

## **Tourism Advisory Board Meeting/ Meeting Agenda**

**Thursday, February 19 – 9:30 a.m.**

**Meeting Call to Order: Judy Heinmiller**

**Roll Call: Present - Judy Heinmiller, Chris Schelb, Juanita Lidholm, Jason Gaffney, John Hunt**

**Absent - Jeff Butcher, Gregg Johnson**

**Also Present - Lori Stepansky, Karen Hess, Michael Ahmuty**

**Approval of January 2009 Minutes:**

Hunt noted correction to have Schelb second the motion to appoint Ahmuty to a non-voting member seat and that all had approved. Hunt motioned to approve amended minutes; Gaffney second; all approved.

### **Public Comments:**

Karen Hess commented the Assembly resolution for supporting the increase of cruise ships to Haines was very well received by Holland America. She encouraged the board to communicate with Assembly about options to get more ships to Haines. She also noted the Royal Caribbean ship being pulled out of Alaska in 2010 opened up a spot for docking in Skagway on Wednesdays and HAL indicated it was too early at this time to confirm their schedules for 2010 would keep Wednesday ships in Haines. Hess also commented on progress of the HB134 cruise ship wastewater management bill.

**Approval of Agenda:** Stepansky noted to Chair Heinmiller the absent members' status of excused or not excused should be voted on by the board. Johnson notified Chair prior to meeting of an emergency ear doctor appointment; Hunt motioned to excuse Johnson, Schelb second; all in favor for excused absence. Butcher had not notified chair of participation in meeting, noted unexcused.

Hunt motioned to approve the agenda; Lidholm second; all in favor.

### **President's Report:**

Heinmiller reported she had been out of town for a while but had received calls from local resident Kathleen Menke regarding the AP&T Connelly Lake Project and the Tourism Advisory Board's position to support any Assembly decision to move forward with a hydropower project.

Board member Ahmuty commented on the Assembly meeting adopting the resolution to support more cruise ship business in Haines. Hess also commented about the cruise ship industry in regards to acquiring ships and how other regions are building up ports to increase the business to their region. Discussion continued regarding what the impact would be to Haines and Alaska with of the loss of ships.

**New Business:** **Budget** (*Tourism Director Stepansky has submitted her department budget to the CFO and Borough Manager and would like the board to review the budget with a suggested action of submitting a letter of support to the Assembly with recommendation of approval of the Tourism Department budget. A copy of the budget with a budget summary document has been provided by Tourism Director Stepansky.*)

Thorough discussion took place regarding key items with the tourism department budget with Director Stepansky noting Borough Manager Bolen had indicated to her he would be taking funds from the Tourism budget and put them in the Economic Development budget with the intent of shifting cruise ship head tax funds into the Tourism budget. Discussion continued

with the specifics uses for the head tax with questions regarding how much and where from the Borough Manager intended to make cuts. Discussion also took place regarding new line item of Canadian/Yukon advertising, funding for additional DVDs, and the needs of Southeast Conference convention this September.

Board member Hunt commented about Assembly member liaison Jerry Lapp not attending board meetings. Discussion took place about the Assembly liaison for the board and board members attending the Assembly meetings.

Discussion took place regarding the Tourism Specialist position previously talked about at the last meeting and the need to have staff support for functions of the Visitor Center. Stepansky commented if the budget was cut and accepted by the Assembly, she may need to contact SE Conference about Haines' ability to handle the convention and possibly suggest they change their venue.

Board unanimously agreed to write a strong letter supporting the tourism budget as it stands and a second letter about support for staff to handle the Southeast Conference Convention. Discussion took place regarding conventions last year and the staff challenges and previous city venues of SE Conference. Chair Heinmiller asked Schelb to draft the support letter for staff of the SE Conference; Chair asked Hunt to assist with drafting the budget support letter.

**New local ad campaign ideas for developing more support for tourism and cruise ships** *(Non-voting member Ahmuty has requested this item be added to the agenda).*

Ahmuty commented on the local ad campaign idea discussed at the special board workshop in September. Ahmuty noted the testimonial type ad with a local face stating what tourism means to the community should be pursued.

Hunt commented more local business owners should be invited to the board meetings and reminded the board of previous discussions for a board retreat. Discussion followed regarding options of surveying the community for input about tourism in the community via web surveys, mailings, emails, etc. Hunt, Schelb, and Ahmuty volunteered to work on questions for the survey. Stepansky stated she would talk to her web site manager, James Alborough for technical ideas and suggestions.

**Update and forecast from Visitor Center on independent traffic coming to Haines for 2009** *(Non-voting member Ahmuty has requested this item be added to the agenda).*

Ahmuty stated he was interested in knowing if there were any indications from the industry via venues and functions the Tourism Director has recently attended regarding what the year was projected to be with visitors. Stepansky reported hard figures had not been announced other than cruise ship bookings being down 40% although she has heard reports that bookings are down for the ferry and possibly for tire traffic. Stepansky reported on upcoming conferences she would be attending in the next few months where the economy and the impact on the tourism industry would be discussed. She also noted reports from local hoteliers and B&Bs indicated an increase in Australia visitor bookings. She also commented on number of brochure requests, where planners were being sent for brochure distribution and the positive aspects Haines had for this year over other communities.

**Update from Visitor Center on what new marketing approaches are being taken for the 2009 season as well as the future in relationship to global recession – in short, the future of Haines Tourism** *(Non-voting member Ahmuty has requested this item be added to the agenda).*

Stepansky reported on the brochure distributions utilized by the Visitor Center, the increase of marketing in the Yukon, enhanced listings with Alaska gateway communities, and focus in other regional areas such as the Northwest Pacific where access to the Haines region was more accessible.

**Old Business:**

**Update from board member Gaffney regarding his meetings with Norwegian and RCCL during his recent trip to Miami.**

Gaffney reported meeting with Director Jim Burnside and Marketing planner Jennifer Arneal of Norwegian Cruise Lines and options of testing the Haines waters again. He also met with Royal Caribbean and noted Haines has a notoriety of past events and so cruise lines have the consideration of things that happened in the past and want assurance of no reoccurrence of such incidents in the future. Gaffney indicated they desire to see a change in Haines' attitude demonstrated through and for the long-term of what Haines can and will do for the industry in light of other destinations working hard to attract the cruise ship business.

Lengthy discussion followed regarding bad impression Haines a minority group made in the past with the cruise lines with the picketing protest, how to overcome the reputation. Discussion took place with suggestions of various community education ideas, packages to make the Haines port appealing to the cruise lines, and ways to reaffirm the position of Haines is to increase the ship visitation.

Additional discussion took place regarding HB134 and the impact it would have with the state of Alaska if it does not pass accordingly. Gaffney specifically stated it would result in cruise ships pulling out of Alaska. Further discussion followed regarding the standards of the ships' water in comparison to the quality of what is acceptable in the communities.

**Bathroom/Pavilion Project**

Stepansky reported she was aware construction would begin this season and would likely be on-going during the summer and suggested tour operators meet with Borough Manager Bolen in regards to the flow of bus traffic in the area. The situation of ADCO trailers being purchased and put in place for the temporary bathroom facilities was discussed along with its affect on parking. All agreed the inconvenience was necessary to get permanent facilities.

**Directors Report:**

**Visitor Center Staff**

Stepansky reported Angela Robinson was hired as the Visitor Information Coordinator and the transition of Christa Rayl moving to the Finance Department has taken place. Stepansky noted she is extremely pleased with the choice of Angela for the VIC position.

**Yukon Trade Show**

Stepansky reported the Haines Chamber was having financial challenges this year and planned to drop the Yukon Trade Show but had worked out an agreement for the Tourism Department to take over the trade show with assistance of Haines Chamber office manager Joan Carlson doing leg-work for coordinating details with community participation.

**LA Times Adventure Travel and Trade Show**

Stepansky reported she just returned from Los Angeles having attending the LA Times Adventure Travel and trade show in a booth co-op with Southeast Alaska Tourism Council. It has been estimated approximately 23,000 people attended the show in two days which included travel media and travel agents. Stepansky also commented on a 30-minute workshop

she and colleague Sandy Lorrigan from Sitka conducted to talk about the Inside Passage.

**Board Comments:** Lidholm stated she had heard the comment small cruise ships were reported to spend more money in town verses the large cruise ships and asked board members for clarification. Discussion followed regarding the class, quality, and volume of people as a result of all ships.

Schelb reported he had been in communication with Rod Pflieger and John Binkley and understood they would be visiting Haines on March 27 for the Chamber Luncheon.

Hunt commented again with encouragement to the board to invite more business members to attend the Tourism Advisory Board meetings.

**Set Next Meeting Date:** Thursday, March 12, 2009 – 9:30 a.m.  
**Assembly Chambers, Public Safety Building**

Hunt motioned to adjourn, Schelb seconded; all approved. Meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.