

Sitka Long-Range Tourism Plan Collaborative Process
Steering Committee Meeting
13 April 2006; 12:00
Centennial Hall Maksoutoff Room

Summary: Two primary topics were on the table for the Steering Committee – how to proceed with providing Stakeholders with the information they have requested, and how to handle two of the more contentious topics (cruise ship dock and fishing allocations). Process expert David Chrislip joined the committee by phone for a portion of the meeting to answer questions about how to approach these issues. The committee developed an agenda for the next Stakeholder meeting.

In attendance

Stef Steffan, Hugh Bevan, Julia Smith, Dave Malone, Peter Gorman, Jeff Budd, Greg Dudgeon, Cleo Brylinsky, Wendy Alderson, Judy Ozment, Matthew Turner, Kayla Boettcher, and David Chrislip (briefly by phone)

The Stakeholders have identified a large list of information they would like to digest in order to come to a common understanding about the current situations in tourism. The Steering Committee (SC) is tasked with making decisions about how to gather that information and present it to the Stakeholders (SH). The facilitators had reorganized some of the information requests according to the source that might provide it (i.e. from the cruise industry, the city, businesses, etc.). SC members discussed whether that list should be presented to the SH, allowing them to decide how they want to proceed. But the SH present at the meeting concurred that SC should make a plan and provide the SH with some direction.

Two of the concerns that Stakeholders have identified are perceived to be highly contentious: the possibility of a cruise ship dock at Sawmill Cove, and the impact visitors have on Sitka fisheries. The issue of the cruise ship dock has been publicly discussed a great deal in the past few days during the Assembly meeting. Several Stakeholders gave testimony at the Assembly meeting, and some requested that the Assembly wait to make any further decisions on this issue until the Stakeholder group has a chance to discuss it and provide some recommendations. SC and SH members present at today's meeting discussed the danger of allowing the public to think the dock is our main focus – one SH said there needs to be a clear statement made at the next SH meeting on how the SH will address the dock issue, and then move on. A SC member added that it seems if the SH don't address this issue and the one about allocations, then it's been a waste of their time to participate. Others voice their concern that focusing on these issues could preoccupy too much time, at the expense of not giving any attention to the other concerns that have been identified. The SH believe the SC needs to develop a strategy about dealing with contentious issues and present it to the SH. A couple of SC members suggest that presentations be given to the SH on these two issues first, either by dividing the SH in half and each half deals with one of the issues, or by providing presentations on both sides of both topics to the whole group. Then SH can deal with these issues first and come to some consensus about what they can do about them. Perhaps they could even consider strategies for what they want to see happen if the dock is built as well as if it is not. Then they can try to move on from them.

At this point, David Chrislip, the contracted process expert to advise this process, joins the committee by phone. He is told that the group is trying to determine how to proceed with the information stage and how to deal with contentious issues. He reminds the group that the phase they are in now is not a problem-solving phase – they first must come to a common understanding of what is currently happening with regard to tourism in Sitka. The goal is for the SH to reach a common understanding about the current situation – for example, everyone needs to understand how allocations are currently determined, what the trends are, what is happening in the political arena, etc. It is not time to debate the ways to proceed from here. The same goes for every one of the concerns that have been put on the table – all the SH need a common understanding about what’s happening with each of the concerns.

One of the SH asks David, “At what point do we define desired conditions/visions?” David replies that we don’t proceed to defining visions or strategies until after there is common understanding. It’s really important to get a shared understanding before deciding what to do next.

SC question to David: There is a massive list of desired information – some is very obscure. How do we reduce the information requests to something manageable/realistic? David responds: SC needs to work with the facilitators to look at what’s practical, what can be readily retrieved, and what won’t be clear. Then go get it. Some items may be obscure – you need to recognize that, and decide on the next best thing. There’s always a ton of information people want to see; somebody has to say this is what we can get in the most practical way. There is a leadership role from SC and some of the SH in helping all the participants recognize what’s practical, and that we’ll never have complete information – we’ll do the best we can.

SC question to David: How do we acquire the information and put it together? The SH are volunteers, and we have a limited budget to produce information... David: The SC needs to identify the practical pieces and potential sources for them, then farm it out to subgroups to track down the information. They can then decide how to give the information presentations – if there’s an expert available, get that person in; at other times, the subgroup would sort through it and decide what’s important to present. Subgroups need to be a mixed group, providing different perspectives.

SC question to David: Would you agree that it’s best to deal with the hot button issues first so people can clear their minds about the less-intense topics? David: It depends. If it’s so hot, yes sometimes that needs to be dealt with up front – you almost set up a mini-SH group to move with it. Sometimes the hot issues are tabled in order to let us take care of some things that are less contentious – this lets us have some successes. Sometimes there are issues that are so hot and so polarized it’s not appropriate for the SH group to take them up. In those cases, you may have to let those hot issues go, and recognize that they’re being handled elsewhere in the community. I.e. solid waste process started because of potential reopening of a ball field – the ball field issue played itself out in the political field. But the SH said if we don’t have a solid waste plan, we’ll have this issue more often – we need to go ahead and create a longer-range strategy for solid waste.

Q: Should the SC make the decision about hot-button topics for the SH?

David: No – you should make a recommendation to the SH, present two or three possibilities, and ask them what they think. The solid waste wouldn't have gone forward if we couldn't have put aside the ball field issue.

SH question to David: What about the approach of telling people that these issues aren't any bigger than the other issues – that all the issues are important and will be given the same attention?

David: Yes – that would be the way we'd like to see it unfold. Sometimes things are so hot, it's hard to stay focused on big picture – if the hot issues keep coming up, you may need to decide what to do about those. Approach it like they're all equal, but sometimes things are so pressing/dominant, you may need to deal with those first.

David then reminds the group again that before they jump too far ahead and decide what to do about contentious issues, everyone needs to have a shared understanding of what's going on with these issues now. It is not time to define the problem and how it impact us – just learning what's going on now. After that's finished, start the visioning phase and discuss what would we like to have here. THEN, move into developing solutions/strategies about how to reach that vision. Due diligence to create shared understanding now will alleviate misunderstandings when we get to the strategy phase.

SC question to David: Should someone from the SC gives that speech to the SH instead of having facilitator do that?

David agrees wholeheartedly. Julia volunteers to do that. She says everyone needs to hear that speech, maybe several times. David agrees that it's really appropriate for the SC to do that. He adds that if something comes up in a meeting that seems to be steering the group off course, anybody can stand up and refocus the group when it starts to veer off course.

SH comment/question to the SC: At the assembly meetings this week at least one Assembly member made a comment that the Stakeholders have gotten off on a tangent, focusing only on one aspect of tourism. I'm not sure [the Assembly] understands what's been happening or what this process is about.

Cleo says she intended to meet with them 1/month; since she's been gone, Julia and Stef said they would do it. Julia and Stef say they're on the agenda for next Assembly meeting.

Facilitator question to David: SH are anticipating/concerned about revisiting the mission statement. I take that to be part of visioning phase, after we've reached common understanding about the information.

David agrees. He says it is ideal to achieve the shared understanding, then revisit that statement.

Matthew says he's thinking in terms of calendar – people are anxious about the mission statement, but at the pace we're going, we may not get to it before the summer.

David says, "I hope it won't be a big deal and bog you down. I know there's some concern that the original statement may be too narrow – hopefully all you have to do is add/change a couple of words and get going with it again. If you spend more than a few minutes, it's probably not time well spent."

Facilitator question to David: We've identified an exhaustive list of information needs, and we're up against the reality that we may not be able to access information that responds to all

those needs. Can shared understanding also be “we understand that we’d like to know more about this and we need more help to get that information?”

David says yes. We can come to consensus in the group that we’d like to know more on this topic, but can’t access that information at this time, so we agree to move on from there. He goes on to say that information or the lack thereof is one of the most common excuses for SH getting bogged down. You can go around forever on information, but sometimes you have to say this is what we’ve got, this is all we’ll get, let’s move.

[David Chrislip leaves the meeting.]

The group turns their focus back to planning for Monday’s meeting. Someone suggests that we cross-reference the top urgencies with the list of information we already have available.

Another committee member reintroduces the conundrum of whether to schedule someone to present on Sawmill Cove and fishing allocations, and wonders if the SC should ask the SH if those two topics are too hot? Someone responds by reiterating what David said several times – that all we’re doing now is getting a shared understanding, and therefore the SH need to have information presented on all their concerns.

The group agrees we should start out with Julia’s “sermon” that the goal of this phase is to create shared understanding. She will also discuss how none of the identified concerns should be any more important than the others.

Then they decide the best strategy for tackling the information needs is to divide the SH into four subgroups and assign topics for them to focus on.

- A suggestion is made to assign facilitators to each of the subgroups to help keep the groups focused. It is decided that SH can either volunteer or nominate someone to be the group’s facilitator. One SC member wonders if the facilitators should be SC members, since those people will be responsible for assigning tasks and tracking them, but the group seems to think that volunteer or nominated SH will be fine.
- Should the groups be assigned the original categories of concerns, or should they be given the reorganized lists that order the information according to where the resources might come from? The reorganized lists cross several categories, and hopefully would eliminate duplication of efforts among subgroups. The committee agrees to divide the information by source (i.e. cruise industry, city, etc.) for ease of attaining the information. The facilitators will keep track of which concerns each piece of information addresses.
- How to divide the SH among the groups? There may be some SH who are experts in certain areas (i.e. Fred with cruise lines); they should be on the committee where they are experts. The rest of the SH can self-select into the category they wish to work on. The group will do a balance check, to make sure all SH feel that all four groups have diverse representation. It is important to have a mix of viewpoints in each group – perhaps some SH will gravitate toward one group to begin with, but they might see that their perspective is already reflected in that group, but perhaps not in another, so they would switch.
- Kayla points out that not all the requested information is included in the reorganized lists – there is a long list of “other” topics that didn’t obviously fit into these sources.

The remaining topics will be placed on the sticky wall and groups can pull those cards off if they are willing to explore that information need as well.

Will there be a presentation on Monday? The group decides there will not be – the meeting will consist of starting some subgroup work and perhaps doing some of the other large group things, like defining “quality of life.”

Who will present at the following meeting (Saturday, 4/22) – a SH group? One person suggests that each subgroup could present on what they have so far and comment on that, and also discuss what their next steps will be. The group says that sounds like meetings could be structured like committee reports – at every meeting, every group could report on their progress and findings. Someone points out that presentations from outside sources may or may not be all that great – it should be up to the subgroups if a certain presentation is appropriate for the whole group, or if they just need to process the data within their subgroup and present on that to the whole group.

- A committee member mentioned that it is important to have someone present who can answer questions about the topic being discussed. All the SH will want to ask questions. Matthew mentions the possibility of having panel presentations. The panel would be the group of SH, with the option of having an outside expert there too, either as part of the panel or to actually make the presentation.

Matthew asks everyone in the room for help in policing the boundaries on these topics – when it goes into opinion or otherwise veers off the course, it’s more effective if more people than just the facilitator sets that boundary. He also stresses the need to be focused on just addressing the information that’s been requested, not adding more to the list. Also, we all need to make sure the presenters don’t try to sway the SH perspectives, but merely provide them with information. Someone suggests that on Monday, before breaking the SH into subgroups, there is a presentation on the ground rules of subgroups expectations, acceptable presentations, parameters, etc. This should also be put in writing to the group facilitators.

One of the SH asks for clarification about what we need to do by Oct 31 – how much detail is the Assembly expecting? A couple of people reply that there will likely be varying levels of detail in that Assembly presentation. With some topics, we’ll go to Assembly and say we have a need for more information, before we can come to any recommendations. Some items may have action steps developed.

SH comment: One thing I’m fearful about...there were high emotions at this weeks’ Assembly meetings. Some SH may have felt betrayed by other SH, or offended by how they presented their perspectives. There may be an undercurrent of dissatisfaction about how SH presented themselves as individuals; there may be aggression about how SH feel about others; there may be private comments or feelings that threaten our process. Should we acknowledge that somehow, or ignore it?

- Other SH agree
- Some comment that it makes sense to identify ourselves as part of SH group, but needs to be clear that we’re representing ourselves, not the whole SH group.

- Julia agrees to go over ground rules in her opening speech and remind people that we have differing opinions, but to leave those at the door and support the process while we're involved with it.

Another SH expresses concern about people that have stopped coming, and the continued low representation from Native groups. A SC agrees and says the SC should be circulating and making sure there aren't missing perspectives. Kayla comments that she has tracked the attendance for every SH meeting and has arranged lists of attendance according to the Perspectives and Experiences that were represented.

The group returns to making a decision on how to group the SH on Monday. They agree to divide according to the reorganized list, such as Info from City, Info from Cruise Lines, Business info, and Environmental Concerns. The other categories are divided into those four categories:

- Rural goes with environmental
- Capacity with cruise industry
- SC agrees to find specific info requests
- The group agrees to put visitor/community opinions on hold for right now – they may be more important in the visioning phase, or perhaps some of the budget money can be used to hire someone to develop surveys that address the concerns in these categories.
- Other categories – each of those goes on the sticky wall, groups can take them off if they want to tackle it.

Stef tells the group that Chris Beck is scheduled to present on May 1. Goals for his visit are somewhat vague – he's been asked to share some data he has about visitor stuff, and maybe he can bridge between information and how some of the committees he's worked with have moved into strategies. We don't want to be premature in talking about that, but maybe it could be helpful in some ways. Group comments:

- Can talk more about what we want him to do as the time approaches?
- Do we know he has some specific things that we'd want to hear?
- If we're doing this process where the SH are seeking the information and presenting it, I'm not sure what value Beck would add at this point. Could be helpful when the groups say we can't get any further.
- It might be a good idea to go through the lists we have with Beck and cross off the items that he could present on so the SH don't have to track them down.
- Or we could see what remains on the "other" list after Monday night and see if he could help in those areas.
 - Stef feels it may be better to have Beck look through the lists prior to Monday and commit to some of the items.
- It doesn't really sound like he's a content guy – he gets most of his information from McDowell.
 - Hugh has already told McDowell to put together a presentation for us.
- Might be more interesting to hear him talk when we get to the visioning stage and be an advisor on how to proceed.
- He could also maybe advise on how to collect visitor/community opinions.

A SC member asks: Is it reasonable to expect that some strategies could be developed over the summer? Stakeholders respond that it could happen only if the whole group can meet. One SH comments that it sounds like it may be hard to get the whole group together over the summer. Some SH are nervous about the process going forward without them, but have totally busy summer schedules and would be unable to be there.

- It is added to Monday's agenda that a SC member will ask the SH if they can meet at all during the summer. We can determine from there how to proceed with Chris.
- It's possible that the SH will identify things they want to survey about over the summer. Potentially we could use city money to develop and conduct this survey...but probably couldn't get for \$6000. However, there may be other groups that would be willing to pitch in for that study.
 - SH maybe could implement the survey once its developed instead of hiring people to ask the questions.

The group also agrees it would be great to have copies of some information we already have collected available for the SH on Monday. The SC reviews the list of information we already have collected and determines that having 3 copies available of each of those studies (except for the Haines and Hawaii tourism plans) would be helpful. Stef and Cleo divide responsibility to copy the items we have in hard copies, Kayla agrees to bring copies of the electronic documents (including the VIS study).

Matthew asks the SC if it would be possible to meet on Tuesdays instead of Thursdays. If they met on Tuesdays, the previous meeting would be fresh in everyone's mind, and there would be ample time to prepare for the next meeting. Those who are present agree to the change.

Meeting adjourned at 2:40.

Agenda for Stakeholder meeting, Monday April 17:

Opening remarks from Steering Committee member Julia Smith

- This is the phase of generating shared understanding, not debating sides or strategies
- All issues have equal weight
- Review ground rules and remind SH they need to clearly not represent the SH group when they are testifying in public

Process for dividing into subgroups

- Outline of goals for subgroups
- Nomination/volunteer facilitators
- Guidelines for presentations

Divide into four subgroups

- Info from City
- Info from Cruise Lines, Capacity concerns
- Environmental Concerns, Rural Status
- Info from Businesses
- Other categories on the sticky wall – groups volunteer to explore them

SC member polls SH about possibility of meeting during the summer