



CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

Final Meeting Minutes Tourism Commission

Officers: Chair Jeremy Plank; Vice Chair Ian Dempster; and Secretary Carol Bryant-Martin

Members: Devon Calvin; Vaughn Hazel; Bethany Lowrance; Alana Peterson; and Rachel Roy, Visit Sitka (Ex Officio)

Staff Liaison: Amy Ainslie, P&CD Director (Ex Officio)

Assembly Liaison: Scott Saline

November 13, 2025

6:00 P.M.

Harrigan Centennial Hall

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Plank called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Carol Bryant-Martin; Devon Calvin; Vaughn Hazel; Jeremy Plan, Rachel Roy,

Absent: Devon Calvin (excused) Ian Dempster, Alana Peterson (excused)

Staff: Amy Ainslie, P&CD Director

Public: Christina Vandenhogen, Elizabeth Faulkner, Larry Edwards, Shannon Haugland (Sitka Sentinel)

Secretary Bryant-Martin confirmed quorum was present.

III. CONSIDERATION OF AGENDA

No agenda changes were made.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

None

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Review of 2025 End-of-Season Tourism Survey Results

Ainslie provided a report on the survey results, and detailed the number of responses and outreach efforts. Key takeaways from the survey were that traffic and congestion/crowding continued to be key community concerns. Respondents felt most impacted in terms of phone and internet service, access to business services, recreational and subsistence areas, and getting to school, work, or appointments on time during the visitor season. For 2026, leaving Lincoln Street open and using Maksoutoff Street for temporary restroom placement were slightly favored, as well as agreement on the effectiveness of the pedestrian monitors. Sentiment on overall industry impacts was largely unchanged from the 2022 survey results. Key areas for improvement for CBS included communicating amounts and uses of tourism-related revenues, managing traffic-related impacts of tourism, communicating CBS tourism management efforts and decisions, managing crowding/congestion in the downtown area, and managing overall visitor numbers. Ainslie also stated that there were 590 long-form responses about what CBS should keep, stop, and consider doing in terms of managing tourism; the report had a high-level summary of the comments, but Ainslie would bring back a more detailed analysis of these comments at the next meeting.

Plank opened the floor to public comment. Christina Vandenhogen noted that she was a member of the Island Artist Gallery co-op, and was offering comments on their behalf as well as from her perspective

as someone who worked downtown during the summer. Vandenhogen noted trash management issues on Lincoln Street, and identified the lack of public trash cans on the street and the need for more efforts to address litter. She also stated that more benches were needed. Further, she shared concerns for safety with Lincoln Street being open due to jaywalking and drivers using their horns frequently in response, as well as the accessibility of sidewalks.

Elizabeth Faulker, also a member of the Island Artist Gallery, stated her agreement with Vandenhogen's comments. She further added that downtown beautification was needed, and would like to see more litter pick-up, encouraged hanging of the decorative banners, and other options such as flower baskets that would make downtown feel more vibrant and inviting. She added that the co-op was in favor of closing Lincoln Street during busy visitor days.

Commissioners had a brief discussion about the results; while they were happy to have a significant number of responses, they agreed that efforts to expand engagement in the future through a more designed/targeted survey to achieve better community representation would be beneficial. The Commission also agreed that making decisions about Lincoln Street closures and other city operations before the 2026 season needed to be prioritized, and aimed to finalize those recommendations in January. No action was taken.

B. Review of Zoning Code Changes for Cruise Ship Docks

Ainslie reviewed progress on the proposed zoning code change for cruise ship docks including updates to the definition of cruise ship docks; recent Planning Commission discussions regarding zoning districts in which cruise ship docks would be permitted, conditional, or prohibited; and options that were being explored to address unzoned areas of the borough.

Plank opened the floor to public comment. Larry Edwards stated that members of Small Town SOUL had concerns about the proposed definition, as it specified that cruise ship docks were those that served 250 or more overnight guests; were there to be multiple docks developed each with capacities to serve 249 or fewer visitors, there could be significant traffic and other community impacts. Edwards advocated for a smaller number to be used in the definition, proposing that 50-75 overnight passengers be used.

Plank asked a question about how tour vessels that transported passengers from a cruise ship facility to other docks or landings would be characterized, and if that operation would constitute passenger lightering. Lowrance and Roy stated interest in leaving options open for water taxiing rather than busing visitors into town and for future attraction development, and stated concern about the proposed definition limiting those opportunities. Ainslie stated that there may need to be separate definition for passenger lightering vessels to address that issue.

Commissioners also discussed the number of passengers used in the definition, and Ainslie stated that there perhaps needed to be more uses defined to differentiate between sizes of docks and whether they would be permitted, conditional, or prohibited on that basis. Plank, Roy, and Lowrance expressed their concerns with making all cruise ship docks prohibited, and wished to see it be a conditional use in some zones. The Commission agreed that they would like to review the Tourism Task Force recommendations on the issue when this item came back to them for further review. No action was taken.

C. Discussion on Food Cart Permitting & Regulations

Roy gave a presentation on mobile food vending trends and opportunities, regulations that apply, and summarized CBS permitting processes and fees for different types of activities and events. Roy noted the complexity of permitting, and sentiments that administration of the permitting process felt

inconsistent. Considerations for improvement of regulations and permitting processes included standardizing requirements across event types, locations, venues; centralizing regulation provisions in a single-place and document, streamlining paperwork submissions for permit applications, having more flexible deadlines for special events, reducing fees to increase affordability and access for vendors, perhaps having a single annual charge and/or fees based on the size of the vending unit.

Plank opened the floor to public comment. Hannah Portello-Swagel expressed the frustration felt by herself and other food vendors regarding the complexity of the permitting process, time-intensive application submissions, and inconsistencies of regulations between different areas, vending types, and events. She also addressed the affordability of fees, both as a vendor and event organizer. Further, she noted frustration about lack of clarity regarding the use of hot oils for cooking.

Commissioners largely agreed with the improvements suggested, emphasizing the need to streamline the process and make regulations more transparent. Ainslie stated that there was a project in her department to implement a centralized, online system for permit applications which could significantly ease the permit application process. Portello-Swagel was invited back to address questions about food carts in the downtown area, and the Commission discussed how spaces available had been impacted by leaving Lincoln Street open in 2025; Commissioners expressed interest in identifying more spaces for the 2026 season. There was also discussion regarding why certain departments administered certain types of food vending permits, and the complexity of permittees navigating reviews by multiple departments for a single permit. There was discussion on how to approach the proposed improvements, and agreed that the Commission would like to continue work on this topic. No action was taken.

V. PERSONS TO BE HEARD (For items ON or OFF the agenda and not to exceed 3 minutes)

Larry Edwards stated while he appreciated the public comment opportunity at the beginning of items, he would like to see another opportunity to comment before conclusions or motions were made. Edwards further noted that the Tourism Task Force recommendations on zoning for cruise docks were just recommendations, and that development of the final product should be reflective of Planning Commission guidance as subject matter experts. He further described the issues with making a use conditional, rather than prohibited, and concerns about how that designation could lead to potentially undesirable growth in cruise visitation to Sitka.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Seeing no objections, Chair Plank adjourned the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Minutes By: Amy Ainslie, Staff Liaison