to 25 charter vessels in 2008 that ran 100 days or more.
 - The Charter Association anticipates a continued decrease in the number of charter vessels operating in 2010 due to the poor economy and the more restricted fish regulations that put our industry in SE Alaska at a severe disadvantage to the charter industry in Area 2A (Homer, Kenai, Seward, Kodiak, etc.).
 - During 2009, with 1 halibut per day allowed in Area 2C (SE Alaska) and 2 halibut per day allowed in Area 3A, we are losing clients from here to there.
 - Until the economy gets better and the halibut regulations are equal again in both Areas 2C and 3A, we can expect this trend will continue to happen in 2010, further reducing the number of charter trips that will happen in Sitka and SE Alaska. And we will see a few less charter vessels registered to operate in 2010 as well.
 - Finally the number of charter vessels registered to operate in 2011 is expected to decrease from 25% to 40% when "Limited Entry" permits take effects as of February 2011.

ACTION: Motion **PASSED unanimously** on a voice vote.

V. PERSONS TO BE HEARD/CORRESPONDENCE

A letter from the Doris Bailey, President of the Sitka Historical Museum, was included in each commissioner's packet. The letter stated that the Sitka Historical Museum was in favor of expanding the Centennial building rather than the other two options proposed by the MRV Architects (building a separate visitor's facility).

Chairman Ash reported that one possible dilemma of building directly onto the Centennial Building includes the mixing of funding sources (i.e. state and city funds), however with this letter, Mr. Ash believed that the Historical Commission may have looked into it the issue.

Chairman Ash continued the conversation with an update on the MRV Master plan. The Architects have fallen behind on their timeline for completion. He stated that once the plan is approved, the City may go elsewhere for the implementation of the proposed projects.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- *Commission Vacancies* – Allen Turner submitted paperwork to serve on the Tourism Commission. The SEDA/Chamber vacancy should be filled at tomorrow's Assembly Meeting (3/9/10) should he be approved.
- *Final Version of Resident Survey* – Ms. Duncan and Ms. Moreno shared a draft print-out of the Resident Survey. It was constructed using the free version of surveymonkey.com. The Commission was presented with two versions, from that they narrowed it down and moved to approve the final version with a few suggested changes.

Ms. Lorrigan was asked her opinion of the survey questions. Her recommendation was that the Commission look at each question individually, specifically the purpose of each question and how a response will help the Commission as they go before the City Assembly, in other words, will it be useful with future project proposals.

MOTION: **M/S Weiser/Conine** moved to approve the Resident survey with the following changes. 1) Bold ECONOMIC (question 2); and 2) rephrase "How important is it to YOUR ECONOMIC future for Sitka to:" (question 3).

ACTION: Motion **PASSED unanimously** on a voice vote.

- Lincoln Street Survey Update – After approving a final version of the Lincoln Street Survey, each Commission member was encouraged to survey local vendors regarding whether a trial street closure was viewed positively or negatively.

Mr. Conine reported that he surveyed two businesses: Russell's Sporting Goods, White's Pharmacy. Mr. Conine reported that the owner of Russell's was in favor of a street closure stressing that it should be well advertised prior to the event; while the owner of White's felt that a street closure would interfere with local business – which has become more important in this slow economy.

Chairman Ash surveyed the following businesses: Absolute Fresh, The Backdoor, Old Harbor Books, Fairweather Prints, Brenners, Chocolate Moose, Fisherman's Eye, Abbys Reflection, and Little Tokyo. He reported that all of the businesses said that they would be in favor of closing Lincoln Street for 2-3 days during the summer season. He stressed that most of them were emphatically in favor of the idea. He also mentioned that the MRV Master Plan Steering Committee discussed the idea. At that time, Mr. Ash let them know that the Tourism Commission was conducting a survey to see if there was buy-in from local downtown businesses.

Ms. Weiser is opposed to the idea of closing Lincoln Street – even for only a short duration because a solution to the parking problem, created as a result of the closure, has not been offered.

MOTION: **M/S Moreno/Conine** moved to recommend the Assembly approve a closure of Lincoln Street to motorized traffic during 2 or 3 of the busy cruise ship days this summer.

ACTION: Motion **PASSED unanimously** on a voice vote.

Chairman Ash volunteered to attend the Assembly meeting on February 9, 2010 to present the idea to the Assembly members.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

No Agenda Items. However, Ms. Lorrigan shared that Sitka was nominated as a “2010 Distinctive Destination Nominee” through the National Trust of Historical Preservation. Voting will take place online through March.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Ms. Moreno moved to adjourn.