

# Sitka Visitor Industry Plan

version 1.0

February, 2007

Prepared for the City and Borough of Sitka

Coordinated by the Long Range Planning and Economic Development Commission

Developed by residents of Sitka, Alaska

Facilitated and documented by:

Matthew Turner, Concept of Degrees

Kayla Boettcher, KayLab

Introduction

Overview

VI Plan  
Oversight

Marketing  
& Promotion

Incentives  
& Policies

Transportation &  
Infrastructure

Outreach

Information  
& Data

Catalytic  
Strands

Appendices

## Mission:

To create a sustainable plan that maximizes the contributions and minimizes the impacts of the visitor industry so that a good quality of life for Sitkans is realized.

## Overarching Principles

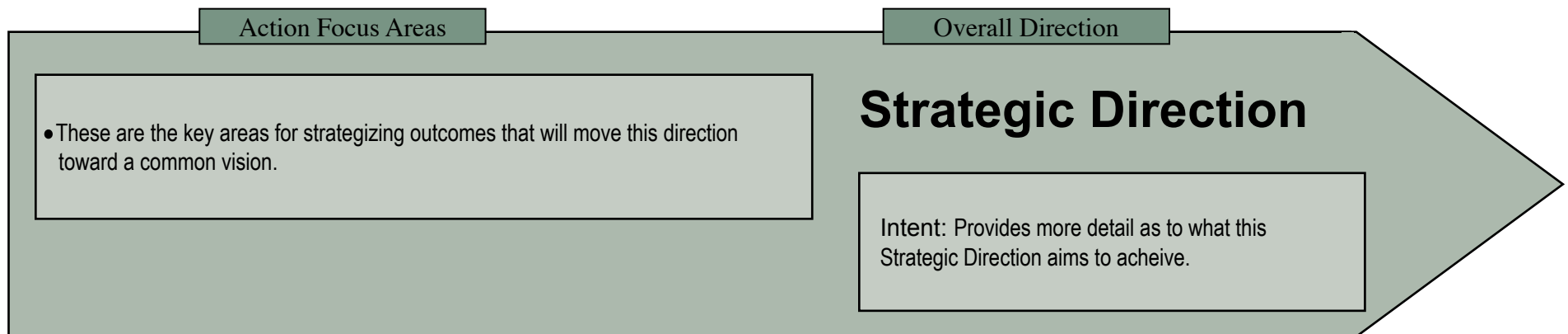
The overarching principles were developed by the Stakeholder group as a way to articulate the values they wish to keep intact for any decisions made about the Visitor Industry in Sitka.

This set of principles applies to every recommendation made in this document and should apply to any future actions or decisions. These are the important underlying assumptions — the ingredients that protect Sitka's unique qualities and sense of community. They remain constant even as needs, resources, and other environmental factors change.

- No community remains special by accident.
- Sitka's unique character must be maintained.
- Sitka wants to be a high value, moderate volume visitor destination.
- Sitka is characterized by locally owned and operated businesses.
- The Visitor Industry will continue to be an important component of a diverse and healthy economy in Sitka.
- The Visitor Industry will optimize its benefits to the residents of Sitka.
- Partnerships are critical for implementing this plan and make unified decisions regarding the Visitor Industry.
- Dialogue and decisions made about the Visitor Industry that have community impacts should include the appropriate people and be based on good information, through a process that invites public participation.

# About Strategic Directions

- A **Strategic Direction** is a course the plan will take in order to overcome the obstacles or blocks and move toward a common vision.
- It acts like a rudder, orienting the group towards the vision and focusing change.
- Movement within each overall direction is guided by **Action Focus Areas**.
- The overall direction and action area elements should remain constant for about five years.



## Benchmarks

- Benchmarks are the navigational points in time that show that the plan is moving in the strategic direction.

- Not every step needed to accomplish these benchmarks is shown, just the key points along the path.

- Benchmarks are the most variable component of the plan. New benchmarks may need to be added, others altered, some deleted throughout the course of the plan.

- Benchmarks are meant to be the key points – either catalytic (the accomplishment will result in other important accomplishments) or the result of a series of prior key steps.

- Benchmarks are placed in the timeline in the quarter where it is anticipated that they will be completed.

- Each Benchmark will need its own implementation plan to outline prior key actions, as well as Who, What, When, and How Much.

# Overarching Principles

The Overarching Principles are value statements that reflect the Stakeholders' emphatic desire to uphold and enhance the high quality of life enjoyed by residents of Sitka. These principles provide the filter through which all Visitor Industry planning should take place. They apply to every recommendation made in this document and should apply to any future actions or decisions. The Principles are the important underpinnings that protect Sitka's unique qualities and sense of community. They remain constant, even as needs, resources, and other environmental factors change.

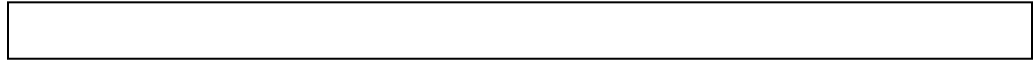
## **No community remains special by accident.**

Sitka has a distinct character that sets it apart from every other Alaska town. It is not just the geographical location on outside waters against a mountain backdrop, but also the rich history, vibrant arts and culture, and obvious self-sustenance. Sitkans love the uniqueness of their town, and are proud to share it with others. But Sitkans have also watched other coastal towns cater to the requests of outside influences, and the results of that courtship seem costly to the community character. The yearlong process to produce this set of Strategic Directions and benchmarks illustrates a dedicated, intentional effort to make thoughtful decisions for Sitka. Active community management and guidance of the visitor industry ensures that Sitka's unique qualities will be protected and promoted.

Communities that don't intentionally manage their marketing and infrastructure to reflect the values and needs of the community generally just promote to the easiest target, see what they get, and then react. This process of exploring community assets and desires has helped the Stakeholders to identify potential growth in other areas of tourism, and the recommendations within this plan will reduce Sitka's dependence on one or two markets.

The other key outcomes of this process have been identifying the impacts and contributions of the visitor industry in Sitka, creating a plan that continuously evaluates those impacts and contributions, and developing a structure where future decisions about the visitor industry strive to keep adverse impacts and contributions in balance. To ensure that Sitka remains a comfortable and accommodating place for its residents, keep benefits directed at locals, and maintain the visitor industry as a balanced part of Sitka's economy and character, a mechanism must be established to oversee the activities of the visitor industry and the implementation of this plan. The Stakeholders recommend the creation of a volunteer Oversight Board, to be comprised of a diverse representation of community members and inclusive of all relevant perspectives.

# Overarching Principles



## **Sitka's unique character must be maintained.**

One of the Stakeholders commented that one of his favorite things about Sitka is that he has a sense of place here: "If you blindfolded me and took me somewhere else, I'd know I was in a different place. That's not true of every community." There are things about Sitka that distinguish it from any other place, and the Stakeholders feel it is crucial to uphold this distinct character. The Visitor Industry can help maintain this sense of place by ensuring that local businesses meet resident needs year round, protecting the natural environment from overuse, sustaining vibrant local arts and culture, connecting to Sitka's historical past while also investing in the future, and helping Sitka to maintain its status among travelers and residents as a "real" community (as opposed to one that is obviously geared toward visitors).

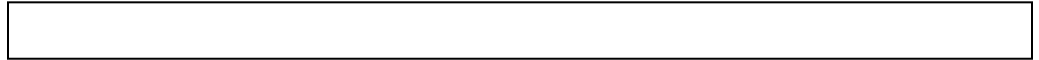
## **Sitka wants to be a high value, moderate volume visitor destination.**

As a small, rural island community with a modest downtown area and easy access to a vast natural environment, the highest quality visitor encounters in Sitka occur when the community is able to provide authentic, personal travel experiences. This type of exceptional service and attention is more feasible with visitors who are able to spend more time in Sitka and more deeply explore this community's unique assets.

Additionally, this principle evolved in response to ongoing concerns about downtown congestion on high-density visitor days, i.e. when there are three or four large cruise ships in port. A recent visitor survey indicates that heavy crowds in the downtown area also have a negative impact on the visitors' experience of Sitka (see the *Sitka Visitors' Survey 2006*, prepared by students and faculty of Union College. Full report available on the plan's website).

This principle is not in opposition to large volume visitor traffic, but does communicate a desire to be more intentional about pursuing new visitor markets. Strategies within the plan for upholding this principle include expanding the shoulder season through new conferences and events, and carefully studying Sitka's current capacity and ability to expand capacity before considering an increase in high density, high impact visitor traffic. Providing the infrastructure for a moderate density of visitors is easier for Sitka to build and maintain, and developing high value markets for the community supports a sustainable economy.

# Overarching Principles



## **Sitka is characterized by locally owned and operated businesses.**

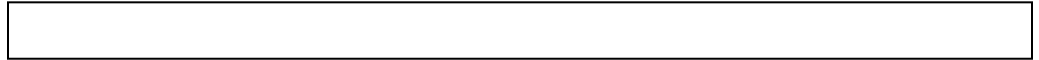
One of the strongest values voiced by the Stakeholder group is that the Sitka business community is primarily owned and operated by permanent local residents. This is not only an economic asset to the community as a whole, as the profits stay in the community, but also a point of pride. Community members have deep concerns about Sitka businesses being run by short-term residents or by large corporations with no personal investment in the community.

There is also some concern that if retailers narrow their focus to visitor sales, it creates non-local markets, which includes a risk of displacing local markets. The Stakeholders recognize that visiting consumers are a boon for local retailers, and this proposal includes incentives for sustaining a business community that meets the needs of residents as well as visitors. Stakeholders also discussed the possibility of using “locally owned and operated” as a local, and perhaps even regional, marketing campaign.

## **The Visitor Industry will continue to be an important component of a diverse and healthy economy in Sitka.**

Sitkans currently enjoy a rich and diverse economy that is strong in several sectors. The Visitor Industry claims about 11% of that economy. When giving a presentation on the state of Sitka’s economy in March, 2006, Eric McDowell commented that Sitka has one of the most balanced economies in the state. The elements of this plan aim to keep tourism a vibrant part of Sitka’s economy, while also striving to diversify the markets within that portion of the economy and support other healthy economies in Sitka. Sustaining economic diversity helps to spread economic benefits among many recipients and provides a variety of employment and business opportunities that attracts and supports a range of community members.

# Overarching Principles



## **The Visitor Industry will optimize its benefits to the residents of Sitka.**

During numerous points of this process, the Stakeholders emphasized that actions taken to enhance the visitor experience should also be useful and enjoyable for local residents. Even as new infrastructure and attractions are developed, Sitka must remain a town for residents, serving residents' needs. This concept applies to current and potential situations. Presently, there are a few practices, such as the closure of public restrooms and telephones and removal of trash bins, that are concerning to Stakeholders because they indicate seasonal services for visitors only.

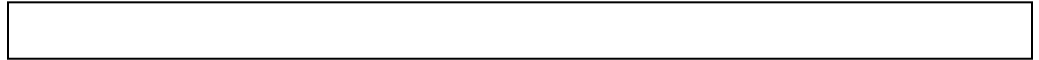
This principle also directs planners in making future decisions about visitor infrastructure. New and remodeled structures should enhance resident quality of life as well as the visitors' experiences. What attracts visitors to Sitka should be the unique characteristics and assets that already exist here – not new, uncharacteristic infrastructure and attractions that make the community unrecognizable to its residents. Examples of areas where visitor infrastructure could also benefit residents are educational, cultural, and historic buildings and events, and transportation options.

Finally, this statement also speaks to the importance of guiding visitor dollars to local goods and services and demonstrating strong preference for local businesses. As much as possible, Sitka should retain control of promoting its own attractions rather than depending on outside marketing efforts. Sitka should also ensure supports and resources are available to help local businesses and entrepreneurs in the visitor industry.

## **Partnerships are critical for implementing this plan and making unified decisions regarding the Visitor Industry.**

Sitka is a relatively small, isolated community with a familiar year-round residential population. Every resident is touched by the visitor industry. Because the visitor industry has such a wide influence, ensuring both industry prosperity and community harmony will require continued partnerships and collaboration. These cooperative relationships go beyond simply coordinating the day-to-day activities of the Visitor Industry, but also aim to provide opportunities for all interested citizens to work together on policies, programs, and action plans. Partnerships that work for the community's overall well-being will advance tourism in a way that also enhances the quality of life in Sitka.

# Overarching Principles



**Dialogue and decisions made about the Visitor Industry that have community impacts should include the appropriate people and be based on good information, through a process that invites public participation.**

This final principle echoes the main tenet of collaborative dialogue as written by collaboration expert David Chrislip: “If you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the community.” The Long-Range Planning and Economic Development Commission opted to create these recommendations for Sitka’s Visitor Industry through a collaborative process, to ensure that the diversity of community interests was reflected in the plan. To truly plan for the community’s future, to protect the assets that make Sitka unique, and promote a unified community vision, all perspectives must be represented. The “appropriate people” includes everyone that has a relevant perspective to add to the dialogue. “Good information” comes from reports, surveys, and expert insight that the participants agree is reliable and credible.

Sharing the same information helps all players to base their decisions on a common understanding. Keeping the process transparent and accessible to the public builds trust, dispels myths and rumors, and demonstrates that decisions are truly being made on the community’s behalf.

## Action Focus Areas

- Establishing oversight mechanism for Visitor Industry plan
- Ensuring plan implementation includes ongoing community participation
- Establishing two-way communication with the community about the Visitor Industry
- Providing better public information about true benefits and impacts of Visitor Industry
- Setting target visitor numbers based on visitor contributions and impacts
  - Aim to avoid spikes
  - Provide for breaks
- Structuring existing local revenues so they can meet service demands
- Generating revenues to support visitor industry-related services and infrastructure, which can also be enjoyed by residents

## Overall Direction

# Visitor Industry Plan Oversight

Intent: Visitor Industry entities, local government leaders, and residents working together in continual oversight of the Visitor Industry Plan.

1<sup>st</sup> Qtr.

## Benchmarks 2007

- City-endorsed Visitor Industry Board established to assure ongoing development, implementation, and coordination of the Visitor Industry plan.

2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

- Visitor Industry plan is a part of the Sitka Comprehensive Plan.
- Necessary funding for studies and surveys required to implement plan are secured.
- Oversight Board has established a web presence and utilizes other tools to communicate with community about the Visitor Industry and the implementation of this plan.

3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr.

- Oversight Board has met with other local tourism-related entities to explore and define their relationships with each other and the plan.
- Promotions and incentives to cruise line employees entice more passengers to disembark in Sitka, mitigating the impact of fewer total ships visiting Sitka.
- Visitor Industry Board has forum for citizens with concerns about the Visitor Industry and a process to address those concerns.
- Large cruise lines respond to Sitka's request for a return to 2006 passenger levels by redirecting some boats to Sitka on days when 1 or 0 boats are scheduled (except on weekends).
- Small cruise lines respond to Sitka's request for a return to 2006 passenger levels by redirecting some boats to Sitka on days when 1 or 0 boats are scheduled.

4<sup>th</sup> Qtr.

- Dialogue with large cruise ship industry results in the following schedule for 2008: visitor capacity at 2006 levels with no more than 3 large ships per day, and most weekends with no ships.

1<sup>st</sup> Qtr.

## Benchmarks 2008

- Oversight Board understands parameters of using the head tax and has a plan to use it on projects identified in the Visitor Industry plan.
- City has hired employee to manage plan implementation, industry oversight, and head tax revenues.

## Beyond 2008

- Public review process for plan is completed – new benchmarks have been identified.
- New target(s) for visitor numbers have been set based on evaluation of visitor impacts and contributions.

# Visitor Industry Plan Oversight

**Intent:** Visitor Industry entities, local government leaders, and residents working together in continual oversight of the Visitor Industry Plan.

## Action Areas:

- Establishing oversight mechanism for Visitor Industry plan
- Ensuring plan implementation includes ongoing community participation
- Establishing two-way communication with the community about the Visitor Industry
- Providing better public information about true benefits and impacts of Visitor Industry
- Setting target visitor numbers based on visitor contributions and impacts
  - Aim to avoid spikes
  - Provide for breaks
- Structuring existing local revenues so they can meet service demands
- Generating revenues to support visitor industry-related services and infrastructure, which can also be enjoyed by residents

---

Discussion: Establishing an oversight mechanism will help to centralize plan implementation efforts. The Stakeholders recommend that this mechanism be embodied in a Visitor Industry Plan Oversight Board, sponsored by the City, that will assure the ongoing development, implementation and coordination of this plan.

The work of the Oversight Board will adhere to the Overarching Principles identified by the Stakeholders. The Oversight Board will strive to uphold open and transparent communication about issues that affect the whole community by ensuring that the plan's implementation continues to include diverse community participation, establishing two-way communication with the community, and providing better information about

industry benefits and impacts.

The Action Focus Area about setting target visitor numbers aims to ensure that the community enjoys a balance between visitor impacts and contributions, both financially and in terms of capacity. The qualifiers “aim to avoid spikes” and “provide for breaks” show the Stakeholders’ desire to even out visitor density and still have some days with very low visitor traffic. A more even flow of visitors throughout the week helps business owners provide consistent employment, and low visitor days allow the whole community to catch their breath between waves. See also the section on Catalytic Strands in this report for more information on balancing visitor numbers.

As the central location for plan oversight, the Stakeholders also recommend that the Oversight Board be responsible for managing revenues to support visitor attractions and services. Adhering to the Overarching Principles will also ensure that these services and attractions are also of benefit to residents.

Finally, the Stakeholders feel it is imperative that the Oversight Board uphold the spirit and integrity of this planning process. It needs to be inclusive of all community perspectives, and members of the board should represent a diversity of talents and skill sets. The composition of the board is central to the success of the whole plan.

# Visitor Industry Plan Oversight

## Benchmarks

City-endorsed Visitor Industry Plan Oversight Board established to assure ongoing development, implementation, and coordination of the Visitor Industry plan

### Target for Completion: 1st Quarter, 2007

To guide the implementation of this plan, the Stakeholders recommend that an official oversight board be established. Upon approval of this plan, the Long Range Planning and Economic Development Commission and the Steering Committee for this process are prepared to help form this board and ensure that a diversity of skill sets are actively represented on the board. This board will be responsible for ongoing communication with the community about Visitor Industry topics, as well as tracking the progress of benchmarks suggested in this plan and any evolution of the plan beyond this initial document.

Visitor Industry plan is a part of the Sitka Comprehensive Plan

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

Including the Visitor Industry Plan as an element of the Comprehensive Plan gives it the necessary alignment with all City plans and keeps it at the forefront of City business. As it states in the preamble of the Comprehensive Plan: "No decision should be made until the decision-maker has consulted the Plan for guidance."

Oversight Board has established a web presence and utilizes other tools to communicate with community about the Visitor Industry and the implementation of this plan

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

One of the values reflected throughout this process is the importance of public participation and an open, transparent process. This benchmark further demonstrates this value by providing an avenue for the Board to communicate with the community about the process of implementing this plan.

Necessary funding for studies and surveys required to implement plan are secured

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

This should be the top priority of the Visitor Industry Board, once it has been established. Thorough review of this document will give guidance on budgetary ideas, and some benchmarks will require money for feasibility studies and planning.

Oversight Board has met with local tourism-related entities to explore and define their relationships with each other and the plan

### Target for Completion: 3rd Quarter, 2007

For this plan to be effective, the Oversight Board needs to coordinate with other established visitor-related entities. Ideally, all of these entities share a common vision and will cooperatively work toward some action items. Involving those missing voices in the plan at this point will still benefit the overall plan by aligning current activities and future goals.

# Visitor Industry Plan Oversight

## Benchmarks

Promotions and incentives to cruise line employees entice more passengers to disembark in Sitka, mitigating the impact of fewer total ships visiting Sitka

### Target for Completion: 3rd Quarter, 2007

As part of the strategy to ensure a majority of passengers are actually disembarking in Sitka, the accomplishment of this benchmark shows that ship employees are also helping to promote Sitka. The idea is essentially to give the ship's staff direct reason to appreciate Sitka and hope that their enjoyment of Sitka will be communicated to the passengers. Stakeholders had several ideas for employee incentives, such as arranging for inter-ship soccer games (including bussing employees from ship to game site), or offering them coupons and promotions from Sitka retailers. Another strategy is to create a "friendly competition" between ships to see which one has the highest percentage of disembarking passengers, with awards given to the winner.

An underlying intention of this benchmark is to also aid the Information and Data Strategic Direction in its quest to collect actual cruise ship visitor numbers (see also the narrative for the following benchmarks in Information and Data: "first annual count of disembarking cruise ship passengers has been recorded by month" and "key visitor statistics are collected monthly"). To track the success of this benchmark, disembarking passengers must be counted. It may be possible for ship employees that work at the lightering docks to record the count, or perhaps this information could be collected by a Sitkan.

Visitor Industry Board has forum for citizens with concerns about the Visitor Industry and a process to address those concerns

### Target for Completion: 3rd Quarter, 2007

This provides one of the most immediate feedback loops in the system by giving the community a place to talk about how they relate to the visitor industry. This feedback loop will help the Board measure the impacts and contributions of the industry, according to vocal public interface. While this will likely serve residents that need a place to vent their opinions about adverse impacts, it also provides a place to hear from businesses and industry, if they are feeling regulations in ways the policy-makers don't perceive. For example, one Stakeholder told the planning group that to operate his business it is necessary for him to interface with several different entities (Ports and Harbors, cruise lines, SCVB, Centennial Hall, etc.) and follow the regulations and requirements of each. This Stakeholder hopes to find a central point for all those interfaces to help him track the different pieces of legislation, and find balance in the regulations placed upon business owners.

The Stakeholders envisioned this Board to operate two-way communication with the community, so Sitka can implement a balanced plan for the community. The challenge for the Board in this benchmark is to provide a measured response to the community input – not just a response to the most persistent and/or eloquent voices. To respond to community input, the Stakeholder group suggests the Board provide responses based on the input of all necessary perspectives and good information on the topic at hand.

# Visitor Industry Plan Oversight

## Benchmarks

Large cruise lines respond to Sitka's request for a return to 2006 passenger levels by redirecting some boats to Sitka on days when 1 or 0 boats are scheduled (except on weekends)

Small cruise lines respond to Sitka's request for a return to 2006 passenger levels by redirecting some boats to Sitka on days when 1 or 0 boats are scheduled

Dialogue with large cruise ship industry results in the following schedule for 2008: visitor capacity at 2006 levels with no more than 3 large ships per day, and most weekends with no ships

Oversight Board understands parameters of using the head tax and has a plan to use it on projects identified in the Visitor Industry plan

City has hired employee to manage plan implementation, industry oversight, and head tax revenues

### Target for Completion: 3rd Quarter, 2007

Together, these two benchmarks represent a community advocacy effort to mitigate the impacts of a projected decrease in cruise passengers to Sitka. Even though the cruise ship schedule has been published for 2007, community members sense that changes within that schedule are still possible. Ideally, the cruise schedulers would also respect Sitka's request that ships call on low traffic days, rather than adding a third or fourth ship in addition to the regular schedule. The Stakeholders also included the caveat that, ideally, weekends would still be relatively quiet, giving the community a chance to rest during this busy season. For more context, see the pages on "balancing visitor numbers" in the Catalytic Strands section of this report.

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

The work of this benchmark dovetails with several others. See the section on "balancing visitor numbers" in the catalytic strands section of this report.

### Target for Completion: 1st Quarter, 2008

Implementation of a \$50 per cruise passenger head tax will provide increased revenues for Sitka's visitor industry infrastructure. While the Stakeholders frequently mentioned the head tax as a funding source for their ideas during the planning process, the reality is that the parameters and actual distribution of the money remains unknown to this group. Once the Oversight Board better understands these parameters, they will be equipped to recommend goals from this plan to be funded by that money. Ideas for the head tax specifically mentioned in this plan: capital projects (in Transportation and Infrastructure), keeping restrooms open, and hiring a full-time City employee to oversee this effort.

### Target for Completion: 1st Quarter, 2008

To ensure careful and consistent oversight of the many elements of this plan, the Stakeholders recommend that the City hire a full-time employee to coordinate it. The Visitor Industry is a critically important piece of Sitka's economy and community life, and, together with the Oversight Board and the core group of Stakeholders involved with this process, an employee will provide a central resource for the implementation efforts of this plan.

# Visitor Industry Plan Oversight

## Benchmarks

Public review process for plan is completed – new benchmarks have been identified

### Target for Completion: Beyond 2008

Staying true to the spirit of the process that developed this plan, a public review process is mandatory. After two years of implementation, it will be time for a major community review to see what's been accomplished, how things have evolved, and what new topics need to be addressed. The Stakeholders provided the first two years of benchmarks, but the framework of the plan is intended to last for at least five years. New benchmarks will need to be added to continue the ongoing work of this plan.

New target(s) for visitor numbers have been set based on evaluation of visitor impacts and contributions

### Target for Completion: Beyond 2008

This benchmark is the culmination of several previous benchmarks that strive to balance Sitka's capacity with the number of visitors received each year. See the pages on "balancing visitor numbers" in the Catalytic Strands section of this report.

# Visitor Industry Plan Oversight

**Gems:** A great number of ideas, concerns, observations, and aspirations were created and recorded during the planning of this document. While those listed below did not find their way into the final plan, they may spur future creativity in crafting benchmarks.

## Oversight Board

- Community still feels that decisions for Sitka are made by the community (not outside influences)
- Collaborative tourism commission created by Assembly to implement visitor plan
- Marketing plan for the oversight board is developed
- Objective action plans, timelines, and evaluation methods have been identified for the plan's strategic directions
- Milestones in plan implementation are celebrated

## Plan Promotion and Endorsement

- Implementation of Sitka's visitor industry plan has community-wide endorsement.

## Action Focus Areas

- Promoting Sitka's unique qualities
- Diversifying markets
- Improving existing visitor attractions and events
- Developing unique attractions, festivals, and celebrations in the shoulder seasons

## Overall Direction

# Marketing and Promotion

Intent: To market and promote Sitka within the guidelines of the visitor industry plan.

## Benchmarks 2007

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

- Plan-based marketing budget has been established.
- Sitka partnership with large cruise user groups (those that book an entire ship) is successful in lobbying ships to come to Sitka.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr.

- Three cultural/historical events are targeted for promotion through collaborative partnerships.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr.

- Marketing themes and a branding campaign unique to Sitka and relevant to this plan are being consistently utilized in Sitka's promotional strategies.
- Website presence established (either new or through existing sites) that promotes all Sitka businesses and events.
- Desirable, yet under-represented visitor markets see Sitka promotional information.
- Seasonal attractions are available to visitors during designated off-season events.

## Benchmarks 2008

### 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr.

- Visitors have easy and ready access to information on a comprehensive array of Sitka's attractions.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

- Fisheries awareness pamphlet (inc. species ID, history, recipes, handling, conservation, know your limits, etc.) distributed with all sport fishing licenses.
- 80%-100% of cruise ship passengers are disembarking, regardless of weather.
- Dialogue with cruise lines results in fair promotion of Sitka businesses.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr.

- Sitka is recognized as a "pedestrian and bicycle friendly city".

### 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr.

- Sitka appears in 20 national publications as "a great place to visit".
- Increased utilization of off-season bed capacity and event promotion results in a 5% increase since 2006 in conventions and events in Sitka.

## Beyond 2008

- Eco-tourism is a college major and institute in Sitka

# Marketing and Promotion

**Intent:** To market and promote Sitka within the guidelines of the visitor industry plan.

## **Action Areas:**

- Promoting Sitka's unique qualities
- Diversifying markets
- Improving existing visitor attractions and events
- Developing unique attractions, festivals, and celebrations in the shoulder seasons

---

**Discussion:** The ideas and recommendations within this Strategic Direction focus on promoting what is special about Sitka, intentionally reaching out to new markets and inviting them to visit, and ensuring that visitors experience a variety of high-quality attractions and events that enhance their visit to Sitka. The Intent of this Strategic Direction specifically states that marketing and promotional efforts should work in concert with the other elements of this plan and the values of the community. Hence, the hope is that marketing efforts will prioritize local businesses and outfitters; highlight Sitka's unique history, arts, and cultural attributes; emphasize respectful encounters with the natural environment; and welcome visitors to experience the diversity of this working Alaska town.

Results from a visitor study conducted in 2006 also provide some indications for future marketing strategies. This survey was taken by 258 visitors over a five-day period in August. 115 respondents said they felt there is something special about Sitka when compared to other Alaska towns. Many of them felt "other towns are too tourist-oriented," that "Sitka is still a real town with history and culture" and "it's not overrun by tourists like other towns we've visited." All of these comments support the idea that Sitka has unique characteristics that are appealing to visitors, and care should be taken to intentionally promote and share these characteristics with them. In addition, eighty percent of those surveyed said they prefer to shop in locally-owned businesses (see the Sitka Visitor Survey, 2006 prepared by students and faculty of Union College for this project). Promoting this aspect of Sitka follows the plan's overriding principle of maintaining local control, and also hints at a marketing strategy to identify local goods and services.

# Marketing and Promotion

## Discussion (continued)

### Improving existing attractions and events

One of the Stakeholders assembled a comprehensive list of Sitka's cultural and historical assets, including museums, Native and Russian cultural sites, World War Two historical artifacts, cemeteries, and arts events, to name a few. (See **Appendix D** for the full list, which is also available online at <http://www.visgroup.org/inventory.htm>). A concerted effort should be made to review this list and prioritize areas of focus, either for attentive upkeep and/or for increased use and interpretation. The Stakeholders also collected some ideas about how to better promote these assets, such as scheduling festivals and events around the ferry schedule to attract more regional visitors; showing historical films and documentaries in the downtown theater during the day; and featuring local foods in restaurants and cooking schools. See the list of "gems" at the end of this section for a complete list of ideas.

### Developing unique attractions, festivals, and celebrations

This Strategic Direction also serves to attract new markets and increase the number of visitors in October-April (the "off-season"). The Stakeholder group suggested numerous creative ideas for new festivals and events – the full list of ideas can be found on the "gems" page at the end of this section. Here are a few: host a cooking school featuring local products; Sitka Spruce wood instrument festival; fishing heritage festival; promote status as "The Kayak Destination"; expand the Sheldon Jackson Aquatic Center; and establish an artist co-op market.

### Consistent and Accurate Storytelling

There is consensus within the community that Sitka has a unique history and character that residents are excited to share with visitors. Many visitor entities provide some degree of pre-season training to employees who will act as visitor guides. The training is intended to help guides provide visitors with accurate information about Sitka's natural, historical, social, and economic situation. According to one Stakeholder presentation, a substantial number of local government and private visitor entities provide some sort of pre-season training to their employees. However, not all guides receive training, and the depth of training varies. Furthermore, as this Stakeholder reported from an informal survey, the most challenging questions for guides are questions about local, regional, or state issues, the local economy, or the best way to spend three hours in Sitka. There is some concern that guides provide inconsistent and sometimes inaccurate information to visitors, and there has been some discussion about developing a mechanism to improve that situation. Creating a readily available handout that compiles standardized information about Sitka's economy, history, and culture could be a simple first step. Local visitor entities could also cooperatively create a training program that would certify guides and include a "trained guide" logo for use in marketing materials.

# Marketing and Promotion

## Benchmarks

Plan-based marketing budget has been established

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

To proceed with almost all of the other benchmarks listed here, a budget must first be established. The Stakeholders recommend that the budget support action items that further the intentions and goals of this plan; i.e., that Sitka's attractions, assets, and businesses are promoted accurately and consistently, that partnerships are sought for collaborative promotional work, and that locally owned entities are given precedence. A liaison from the Oversight Board should be involved in identifying the budget items for this Strategic Direction.

Sitka partnership with large cruise user groups (those that book an entire ship) is successful in lobbying ships to come to Sitka

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

Frequently, an organization or corporate entity will occupy a large portion or the entirety of a cruise ship. Examples include national corporations who offer the cruise as an employee benefit, and social organizations that promote cruises as a way to meet like-minded individuals. Several Stakeholders who have worked with these groups in the past indicate that Sitka is a favored stop for many of these groups. The strategy behind this benchmark is for Sitka to directly contact the organizers of these cruises and encourage them to make sure their ship will stop in Sitka.

Three cultural/historical events are targeted for promotion through collaborative partnerships

### Target for Completion: 3rd Quarter, 2007

The inclusion of this benchmark sets a bar for Sitka's promotional standards; specifically, the Stakeholders would like to see more energy focused on promoting the unique qualities of Sitka and emphasizing events and attractions that happen in the off-season. Participation from the Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau and other community marketing avenues is critical for the accomplishment of this benchmark.

Marketing themes and a branding campaign unique to Sitka and relevant to this plan are being consistently utilized in Sitka's promotional strategies

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

This goal is geared for all markets – especially desirable, underrepresented markets. A marketing image should be developed that is both consistent with visitor expectations and also an accurate representation of what visitors will experience in Sitka. The branding package should show a common theme and design, and be applied to all promotional materials such as advertising, websites, and brochures. Potential images and themes that are consistent with this plan include Sitka's wild and natural environment, eco-tours, wildlife, the unique cultural and historical aspects of Sitka, "Made in Sitka" art and products, and Sitka's image as a sustainable and self-reliant community. In the future, a promotional theme for Sitka could include its status as a "pedestrian and bicycle friendly" community (see 2008 benchmark within this Strategic Direction).

# Marketing and Promotion

## Benchmarks

Website presence established (either new or through existing sites) that promotes all Sitka businesses and events

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

One goal of this plan is to provide potential visitors with complete and accurate information about what Sitka has to offer. The Stakeholders discussed the possibility of housing such a website within an existing structure rather than to invent a new and competing site; however, importance is placed on promoting the entire range of diverse options for visitors to Sitka, not maintaining a member-based site or spot for paid advertisements.

Desirable, yet under-represented visitor markets see Sitka promotional information

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

The Stakeholder group intentionally chose to discuss all types of visitors and keep their focus broad throughout this process. Early in the process, they broadly defined “visitor” as “a non-local who comes to our community for a short term with a specific reason for being here.” The Stakeholders developed the following list of potential visitors: independent day and overnight visitors, passengers on small cruises, large cruises, and luxury yachts, Alaska residents, small tour groups, “learning-focused” visitors, business and conference travelers, high school students traveling for school events, friends and family of residents, and adventure travelers. Longer-term visitors were also considered: migrant workers, volunteers (e.g. Sheldon Jackson VIMs, Jesuit and AmeriCorps volunteers), medical travelers, students, and seasonal fishing fleets. As a result of this broad definition, they considered many types of visitors as potential markets, and they recognized that some of those markets are currently unrealized or not a focus area in Sitka’s visitor industry.

Other specific benchmarks within this plan are targeted toward adventure travelers, eco-tours, and hosting a broader offering of conferences. Recognizing that some infrastructure will need to be expanded, there are also benchmarks that reflect an expanded conference space and increased bed capacity in October-April to help house visitors in the off-season. Action toward this goal should start with an appropriate group of people deciding which untapped markets to prioritize, and determining the best ways to attract those markets.

Increasing the national advertising exposure would be a good strategy for attracting independent travelers. One effective approach is to utilize cooperative marketing programs, such as the Alaska Vacation Planner and [www.travelalaska.com](http://www.travelalaska.com), both produced by the Alaska Travel Industry Association. Advertisements in a variety of magazines (as suggested by another benchmark in 2008), and even providing informal input to popular travel websites and chatrooms are other strategies.

# Marketing and Promotion

## Benchmarks

Seasonal attractions are available to visitors during designated off-season events

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

In the off-season, during specific events such as Whalefest and regional athletic events, visitors should have the ability to take advantage of attractions that are now considered to be mostly seasonal and are not as heavily promoted in October-May. This idea includes not only making sure the attractions are available, but also for marketers to work with event organizers and local attractions to “package” a series of tours for event attendees. For example, students and families attending the 3A State Wrestling Championship at Mt. Edgecumbe in December, 2007, could be offered the opportunity to take guided land or water tours at a certain time, be shuttled to the Raptor Center, and hear a Native Storyteller during the course of the week.

Visitors have easy and ready access to information on a comprehensive array of Sitka’s attractions

### Target for Completion: 1st Quarter, 2008

Feedback from visitors, input from the Gateway Plan, and observations of local tourist operators all indicate that navigational aids and information on Sitka’s attractions could be more comprehensive. The goal of this benchmark is to ensure that visitors have an easy and immediate understanding of what’s available to them and how to find the local attractions. One specific idea to accomplish this benchmark is for Sitka to provide a promotional brochure to the cruise lines for passenger distribution. Rather than depending on the ship’s promotional efforts, this gives Sitka the opportunity to orient passengers to the community, provide them with inclusive information about businesses and attractions in Sitka, offer safety advice (especially on traffic and crosswalks), and include answers to frequently asked questions. Improved maps and signs to guide visitors through Sitka will also enhance their experience.

Fisheries awareness pamphlet (inc. species ID, history, recipes, handling, conservation, know your limits, etc.) distributed with all sport fishing licenses

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2008

One of the vision elements for this plan as defined by the Stakeholder group states: Active stewardship of historical and cultural resources and the wild and clean environment. The Stakeholders also agree that a healthy natural environment and subsistence lifestyle are two elements of a high quality of life enjoyed by Sitkans.

The intention behind the fisheries pamphlet is to communicate these values to everyone who participates in sport fishing. The Stakeholders recommend the following be included in the pamphlet: species identification information, history of the fisheries, recipes, handling guidelines, information about conservation of resources, and “knowing your limit.” The group originally thought the pamphlet could be distributed through the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, but then decided to narrow their focus on Sitka fishing license vendors. This benchmark should dovetail with the Outreach Strategic Direction, where one benchmark aims to have a fisheries user group working together on common local concerns.

# Marketing and Promotion

## Benchmarks

80%-100% of cruise ship passengers are disembarking, regardless of weather

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2008

Early implementation efforts for this plan include improved marketing to cruise passengers, and providing incentives to cruise line employees if they help “sell” Sitka and encourage all passengers to disembark. Achievement of this benchmark would show that those efforts have been successful, and that Sitka is known as an irresistible port.

Dialogue with cruise lines results in fair promotion of Sitka businesses

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2008

A disturbing realization for the Stakeholder group was to find out that one of the cruise ships had a Russian-themed shop open on their boat, with a sale the day they were in Sitka. The Stakeholders see this benchmark as part of the ongoing dialogue to be initiated with cruise lines in 2007. They believe the community should have the opportunity to talk with the entities responsible for on-board sales and marketing and point out that Sitka’s visitor industry is not only based on cruise ships stopping in Sitka, but also getting passengers off the boat and participating in the unique things Sitka has to offer. The group acknowledges that this may be a daunting task, but they also know that nothing will change if the conversation isn’t initiated.

Sitka is recognized as a “pedestrian and bicycle friendly city”

### Target for Completion: 3rd Quarter, 2008

Achieving this benchmark indicates that, as part of an effort to attract more independent travelers, Sitka has dedicated some effort toward meeting the standards of a pedestrian and bicycle friendly city, and have promoted those efforts.

Sitka appears in 20 national publications as “a great place to visit”

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2008

This benchmark speaks for itself as a marketing strategy.

# Marketing and Promotion

## Benchmarks

Increased utilization of off-season bed capacity and event promotion results in a 5% increase since 2006 in conventions and events in Sitka

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2008

One of the recognized weaknesses in Sitka's off-season visitor industry is a lack of bed capacity and promotion of the off-season. While the achievement of this benchmark may be a little "chicken or egg," the intention is clear: intensive promotion of hosting conventions or events in Sitka in the off-season could bring more visitors to Sitka, but there needs to be a place to house them.

Eco-tourism is a college major and institute in Sitka

### Target for Completion: Beyond 2008

Accomplishment of this benchmark will demonstrate that Sitka has become such a popular and successful eco-tourism destination, that people are coming to Sitka to learn how it's done. Having a population of educated eco-tourism business leaders will also help to sustain a diversity of eco-tour operators in Sitka and throughout Southeast.

# Marketing and Promotion

**Gems:** A great number of ideas, concerns, observations, and aspirations were created and recorded during the planning of this document. While those listed below did not find their way into the final plan, they may spur future creativity in crafting benchmarks.

## Diversifying Markets

- Sitka attracts visitors interested in unique educational opportunities
- Sitka festivals and events are planned around the ferry schedule to attract regional visitors
- Eco-tourism market expanded and widely promoted
- Sitka has expanded outdoor activities and is promoted as a Recreational Mecca
- Sitka has developed a map of sea kayak routes and facilities and is promoted as The Kayak Destination
- There is a world class mountain bike trail, and annual mountain biking events
- Fitness and health training and certification institute established in Sitka (a la Cooper Institute)

## Promoting Sitka's Unique Qualities

- The cultural and historical aspects of Sitka are widely marketed
- The diverse history of Sitka churches is promoted
- Whalefest visitor to local ratio is 2:1
- Sitka receives national attention for the outstanding personalities who attend Sitka celebrations year-round (e.g. Gorbachev visits for Alaska Day)
- Sitka is a national model for how a town can be truly sustainable and self-reliant
- A fisherman's market and community agriculture are promoted as aspects of Sitka's self-reliance
- Incentives developed for existing shops and start-up shops to market local arts, crafts; i.e. true "made in Sitka" souvenirs.
- "Sitka Fresh Network" items are promoted on the menus of Sitka restaurants (e.g. fish, artisan breads, coffee, deer).
- All interpretive guides in Sitka receive accurate, consistent training, and they provide visitors with accurate, consistent information about Sitka's history and culture
- Set up Sitka Netflix for Sitka documentaries on logging/fishing/Native culture, etc.

## New Events and Attractions

- Events tied to commercial fishing (e.g. herring)
- Coast Guard, Search and Rescue exposition, competition and training
- Host cooking school with local and visiting chefs highlighting local wild sustainable products
- Sitka Spruce wood/instrument festival
- Cross-Baranof Island foot race
- Spring arts and music festival
- Start and promote a "fishing heritage" festival
- Alaska Foods Festival with chef demos/school
- Build on local attractions – jazzfest, health and wellness, Art Fest
- Thriving local artist market with co-op market center
- A public kiosk market, with spaces available to locals one week at a time by lottery
- Cross-promote visitor attractions (a la Amazon.com recommendations)
- Walking tour of Katlian St. and Back St. offered to highlight commercial fishing, Native history and "Scotty's Fish Shack."

## Action Focus Areas

- Establishing standards:
  - For environmental impact/use
  - To maintain downtown character
  - For the community economy
- Promoting incentives and solutions:
  - For meeting environmental standards
  - For meeting downtown character standards
  - To improve community economic standards

## Overall Direction

# Incentives and Policies

Intent: Create proactive strategies to maintain and enhance the qualities that make Sitka a special place to live and visit.

2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

## Benchmarks 2007

- Policies and incentives on pedestrian density make 3-ship days seem like 2-ship days (large ships).
- City adequately supports local residents trying to start new businesses in the Visitor Industry through financial assistance and programs.

2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

## Benchmarks 2008

- Awards given to businesses that minimize environmental impact based on community-developed standards.
- Incentives established for broad array of environmentally-friendly transportation.
- Incentives in place for business owners to pay living wage to employees.

4<sup>th</sup> Qtr.

- Community dialogue is held to discuss and define "downtown character" and possibilities for preserving and enhancing that character.
- Subcommittee of Oversight Board has reviewed existing environmental and economic standards, and has researched how other communities provide incentives to meet their standards.

## Beyond 2008

- 90% of downtown businesses open and doing good sales in off-season.
- 0% vacant downtown business spaces.

# Incentives and Policies

**Intent:** Create proactive strategies to maintain and enhance the qualities that make Sitka a special place to live and visit.

## Action Areas:

- Establishing standards:
  - For environmental impact/use
  - To maintain downtown character
  - For the community economy
- Promoting incentives and solutions:
  - For meeting environmental standards
  - For meeting downtown character standards
  - To improve community economic standards

---

Discussion: It goes without saying that a community plan necessitates some policies and incentives for realizing the vision of the community. This Strategic Direction evolved to protect the special qualities of Sitka while other Strategic Directions strive to promote these qualities. The Action Focus Areas articulate three specific issues for attention: Sitka’s natural surroundings, the appearance and feel of the core downtown area, and the overall community economics. In all three cases, the planning group suggests that standards must first be established, and then the community must be prompted to meet these standards and supported in their efforts toward meeting and/or improving the standards. Meeting the established standards could be enforced by policies and regulations, but the Stakeholder group recommends that incentives be more frequently considered.

---

Several of the benchmarks for this Strategic Direction dovetail with efforts in other parts of the plan. For example, offering incentives for using environmentally-friendly transportation is a benchmark included here, and there is also a benchmark in Marketing that shows Sitka being recognized as a “pedestrian and bicycle-friendly town.”

# Incentives and Policies

## Benchmarks

Policies and incentives on pedestrian density make 3-ship days seem like 2-ship days (large ships)

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

Mitigating congestion on heavy visitor days is an ongoing concern in Sitka. This benchmark is one of a set that aims to resolve the crowded feeling of downtown on busy days through actions that help to redirect some of the traffic, either by guiding pedestrians to another path, or by reducing automobile traffic during the busiest times of day. This benchmark directly accompanies the one in Information and Data, which states, "Trial actions taken to mitigate impacts of high-density days are studied for effectiveness." The Stakeholders recommend that the City try some mitigation strategies in 2007 and carefully study the effects of those strategies. The results of these efforts, along with other data and planning, will eventually result in the establishment of a visitor capacity threshold, and a mitigation plan that will be implemented to cross that threshold.

Some suggestions for trial and study include:

- Closing Lincoln Street to automobile traffic from St. Michael's Cathedral to Katlian Street (also suggested in the Comprehensive Plan and the Gateway Plan)
- Collaborate with Sitka Tribal Enterprises as they embark on a downtown transportation study and improved shuttle service (a shuttle system was also suggested in the Gateway Plan)
- Eliminate parking on one side of Lincoln Street between St. Michael's Cathedral and Katlian Street (also suggested by the Gateway Plan)

City adequately supports local residents trying to start new businesses in the Visitor Industry through financial assistance and programs

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

This plan includes a lot of good ideas for new business ventures, and the Overarching Principles clearly prioritize local efforts. But generating a successful new business requires financial resources and know-how, which aren't always readily available to a new entrepreneur. To compliment the benchmarks that are seeking new markets and promoting new attractions and events, the plan also needs to incorporate programs and incentives to encourage local interest in small business. *Sitka Works!* is a tremendous asset in this realm, and it has been responsible for helping many entrepreneurs get their start. The Stakeholders have expressed some concern that this organization does not consistently receive the financial support it needs to rely on this service in Sitka. Other resources should also be explored and promoted to accomplish this benchmark and ensure ongoing opportunities for local entrepreneurial assistance.

# Incentives and Policies



## Benchmarks

Community dialogue is held to discuss and define “downtown character” and possibilities for preserving and enhancing that character

Subcommittee of Oversight Board has reviewed existing environmental and economic standards, and has researched how other communities provide incentives to meet their standards

Awards given to businesses that minimize environmental impact based on community-developed standards

Incentives established for broad array of environmentally-friendly transportation

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

The Stakeholder group feels it is imperative to establish some aesthetic standards for the core downtown area. Articulating and enhancing Sitka’s downtown character is a concept that was also suggested by the Gateway Plan, and by Chris Beck, the content consultant for this process. Both of these planners suggested improvements to lighting, interpretive information and navigational aids, landscaping, and design standards for building scale, colors, and materials. Although the Stakeholders agree that standards should be established, they also recognize some difficulty in articulating exactly what the “downtown character” is, given that the downtown currently has a rather eclectic character. Therefore, this benchmark acts as a critical first step by engaging a diverse representation of the community to define “Sitka’s downtown character.” Once this definition has been established, efforts can be made to develop standards that will preserve the downtown character. Undertaking this effort will provide stronger guidance for future development and remodeling, and help retain some level of consistency that is reflective of Sitka’s heritage and people.

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

The first step for this Strategic Direction should be to thoroughly review any existing environmental, economic, and downtown architectural/historical standards Sitka may currently have. Simultaneously, the Stakeholders believe that other communities may have incentive programs to meet environmental, economic, and downtown character standards, and perhaps Sitka could learn from those examples. Therefore, the group also recommends that some research be done to collect ideas on how to help the community meet the standards.

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2008

Both of these benchmarks point toward a community effort to protect the wild and clean natural surroundings of Sitka. Once the environmental standards have been established, giving awards to businesses that meet and exceed these standards is one incentive idea. For example, charter and sightseeing boats that meet the standards could receive a decal to place prominently on their boat that designates them as “a friend to Sitka’s environment.” (This could also be considered for a promotional strategy.)

Similarly, the Stakeholders recommend that an incentive program be established to promote broad use of environmentally-friendly transportation. This could apply to both individual residents who choose to travel through town by bicycle, and also to transportation businesses that use electric busses or fuel-efficient engines.

# Incentives and Policies



## Benchmarks

Incentives in place for business owners to pay living wage to employees

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2008

The overall mission of this planning process had three elements: to maximize contributions, minimize impacts, and enhance Sitkans' quality of life. Local economics and standard of living are important issues for local residents, and as a significant portion of Sitka's economy, the visitor industry has a role to play in making sure residents can afford to live here. As part of the action area focused on community economic standards, achieving this benchmark would demonstrate that Sitka recognizes how earning a living wage positively influences one's quality of life. It's a slightly different kind of benchmark, in that it indicates something that should be tracked, rather than a single accomplishment. Regardless, Stakeholders hope to see some progress in this area.

Two relevant websites that offer more information about living wages are [www.livingwagecampaign.com](http://www.livingwagecampaign.com) and [www.acorn.org](http://www.acorn.org). Both of these sites offer information on how other communities have implemented a living wage campaign and what the elements of a living wage ordinance would be. Taking steps toward this benchmark would require a community dialogue about the elements to include in Sitka's definition of a living wage, and then the City would enact that standard through an ordinance.

90% of downtown businesses open and doing good sales in off-season

0% vacant downtown business spaces

### Target for Completion: Beyond 2008

Both of these benchmarks speak to the Overarching Principles and the Stakeholders' Quality of Life statements and respond to the Stakeholders' pervasive wish that the downtown business community remains active year-round and in service to residents as well as visitors. These are indicators of an economy that is not strictly seasonal and that Sitka is not building infrastructure based on one seasonal source, but that there is a flow of traffic through Sitka businesses year-round.

# Incentives and Policies

**Gems:** A great number of ideas, concerns, observations, and aspirations were created and recorded during the planning of this document. While those listed below did not find their way into the final plan, they may spur future creativity in crafting benchmarks.

## **Downtown Character**

- Downtown character maintained and improved, with attention given to lighting, parking, pedestrian circulation, comfort, design standards, and enforcement of existing laws/zoning
- Green spaces and open views are preserved and increased

## **Economic**

- Incentives established to promote year-round businesses
- Incentives developed for new restaurants and accommodations to support the steadier tourism flow
- Families have the ability to live and work in Sitka
- Children return to raise families

## **Environment**

- Incentives established for implementing “green” infrastructure and practices
- Tour buses and public transportation use alternative fuels
- Electric shuttle buses in use
- No natural resource has been depleted
- City works with local tour operators on “intensity of use” zoning and “leave no trace” policies.
- Specific sensitive natural areas have been identified and actions are taken to protect them
- Islands and beaches are still wild and undeveloped

## **Recreation**

- Actions are taken to balance visitor and resident use of recreational facilities
- Maps created to guide visitors only to a specific subset of recreation (reserving some for resident use)

## **Other Ideas**

- Tax incentives or rewards for businesses that follow or help implement the long-range visitor industry plan
- Reward program established to recognize the volunteer service efforts of visitor industry entities

## Action Focus Areas

- Identifying, building, improving and maintaining visitor industry infrastructure
- Improving access to/from and within Sitka and offering a broad array of transportation options
- Creating and maintaining attractive public spaces and amenities

## Overall Direction

# Transportation and Infrastructure

Intent: To provide the framework of structure and support for Sitka's Visitor Industry and optimize visitor access to Sitka's community and natural assets.

## Benchmarks 2007

2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

- Visitor Industry-related capital projects for next 5 years identified.

3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr.

- Comprehensive list of existing meeting spaces has been compiled and is being housed in a central location as a resource.

4<sup>th</sup> Qtr.

- Oversight Board liaison has met with Parks and Rec and/or the Tree and Landscape committee to discuss existing plans for Sitka's green spaces and to cooperatively plan for protecting and maintaining those spaces (esp. Crescent Harbor strip).

## Benchmarks 2008

1<sup>st</sup> Qtr.

- Visitors and residents can easily access a public telephone and wireless internet.
- More public restrooms have been made available; public restrooms are clean, accessible, and open year-round.

2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

- Partnership between City and Sitka Tribal Enterprises provides improved shuttle and tour services.
- Congestion mitigation plan implemented on heavy visitor days.

4<sup>th</sup> Qtr.

- Convention capacity has expanded downtown.

## Beyond 2008

•

# Transportation and Infrastructure

**Intent:** To provide the framework of structure and support for Sitka’s Visitor Industry and optimize visitor access to Sitka’s community and natural assets.

## Action Areas:

- Identifying, building, improving and maintaining visitor industry infrastructure
- Improving access to/from and within Sitka and offering a broad array of transportation options
- Creating and maintaining attractive public spaces and amenities

---

**Discussion:** Visitor attractions, amenities and access to Sitka are all critical considerations for future community decisions. As an island community, Sitka is constantly concerned about having practical and affordable transportation available to both visitors and residents. The specific benchmarks about transportation included in this section addresses traffic flow within Sitka. Additionally, although they aren’t officially included as benchmarks in the plan, the last page of this section includes many Stakeholder ideas about transportation to and from Sitka, as well.

The area of Sitka enjoyed by tourists is also where residents work and live. Creating infrastructure that meets everyone’s needs assures that these areas will continue to be vibrant year-round. Stakeholders consistently commented on the off-season barrenness of Southeast towns that have built visitor-specific infrastructure, and emphasized their desire to avoid that type of seasonal imbalance. Action items within this benchmark also include care for public spaces such as cemeteries and green strips, and improved signage and maps to help visitor

traffic flow. Other resources to consult on topics within this strategic direction include the Sitka Comprehensive Plan, the transportation study conducted for Sawmill Cove Industrial Park, the Sitka non-motorized transportation plan, and presentations made by Stakeholders during this process listing Sitka’s current infrastructure and the capacity of the City’s infrastructure to meet visitor needs. (Stakeholder presentations are available on the plan’s website, and will also be available as a reference in hard copy.)

# Transportation and Infrastructure

## Benchmarks

Visitor Industry-related capital projects for next 5 years identified

Comprehensive list of existing meeting spaces has been compiled and is being housed in a central location as a resource

Oversight Board liaison has met with Parks and Rec and/or the Tree and Landscape committee to discuss existing plans for Sitka's green spaces and to cooperatively plan for protecting and maintaining those spaces (esp. Crescent Harbor strip)

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

As a first step in this Strategic Direction, the Oversight Board, together with local experts in the areas of infrastructure and transportation, should develop a list of capital projects that support the goals of this plan. Some suggestions have been made within this document, such as year-round public restrooms, expanded convention capacity, and a congestion mitigation plan. As the benchmarks below are thought through in greater detail, other capital projects may appear. These projects could be considered as a target for head tax money use; however, there are other, non-capital projects also recommended for head tax money. Once the Oversight Board understands the parameters and expected income from this tax, they will be better equipped to make budget recommendations.

### Target for Completion: 3rd Quarter, 2007

The Stakeholder group had several discussions about Sitka's meeting and convention capacity, and how it seems to be increasingly difficult to find a meeting space for moderately-sized groups, especially during the summer season. These conversations resulted in two benchmarks: this one to solve immediate needs, and one looking further into the future. During one of the planning meetings, members of the Stakeholder group started to realize there are numerous meeting spaces that could be available to the public if only they knew where to inquire. For example, a representative of the Forest Service offered the White House as a possibility, and a charter fishing operator said she knows of several lodges that could provide meeting space and transportation, especially during the off-season. A compilation of these options, including contact information, availability, and location, should be assembled and made available to the organizers of meetings, small conferences, and retreats.

The second related benchmark is to expand the downtown convention space (full description follows below).

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

The Stakeholder group placed a strong value on protecting the existing green spaces in Sitka and finding opportunities to create more. They are particularly concerned about the Crescent Harbor green strip, which is occasionally threatened by ideas for a wider street or more parking. This green strip and the pathway through it provide visitors and residents alike the opportunity to enjoy a seaside stroll with a harbor view. It also provides a nearly seamless connection from downtown to Sitka National Historical Park. Working together with the Parks and Recreation commission, the Oversight Board aims to support existing plans and help to make future decisions for maintaining these green spaces.

The notion of preserving and enhancing greenways is also supported by the Sitka Comprehensive Plan in Sections 2.13.34 and 2.7.8.

# Transportation and Infrastructure

## Benchmarks

Visitors and residents can easily access a public telephone and wireless internet

More public restrooms have been made available; public restrooms are clean, accessible, and open year-round

Partnership between City and Sitka Tribal Enterprises provides improved shuttle and tour services

### Target for Completion: 1st Quarter, 2008

These two benchmarks both achieve easier access to travel amenities. There are currently three freestanding public restroom facilities in Sitka (with four units per facility), which are only open from May-September. One of the Stakeholders researched recommendations for restroom capacity, and found that the Public Events Planning Commission in East Somerset, England, recommends a toilet to person ratio for events under 6 hours should be 1:100 for women and 1:150 for men. According to this equation, Sitka's current summer capacity is 1200 women and 1800 men in a six-hour period. This calculation does not include additional restrooms at attractions or excursions. But even if those were included, the visitor numbers probably still exceed capacity on the heaviest days, and without increasing public facilities, Sitka would be stretched to accommodate greater visitor density. Additionally, numerous residents have expressed their wish to have access to public restrooms from October-April.

There are two separate issues on the topic of telephone access: pay phones are not readily accessible during the off-season, and during the summer, the cell phone network frequently overloads. The Stakeholders stress that access to telephones is important for year-round visitors and residents. Achievement of this benchmark shows that Sitka has expanded its telecommunications capability.

The third utility included in these benchmarks is Internet access; specifically, access to wireless internet connections. Use of the Internet is already of utmost importance, and a necessary amenity for business travelers. While Sitka is already taking steps to accommodate this need, accomplishing this benchmark will assure that travelers have several options to access the Internet.

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2008

Another solution for solving downtown congestion issues is to provide enhanced shuttle service for visitors. STE is already pursuing a new shuttle to run from the O'Connell Bridge and Crescent Harbor through downtown, to Sitka National Historical Park, the Sheldon Jackson Museum, and other favorite attractions. A partnership with the City will help to develop shuttle stops, and potentially expand transportation routes beyond the downtown area.

# Transportation and Infrastructure

## Benchmarks

Congestion mitigation plan implemented on heavy visitor days

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2008

Mitigating congestion on heavy visitor days is an ongoing concern in Sitka. Not only was it discussed in this process, but mitigation strategies were also suggested in the Comprehensive Plan, the Gateway Plan, and by Chris Beck, a planning consultant for this process. This benchmark is third in a series that aims to resolve the crowded feeling of downtown on busy days through actions that help to redirect some of the traffic, either by guiding pedestrians to another path, or by reducing automobile traffic during the busiest times of day. Two benchmarks set in 2007 conduct some test solutions and careful study of those trials to evaluate their effectiveness. Armed with this information, along with the data that will be gathered about downtown capacity and visitor density, planners will be able to ascertain a capacity threshold, i.e., how many visitors Sitka's downtown can comfortably welcome with no traffic alterations. Once that capacity has been determined, strategies for mitigating the impacts of exceeding that capacity can be developed.

Convention capacity has expanded downtown

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2008

In 2005, Centennial Hall had 1000 reservations for meetings and events. Especially in the summertime, their schedule is packed, there are lines to the restrooms, and the staff is working constantly. The North Pacific Fisheries Conference would like to hold their conference in Sitka next June, but it looks unlikely that Sitka has the capacity to host that conference. Its not just the summertime that's crowded – conferences have been turned away year-round because there is not enough space. The Isabel Miller museum is also crowded into its space in Centennial Hall. Although a new auditorium is being built at the high school, it does not seem likely that it will help with meeting and convention capacity – that new space is designed to accommodate performance events.

This Benchmark also accompanies one in Marketing that aims for a 5% increase in convention and event business by the end of 2008, made possible through increased off-season bed availability and greater event promotion.

# Transportation and Infrastructure

**Gems:** A great number of ideas, concerns, observations, and aspirations were created and recorded during the planning of this document. While those listed below did not find their way into the final plan, they may spur future creativity in crafting benchmarks.

## Transportation To/From Sitka

- Well-defined community supported dock is built
- Improved ferry service: a) AMHS has improved services to Sitka, and/or b) collaborative commission is created to explore/promote local ferry
- Dock space for small luxury cruise ships exists
- Sitka owns and operates a small cruise ship
- Air access has improved due to increased individual and small group demand for Alaska Airlines

## Infrastructure

- Greater capacity available for conferences and events (e.g. Centennial building expanded)
- More public restrooms
- There are enough sidewalks and streets and they are in good shape
- Comprehensive recycling program (including plastics)
- Additional recycling bins near garbage bins
- Community facilities (e.g. museums, meeting places) are supported by Visitor Industry

## Transportation within Sitka

- Downtown pedestrian zone created
- Shuttle system runs between major visitor attractions to reduce downtown congestion
- Boardwalk built along waterfront from O'Connell Bridge to Crescent Harbor with outdoor mall
- Alternative transportation options are in good condition (e.g. bike paths, green belts)
- Walking routes from harbor to downtown have improved
- Lincoln Street is closed from Cathedral to Katlian on busy days
- Downtown parking has improved
- Navigational aids (signs and maps) have improved
- Marine boardwalk along Katlian has been built
- A sky bridge crosses Lincoln Street, enabling safer photo opportunities and better traffic flow
- Laws regarding pedestrian flow are enforced (e.g. no T-Shirt racks on sidewalks)
- Sitka Maritime Heritage Society, with help from other community entities, developed kayak/small craft launch and storage facility across the bridge and operates an historic water taxi service

## Recreation

- Trail system is well-maintained
- The number and variety of outdoor recreational destinations has been expanded

## Attractions

- Cemeteries receive continued care, maintenance, and respect
- Visitor-community interactive center built
- Baranof Castle rebuilt as museum
- Expand historic building restoration programs
- Russian fort reconstructed
- Outdoor mall on Lincoln Street
- WWII sites protected, maintained and promoted
- Sitka's museum spaces have expanded to better highlight our unique history
- Interpretive Center on Sitka's unique history developed by various historical entities
- Sheldon Jackson College SeaLife Aquarium is world-famous.

## Action Focus Areas

- Encouraging dialogue and cooperative actions with businesses and large visitor industry corporations
- Resolving divisive community issues regarding the visitor industry
- Working with other governmental entities for mutual benefit with visitor industry

## Overall Direction

# Outreach

Intent: To encourage meaningful dialogues within the community, with corporations and with other governments regarding the visitor industry to move this plan forward.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

## Benchmarks 2007

- An Assembly resolution states that issues regarding the Visitor Industry that are indicated as divisive by the public go through a community dialogue before the Assembly makes major decisions on those issues.
- Assembly resolution passed recognizing the City's commitment to open dialogue with large corporations regarding the Visitor Industry.
- Outreach committee has been created.
- Assembly and a subcommittee of the Oversight Board initiate dialogue with cruise lines to discuss relevant aspects of the Visitor Industry Plan.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr.

- Assembly resolution passed regarding City's commitment to intergovernmental partnering on Visitor Industry projects.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr.

- Outreach committee has developed parameters and incentives for conducting inclusive community dialogue around divisive issues.
- Community concerns about charter fisheries are addressed through a public forum; input included into this plan.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr.

## Benchmarks 2008

- A fishing user group is working on common local concerns.
- Sitka Visitor Industry Oversight Board and Juneau Tourism Partnership have met to discuss plan implementation strategies and challenges.
- Promotion of regional tourism is being explored with SE Conference and with individual SE communities.

## Beyond 2008

-

# Outreach

**Intent:** To encourage meaningful dialogues within the community, with corporations and with other governments regarding the visitor industry to move this plan forward.

## Action Areas:

- Encouraging dialogue and cooperative actions with businesses and large visitor industry corporations
- Resolving divisive community issues regarding the visitor industry
- Working with other governmental entities for mutual benefit with visitor industry

---

**Discussion:** The fact that this Strategic Direction evolved from the Stakeholder process illustrates some core values the Stakeholder group embraced through this process: working through an open and transparent public dialogue, making decisions after first reaching a common understanding, and seeking solutions that benefit all players.

This Strategic Direction also ties in directly to one of the Overarching Principles, which asserts that the community needs to feel informed about decisions being made on contentious issues with community-wide impacts. When key decisions are made for the community without adequate public involvement, there is a

risk of greater community division. Non-participants feel there are unexplored possibilities, and the decision-makers feel blocked and distrusted. When contentious decisions are being made without seeking consensus, it is possible that community members will make extensive efforts to block that decision. As a result, the original decision may be stopped, but no new solutions are developed, leaving the underlying divide unresolved. Exploring these divisive issues through community dialogue will promote innovative problem solving and greater community cohesion.

Finally, the call for collaborative work with other governmental entities arises partly from a sincere Stakeholder desire to

work more closely with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska to coordinate activities, and also to include more emphasis on preserving and promoting cultural heritage within this plan. Some of the following benchmarks also promote greater partnerships between local government and state and federal entities. This Action Focus Area also includes an intention to promote regional tourism. Rather than thinking competitively about neighboring communities, this provides an opportunity for sharing resources to cooperatively promote travel to Southeast Alaska.

# Outreach

## Benchmarks

An Assembly resolution states that issues regarding the Visitor Industry that are indicated as divisive by the public go through a community dialogue before the Assembly makes major decisions on those issues.

Assembly resolution passed recognizing the City's commitment to open dialogue with large corporations regarding the Visitor Industry

Assembly and a subcommittee of the Oversight Board initiate dialogue with cruise lines to discuss relevant aspects of the VI Plan.

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

This resolution asks that the Assembly recognize when they are dealing with issues that divide the public, and allow representatives from all sides of the issue to try to work through the issue and advise the Assembly on their decision. Throughout the Stakeholder process there was significant conversation about the citizen initiatives placed on the 2006 ballot, and how the community voted contrary to the direction of the community's leadership.

According to David Chrislip, an expert on resolving community conflicts through collaborative dialogue, "most initiatives fail to address underlying causes of complex problems as they oversimplify solutions to accommodate a yes or no vote." By offering only simplistic solutions, the citizenry still remains polarized, and controversial issues could potentially become more inflammatory. Chrislip also says, "Direct democracy provides neither the opportunities or the incentives to engage citizens in solving complex public problems."

When there are obvious divisions, quick solutions (i.e., Assembly votes or "yes or no" initiatives) will not benefit the wellness of the community in the end. Chrislip says, "Divisive issues are complex and systematic, and not amenable to expert or top-down solutions." This benchmark appears in Sitka's visitor industry plan in the hopes that the Assembly and the community can find greater consensus on difficult community issues by bringing people together in the spirit of dialogue to generate solutions.

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

The Stakeholders recommend that citizens become more involved in regular, public dialogue with cruise line agencies. Decisions made by the cruise lines have community-wide impacts: the community feels crowded when there are four ships in, and losing a potential 30,000 visitors in one year creates a negative economic impact on businesses who count on stability from year-to-year. Stakeholders have seen that community attitude about cruise ships is divided, and many community members distrust the cruise industry and dislike the community's dependency on their decisions. Closer relationships between the community and the cruise industry could provide an ongoing opportunity to discuss Sitka's desires for scheduling, number of calls, fair promotion of Sitka and Sitka businesses, and other relevant topics. It also provides the cruise lines an opportunity to improve negative community attitudes by demonstrating that the industry will respond to community preferences. The Stakeholders are especially optimistic about starting a relationship with the newly-formed Alaska Cruise Association.

As this benchmark was being crafted, many people within and outside of the process rolled their eyes and said, "Good luck." The Stakeholders recognize there is a general disbelief that an open dialogue is possible, but they contend that the effort should be made before deciding it can't be done.

# Outreach



## Benchmarks

Outreach committee has been created

### **Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007**

As a subcommittee of the Oversight Board, including at least one liaison from the Oversight Board, the Outreach Committee will exist to focus on the action areas of this Strategic Direction: to resolve divisive community issues, to encourage intergovernmental partnerships (e.g. tribal government, state and federal entities, and other local governments in Southeast) on visitor industry topics, and to establish open dialogues with large visitor industry corporations (most notably, the cruise industry). Refer to the “catalytic benchmark” section this report for an illustration of the committee’s first project.

Assembly resolution passed regarding City’s commitment to intergovernmental partnering on Visitor Industry projects.

### **Target for Completion: 3rd Quarter, 2007**

Passage of this resolution demonstrates to the community and to other regional entities that the City of Sitka is open to cooperative exploration of common issues and innovative solutions for the benefit of everyone involved. The City already has a strong working relationship with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska; this focuses some of that relationship on mutually beneficial endeavors in the visitor industry. Sitka Tribal Enterprises already has plans in motion for improved transportation services, and they have indicated they could benefit from City assistance with those efforts. Similarly, working relationships already exist between the City and the Forest Service, National Park Service, and Alaska State Parks; however, there is potential for improvements, such as creating a more streamlined permit system for tour operators wishing to utilize wild lands that fall under more than one management area.

An area of great potential is to seek partnerships with other Southeast communities to market and promote Southeast Alaska as a regional travel destination for independent travelers.

# Outreach



## Benchmarks

Outreach committee has developed parameters and incentives for conducting inclusive community dialogue around divisive issues.

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

Before embarking on the quest to resolve some heated community issues, the Outreach committee must first address the challenges and promote the incentives of this type of process. The Outreach committee must also ensure they have the capacity to facilitate a safe and inclusive experience for all participants.

Throughout the collaborative process to develop Sitka's Visitor Industry Plan, the Steering Committee encountered several challenges in sustaining full representation of the community. Some invited Stakeholders couldn't participate in such a rigorous meeting schedule. Others found it difficult to secure childcare during the meeting times. Still others felt there was no incentive for participating – they perceived that the group “leaned” one way or the other, or there was no economic bottom line for their participation, or that participation in this effort was potentially risky for their livelihood. In addition to ensuring appropriate community input, another challenge of community dialogue is to help participants wrestle with tough issues rather than sidestep them.

Simultaneously, it is important for the Outreach committee to build community trust in this type of process and show how the benefits of resolving difficult issues through community dialogue outweigh the risks of being involved in it. Inclusive dialogue promotes broad understanding of complex issues, and innovative, proactive, and unexpected solutions. Other benefits of inclusive community dialogue are discussed in the Introduction section of this report.

Community concerns about charter fisheries are addressed through a public forum; input included into this plan.

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

Currently, one of the most obvious divisive community issues in Sitka is the controversy between charter fishing and other fishing user groups (i.e. commercial and subsistence). In the beginning of the Stakeholder process, some members of the group hoped to resolve this controversy through this process. However, it became evident that the fisheries issues require a very focused effort and dialogue, which was not possible through this Stakeholder process if other tourism-related topics were to also be addressed. This divisive community attitude about fishing is a major concern for Stakeholders, and is something they feel should be addressed through this plan. One of the Stakeholders, a charter operator, offered this benchmark for the plan. She said she realizes the community is engaged in a battle over this topic, and that it's time to have a public forum and constructive dialogue to help all fishers to see where they share common ground and work toward healing this divide.

# Outreach



## Benchmarks

A fishing user group is working on common local concerns

### Target for Completion: 1st Quarter, 2008

It is likely that this benchmark will be set in motion by the previous one (the community forum on charter fisheries) as a result of the chance given to charter and commercial fishers to find a way through their differences. The forum provides an opportunity for them to identify their common ground, and establishing a fish working group gives them the opportunity to work together on their common concerns. This group should include charter operators, commercial fishers, Sitka Conservation Society, and STA, among others.

Sitka Visitor Industry Oversight Board and Juneau Tourism Partnership have met to discuss plan implementation strategies and challenges

### Target for Completion: 1st Quarter, 2008

These two benchmarks both give future direction to the Outreach committee. Because these are exploratory conversations, it is hard to predict what could come of them, but the potential for future regional tourism partnerships is great.

Promotion of regional tourism is being explored with Southeast Conference and with individual southeast communities

# Outreach

**Gems:** A great number of ideas, concerns, observations, and aspirations were created and recorded during the planning of this document. While those listed below did not find their way into the final plan, they may spur future creativity in crafting benchmarks.

## **Intergovernmental Relations**

- A multi-agency team aligns and coordinates various city/state/Native/federal plans re: visitors.
- Southeast communities have developed regional tourism plan.
- NPS, SJ/UAS, and STA institute an intergenerational, historical/cultural outdoor experience.

## **Business/Corporate Relations**

- Cruise ships increase # of hours in Sitka
- Cruise ships share experts/specialists for community events
- “Sitka Dollars” are used in local banks and businesses as spending incentive and method to track visitor spending.

## **Community Issues**

- Regular moderated tourism round-table discussions are held each year to focus on emerging issues.

## **Other Ideas**

- Sitka is a National Outdoor Leadership/Outward Bound school/site.
- Visitor Industry Appreciation Day is held in April.

## Action Focus Areas

- Gathering better information about the visitor industry
- Managing visitor industry information

## Overall Direction

# Information and Data

Intent: Ongoing data collection about Sitka's visitor industry, which will be used to inform other committee/community decisions.

## Benchmarks 2007

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

- Visitor Industry-related surveys and data collection needs have been identified; budget request included.
- Trial actions taken to mitigate impacts of high-density days are studied for effectiveness

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr.

- First annual count of disembarking cruise ship passengers has been recorded by month.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr.

- Positive and negative impacts of different visitor types have been identified.

## Benchmarks 2008

### 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr.

- "Marketing and Promotion" and "Transportation and Infrastructure" Strategic Directions set and adjust benchmarks based on visitor feedback of their likes/dislikes.
- Key visitor statistics are collected monthly.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr.

- City, Chamber of Commerce, Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau and Sitka Economic Development Association institute method for tracking visitor dollars.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr.

- Annual report is prepared on Visitor Industry contributions and impacts and how these affect Sitka's Quality of Life indicators.
- Oversight communication strategy refined through resident survey on their perspectives of visitors, the visitor industry and their impacts and contributions.

## Beyond 2008

- Local colleges and high school collaborate with the Oversight Board on data collection and analysis.
- Sitka recognized statewide as model community for data collection.
- Sitka recognized in visitor trade journals for visitor industry data collection.
- Infrastructure/capacity for ongoing data collection needs achieved.

# Information and Data

**Intent:** Ongoing data collection about Sitka’s visitor industry, which will be used to inform other committee/community decisions.

**Action Areas:**

- Gathering better information about the visitor industry
- Managing visitor industry information

---

**Discussion:** The Information and Data Strategic Direction evolved directly from one of the most arduous, yet necessary, phases of the planning process – the “Needed Information” phase. This phase in a collaborative planning process is critical in helping the Stakeholders reach a common understanding about what’s currently happening in a situation. Sharing objective information about the current situation helps the group dispel myths and hearsay, and gives all the Stakeholders the same foundation from which to base decisions. Sitka’s Stakeholders were asked to brainstorm what information everyone in the group needed to know in order for the group to make good recommendations for a community-wide plan. Once those information requests were identified, the Stakeholders proceeded to find the answers to those questions, either by researching it themselves, or by inviting an expert to present to the group. The reports they provided to the planning group, observations and concerns the group had to the reports, as well as a list of unanswered questions, are well documented in a companion piece to this report.

It was during this phase of collecting and digesting information that the Stakeholders recognized how difficult it would be to make objective recommendations on some elements of these Strategic Directions because they didn’t have enough information. One example that quickly emerged is that no recommendations

can really be made about whether to grow or restrain the visitor industry in Sitka because:

- a) There are no counts of how many people actually visit Sitka. Independent travelers are difficult to track, and the numbers distributed for cruise ship passenger are capacity numbers and do not indicate how many people are actually on the ship, or how many get off in Sitka;
- b) The current system for recording revenues and expenses does not indicate whether the City recoups its costs from the seasonal sales tax; and
- c) There is not enough objective information on other issues, such as downtown congestion, to truly understand the impacts.

The mission of the Stakeholder group was to make recommendations about managing the visitor industry that would maximize contributions and minimize impacts. But without good information on contributions and impacts, making some recommendations proved to be difficult. This Strategic Direction points the community down a path of collecting better data, which will help to make informed decisions in the future.

# Information and Data

## Benchmarks

Visitor Industry-related surveys and data collection needs have been identified; budget request included

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

To accompany the budgeting benchmarks in other Strategic Directions, this also aims to identify studies that should to be conducted to achieve benchmarks within this plan.

Trial actions taken to mitigate impacts of high-density days are studied for effectiveness

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2007

This benchmark is directly related to two other benchmarks in the plan: “Policies and Incentives on pedestrian density make 3-ship days seem like 2-ship days” (in Incentives and Policies) and “Congestion mitigation plan implemented on heavy visitor days” (Transportation and Infrastructure). Congestion in downtown Sitka on heavy visitor days has concerned residents for many years, and previous community plans have offered various ideas for solving this challenge. This benchmark acts as a catalyst, providing the opportunity to test some density mitigation ideas and then study the effects of those trial actions. Information from this trial period along with data collected about other visitor impacts and contributions (another benchmark in this plan) and other planning efforts, will eventually lead to a density mitigation plan, which can be implemented on days when the visitor level crosses a certain capacity threshold.

Some suggestions for trial and study include:

- Closing Lincoln Street to automobile traffic from St. Michael’s Cathedral to Katlian Street (also suggested in the Comprehensive Plan and the Gateway Plan)
- Collaborate with Sitka Tribal Enterprises as they embark on a downtown transportation study and improved shuttle service (a shuttle system was also suggested in the Gateway Plan)
- Eliminate parking on one side of Lincoln Street between St. Michael’s Cathedral and Katlian Street (also suggested by the Gateway Plan)

# Information and Data

## Benchmarks

First annual count of disembarking cruise ship passengers has been recorded by month

### Target for Completion: 3rd Quarter, 2007

One of the most difficult issues for the Stakeholder group was trying to talk about how many people Sitka can comfortably host when they didn't actually know how many people arrive in town. There seems to be general agreement that four-ship days definitely feel crowded, but if attempts to get more passengers off the ships in Sitka are successful, two- or three-ship days could feel just as crowded. In order to make sound decisions about mitigating the impacts of crowds downtown, it is critical that actual numbers are available to the planners.

Positive and negative impacts of different visitor types have been identified

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2007

Keeping within the mission of the Stakeholder group, which was to create a plan that maximizes contributions and minimizes the impacts of the visitor industry, the first step must be to create a definitive list of contributions and impacts for each type of visitor (independent traveler, cruise passenger, regional visitor, etc.). Identifying the contributions and impacts of the different types of visitors may help to determine desirable markets, impact mitigation plans, and the optimal carrying capacity for various areas in Sitka.

"Marketing and Promotion" and "Transportation and Infrastructure" Strategic Directions set and adjust benchmarks based on visitor feedback of their likes/dislikes

### Target for Completion: 1st Quarter, 2008

These two Strategic Directions are most likely to be influenced by visitor opinions. Feedback from visitors on how they accessed information about Sitka while planning their trip and what they learned about Sitka while visiting could lend guidance to future benchmarks in the Marketing Strategic Direction. Likewise, understanding how they perceived the structural elements and transportation options could influence the Transportation and Infrastructure benchmarks. Planners should gather feedback on these items during the summer and fall of 2007, and in the fall and winter, evaluate that feedback and if/how it impacts these Strategic Directions.

# Information and Data



## Benchmarks

Key visitor statistics are collected monthly

In order to make informed decisions about how to balance visitor contributions and impacts, Stakeholders identified the need for the following key statistics:

1. Revenue contributed per day/week/month/season by visitor type (air, ferry, large and small cruise ships, independent) in Sitka, and compared with other Southeast communities.
2. Number of visitors per type.

The purpose of collecting this type of information is to better understand visitor spending and how it differs by type of visitor. may influence how future marketing campaigns are directed. Furthermore, this will help determine whether the revenue provided to the City from visitors covers the expenses associated with this industry. This benchmark is also closely tied to the next one.

City, Chamber of Commerce, Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau and Sitka Economic Development Association institute method for tracking visitor dollars.

### Target for Completion: 2nd Quarter, 2008

This benchmark provides another way to track how visitors spend their money and where it is distributed in Sitka. It is closely tied to the effort to collect visitor statistics by month, and can also help the community understand consumer interests. One suggestion for this tracking system is to create "Sitka dollars" – a local currency visitors can use to make their purchases downtown. Visitor credit card sales can also be categorized. Key to the success of this benchmark will be the support and partnership of all affected entities: the downtown retailers, visitor industry entities, and the entities that benefit from these statistics.

Annual report is prepared on Visitor Industry contributions and impacts and how these affect Sitka's Quality of Life indicators

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2008

*The common elements of a good quality of life in Sitka are a sense of place, sustainable equitable diverse economy; participatory responsive leadership; healthy natural environment; safe and tolerant community; community support services and infrastructure; subsistence lifestyle; diverse lifestyle choices; community wellness; and cultural and civic institutions.*

The intent behind this benchmark hinges on an earlier benchmark that identifies the contributions and impacts of different types of visitors. This allows for continued study of how those contributions and impacts effect the quality of life elements identified by the Stakeholders (listed above). Stakeholders felt they didn't really have a clear picture of if and how the visitor industry positively or negatively affects the qualities they hold dear about their community.

# Information and Data



## Benchmarks

Oversight communication strategy refined through resident survey on their perspectives of visitors, the visitor industry and their impacts and contributions

### Target for Completion: 4th Quarter, 2008

The Oversight Board has an Action Area that focuses on having two-way communication with the community about the Visitor Industry and the implementation of this plan. Conducting a resident survey could provide some insight to the Board on community attitudes and areas of concern, and guide their communication strategies with the community based on that feedback. To achieve this benchmark in this timeframe, the survey should be conducted in early fall.

Local colleges and high school collaborate with the Oversight Board on data collection and analysis

### Target for Completion: Beyond 2008

Offering local students the opportunity to help with the data collection and analysis efforts for this ongoing planning process not only provides them with some experiential education, but also the opportunity to better understand this piece of Sitka's economic pie.

Sitka recognized statewide as model community for data collection

### Target for Completion: Beyond 2008

Both of these benchmarks are included as evidence that Sitka has established a thorough data collection system, which is providing the community with good information upon which they can make careful decisions.

Sitka recognized in visitor trade journals for visitor industry data collection

Infrastructure/capacity for ongoing data collection needs achieved

### Target for Completion: Beyond 2008

Establishing the capacity to continue these data collection efforts is recognition of the importance of continued measurement, which continues to inform the community about the balance of visitor contributions and impacts.

# Information and Data



**Gems:** A great number of ideas, concerns, observations, and aspirations were created and recorded during the planning of this document. While those listed below did not find their way into the final plan, they may spur future creativity in crafting benchmarks.

- Studies on visitor patterns and location of crowd densities have been conducted.
- A poll of Sitkans has been conducted to identify the appropriate daily or annual number of cruise visitors
- National Park Service annual survey used to get feedback from tourists about their perception of Sitka
- Visitor and resident interactions have been studied to identify conflicts and positive interactions
- The Visitor Industry Oversight Board knows what percentage of change would be acceptable to community (i.e. in traffic patterns)
- Local residents have been surveyed to better understand overarching community perspectives, e.g., what commercial tourism activities are thought to be (over)saturated, about right, underutilized, or untapped potential?

# Catalytic Strands

Catalytic strands demonstrate how the achievement of one or two initial Benchmarks instigates a chain of events. Momentum builds after those first Benchmarks have been accomplished, and the community is on a path to address broader issues.

This section provides you with a new way to look at and use the plan. Previous sections have shown how the Strategic Directions and Action Focus Areas help move the community on six particular paths for Sitka's future. The Catalytic Strands show how Strategic Directions are also interrelated. Specific areas of concern can be addressed by placing benchmarks throughout the plan with the appropriate Strategic Directions.

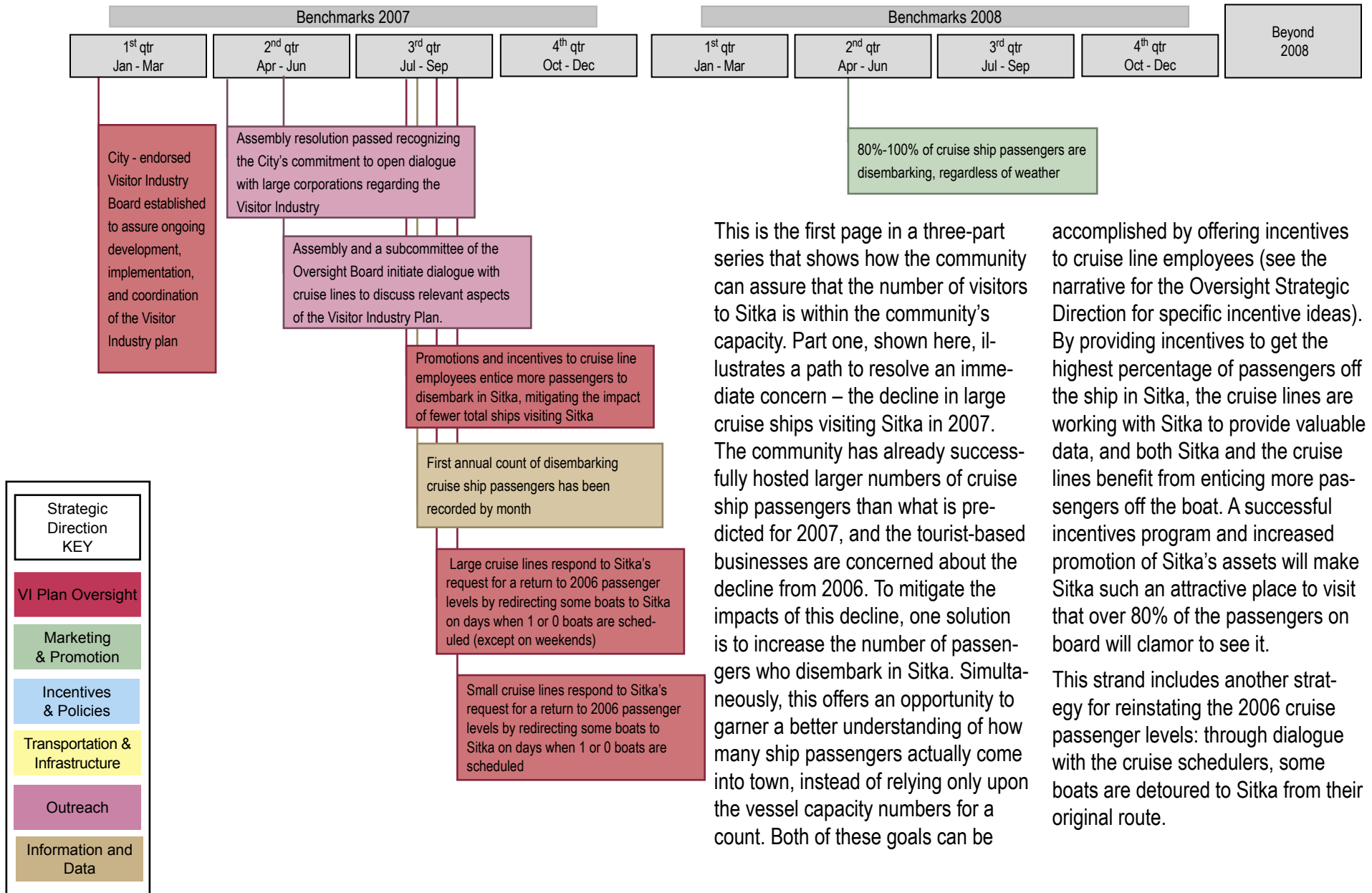
A few key catalytic strands are highlighted here as examples, but they are not the only ones. Designing catalytic strands such as these shows the dynamic structure of this plan and how to use the framework for ongoing planning.



# Catalytic Strands

## Balancing Visitor Numbers

### Part I: Mitigate Impact of Fewer Potential Large Cruise Ship Visitors in 2007



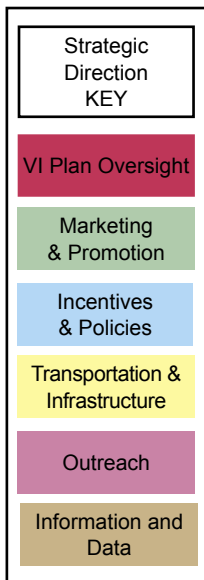
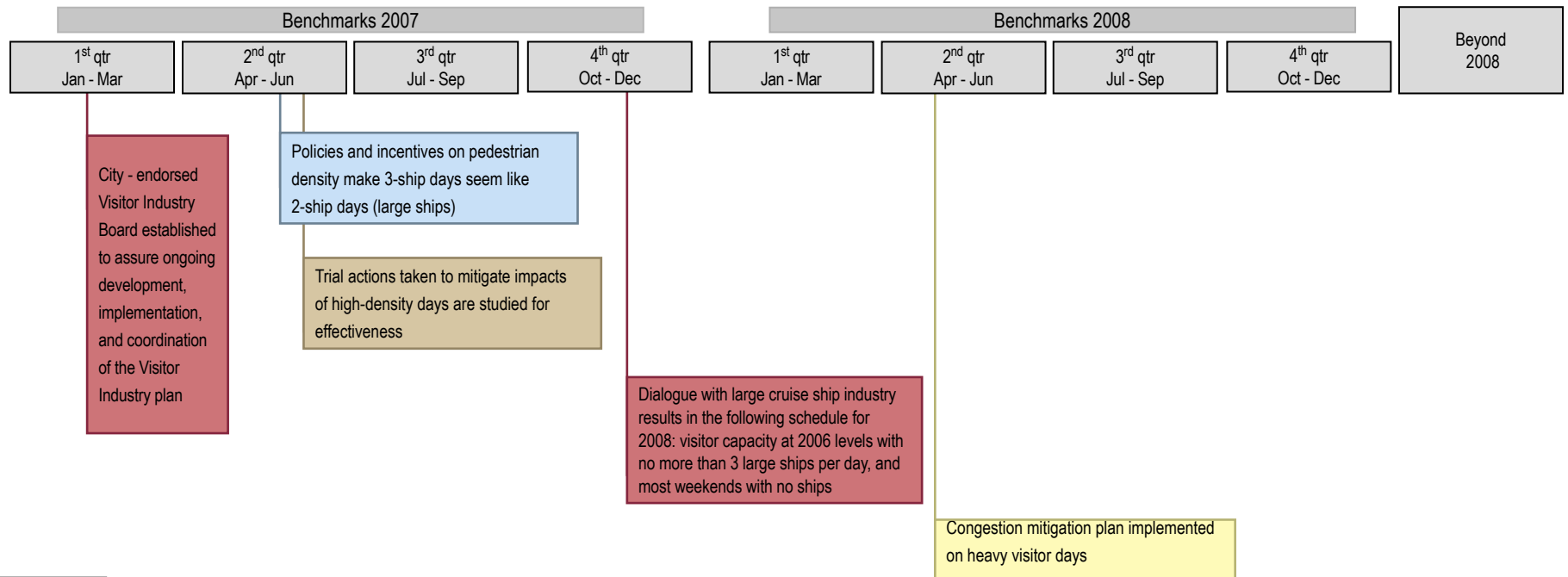
This is the first page in a three-part series that shows how the community can assure that the number of visitors to Sitka is within the community's capacity. Part one, shown here, illustrates a path to resolve an immediate concern – the decline in large cruise ships visiting Sitka in 2007. The community has already successfully hosted larger numbers of cruise ship passengers than what is predicted for 2007, and the tourist-based businesses are concerned about the decline from 2006. To mitigate the impacts of this decline, one solution is to increase the number of passengers who disembark in Sitka. Simultaneously, this offers an opportunity to garner a better understanding of how many ship passengers actually come into town, instead of relying only upon the vessel capacity numbers for a count. Both of these goals can be

accomplished by offering incentives to cruise line employees (see the narrative for the Oversight Strategic Direction for specific incentive ideas). By providing incentives to get the highest percentage of passengers off the ship in Sitka, the cruise lines are working with Sitka to provide valuable data, and both Sitka and the cruise lines benefit from enticing more passengers off the boat. A successful incentives program and increased promotion of Sitka's assets will make Sitka such an attractive place to visit that over 80% of the passengers on board will clamor to see it. This strand includes another strategy for reinstating the 2006 cruise passenger levels: through dialogue with the cruise schedulers, some boats are detoured to Sitka from their original route.

# Catalytic Strands

## Balancing Visitor Numbers

### Part II: Mitigating Crowd Density, Smoothing Out Visitor Peaks



The second strategy for assuring balanced visitor numbers is illustrated through this strand of benchmarks. This path is especially aligned with this Action Focus Area from Visitor Plan Oversight: Setting target visitor numbers based on visitor contributions and impacts, aiming to avoid spikes, and providing for breaks. Current visitor patterns during the busiest part of the season can result in days where the downtown is densely congested. While this has been a concern for residents for many years, a recent study indicates that crowding is also a concern for visitors. The strand shown here begins with an opportunity to test some density mitigation ideas and study the effect of those trial actions on pedestrian flow. Information from this trial period and data about other visitor impacts and contributions, along

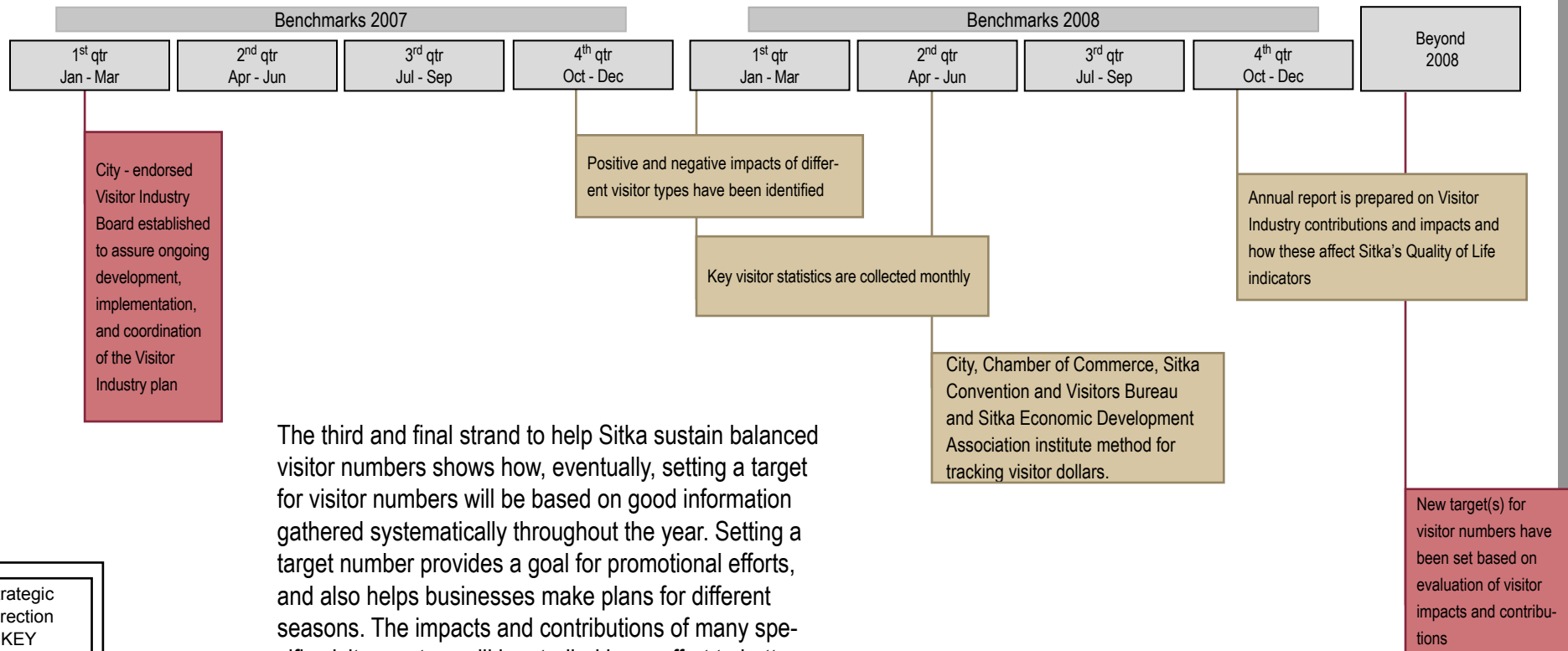
with other planning efforts, will eventually lead to a density mitigation plan, which can be implemented on days when the visitor level crosses a certain capacity threshold.

Until the impacts and contributions of this visitor sector are better understood, the objective is to keep large ship passenger visitor numbers at levels about the same as 2006, while ideally smoothing out the mid-week spike, and still providing for weekends with fewer visitors. Achieving these goals will help Sitkans look forward to a more steady and predictable flow of visitors in the summer, which should be better for businesses, visitors, and residents.

# Catalytic Stands

## Balancing Visitor Numbers

### Part III: Establishing Future Visitor Target Numbers Based on Necessary Information



The third and final strand to help Sitka sustain balanced visitor numbers shows how, eventually, setting a target for visitor numbers will be based on good information gathered systematically throughout the year. Setting a target number provides a goal for promotional efforts, and also helps businesses make plans for different seasons. The impacts and contributions of many specific visitor sectors will be studied in an effort to better understand which sectors contribute the most to the community and have the fewest adverse impacts. Surveys, statistics, capacity studies and tracking visitor dollars will all provide the public with a more complete picture of how visitors contribute to Sitka's economy. In addition, this information helps Sitka understand its capacity for high traffic volumes, and determine the markets upon which to focus efforts.

Strategic Direction  
KEY

- VI Plan Oversight
- Marketing & Promotion
- Incentives & Policies
- Transportation & Infrastructure
- Outreach
- Information and Data