



CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

Meeting Minutes Tourism Commission

Commission Members: Sherri Blakenship, Devon Calvin, Lillian Feldpausch, Vaughn Hazel, Bethany Lowrance, Carol Bryant-Martin, Alana Peterson, and Jeremy Plank

Ex Officio: Amy Ainslie and Judson Rusk (CBS), Katie O'Neill (Visit Sitka)

March 12, 2026

6:00 P.M.

Harrigan Centennial Hall

I. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

Vice Chair Lowrance called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Sherri Blakenship, Vaughn Hazel, Bethany Lowrance, Carol Bryant-Martin, and Lillian Feldpausch.

Absent: Devon Calvin (Excused), Jeremy Plank (Excused).

Ex-Officio: Amy Ainslie (P&CD Director), Judson Rusk (Tourism Manager, Excused), Katie O'Neill (Visit Sitka)

Public: Larry Edwards, Peter Robertson

Secretary Bryant-Martin confirmed a quorum was present.

II. CONSIDERATION OF AGENDA

None.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Based on public comment received, Ainslie suggested replacing Larry Edward's public comment in the draft February 19, 2026 meeting minutes with the following, "In consideration of the draft ordinance regarding regulation of new cruise ship docks, Larry Edwards asked that the Commission explicitly determine whether Sitka is at, if not beyond, its capacity for cruise visitation and stated why he believes the answer is yes. If the Commission agreed with him, Edwards stated that the draft ordinance should prohibit the construction of new cruise ship docks of any size/capacity that is not de minimis. He recommended using the term "prohibition" rather in place of "moratorium" to remain consistent with zoning code terminology. In addition, he commented that the prohibition should extend to the entire borough of Sitka."

M-Feldpausch/S-Bryant-Martin moved amend the minutes to allow the suggested correction for replacement as presented by staff. Motion passed 5-0 by voice vote.

M-Blakenship/S-Bryant-Martin moved to approve the February 19, 2026 meeting minutes as amended. Motion passed 5-0 by voice vote.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Discussion of potentially implementing a Wi-Fi based visitor Survey at Sitka Airport for the 2026 visitor season.**

Ainslie introduced the proposal for an airport visitor survey to be administered by the McKinley Research Group. McKinley would obtain information from Sitka's travelers through a Wi-Fi-based survey at the Sitka Airport from May to September 2026 for a total cost of \$25,000. Rusk's memo on the topic included in the Commission's packet outlined how McKinley would collect data based on visitor volume, origin and purpose of travel, duration of stay, activities, and spending details. The memo also explained that the airport Wi-Fi survey would support the Commissioners' recommendations to collect data to better evaluate the tourism industry in Sitka, and would be funded by the CBS Visitor Enhancement Fund (bed tax). There were options to run a pilot of the program during the month of May with a decision point afterwards to determine whether there were enough responses to warrant continuation of the survey. Commissioners discussed the pros and cons of conducting the survey; they expressed concerns about the survey cost and the limited data available in May given travel trends. Lowrance expressed concerns about the use of city funds for a survey that may not garner helpful data. Blakenship stated that spending data could be obtained from businesses' point-of-sale systems, including those of short-term rentals, lodges, and hotels, at no cost if they were willing to participate. Ainslie stated that Blankenship's suggestion would be very helpful to the Visit Sitka team in their economic data collection and reporting, but that the airport survey would provide additional visitor data beyond retail spending. O'Neill added that the data inform Visit Sitka marketing, and provide context for adjustments that might be required to attract visitors in the years ahead. Commissioners debated the merits of the survey but agreed that the data would provide a comprehensive assessment of the independent visitor sector.

M-Bryant-Martin/S-Hazel moved to recommend approval of the Airport Visitor Survey to run from May through September of 2026 at a total cost of \$25,000. Motion passed 5-0 by voice vote.

V. PERSONS TO BE HEARD

Vice Chair Lowrance recognized Larry Edwards, a member of the public, to speak. Edwards asked CBS to publish the Tourism Commission meeting packets with enough time for public review and comment, and make the audio recordings accessible on the city website.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion: M-Feldpausch/S-Bryant-Martin moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:18 p.m.

Minutes By: Carol Bryant-Martin, Secretary