

**Sitka Long-Range Tourism Plan Collaborative Process**  
**Stakeholder Meeting #29**  
**18 December 2006 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.**  
**Centennial Hall**

**Summary:** The Stakeholders work in small groups to further define the Strategic Directions and benchmarks. They also revisit the issue of setting target visitor numbers.

**In attendance:** Wendy Alderson, Chris Bryner, Jeff Budd, David Clarke, Ken Corson, Chris Fondell, Peter Gorman, Mike Litman, Mim McConnell, Liz McKenzie, Mary Jo McNally, Judy Ozment, Scott Saline, Andrew Thoms,

*Steering Committee:* Cleo Brylinsky, Hugh Bevan, Phyllis Hackett, Brian McNitt, Julia Smith

*Facilitation Team:* Matthew Turner and Kayla Boettcher

Matthew begins by saying his goal today is to move this planning forward, but it'll be a tight schedule and he'll need to hold the group to time. The plan for the evening is to first revisit the target visitor numbers issue, then break into small groups to review the Strategic Directions.

MT: One challenge I realized people were having – so much of the process up to this point has been about careful wording, and carefully refining a phrase to “pack a lot of punch.” We actually don't have to worry about that as much when we're drafting the plan; partly because instead of getting the right committee title, we can say what we need to say with action areas and benchmarks. If you have a concern about where a Strategic Direction is going, you can better assure that it's going where it should go if you put a benchmark in there that says “do this” and that's what the committee will do.

MT: One thing you may have noticed as you look around the room – our Strategic Directions look a little different than last week. I'm hoping to use this version as a point of departure. Last week, we were still throwing ideas on to them. If you're concerned about how we got to where we got, each Steering Committee member has a flow chart that shows the thinking behind where it was left and how it got to it's new place. Mostly it was about putting something in the right tense/context, or correct benchmark language (i.e. past tense). Sometimes there were things that got molded together. What I hope you'll do, though, is use these as points of departure to move this forward.

MT: I also really hope we'll work this plan tonight. When you have a concern, try to use the plan to resolve it.

MT: Each Strategic Direction has been given a short name. If it needs more explanation, it can have an “intent” added to further explain. But the names have been shortened – it's easier for our purposes to refer to them this way. Then, within each SD there are focus areas. Those need to last as long as the plan lasts. But Benchmarks have a life span – once they happen, it's over. When an idea comes up, evaluate whether it's a life-long idea or a short-term. Finally, you'll see where there are Benchmarks. Right now, they're in the 2007 area, but those should get shuffled around tonight to 2008 or beyond.

MT: In the Visitor Industry plan that I hope comes at the end of this process, you're looking at the structure for it. The meat of the plan – the stuff that makes it work, looks like this. Each Strategic Direction will also name a committee of people who will be responsible for making sure this happens – no more than 10 people, and ideally it consists of about 1/3 SH

who have been around and know the process; 1/3 from outside and appropriate for making decisions about that SD; then leave some spaces for the committee to make recommendations. That's the first page for that Strategic Direction – the Action Areas, Benchmarks, and Committee Members. The second page will be the gems – other good ideas that show some of the past thinking. There will also be a page of “needed information” that points to the SH data collection that you all did, or the questions that have been asked. Then, the next piece will be up to the committees that form – for each benchmark that comes up, there's an implementation plan. For example, if there's a benchmark that is to make Sitka pedestrian/bicycle friendly, this page shows that benchmark written at the top, and there are places for the steps the committee needs to take to make that benchmark happen.

MT: When the process filling out the implementation plans is finished, you'll have a complete Visitor Industry plan, one that includes budgets, etc. What we're creating here are the directions that drive that work.

MT: Tonight I want to show you how to use the plan to address your concerns. A step that I hope happens, once each Strategic Directions has all the Benchmarks, we need to look at them all as a whole to see how they line up. [MT puts all the Strategic Directions in a vertical line on the sticky wall.] Regarding this idea of becoming recognized as a pedestrian-friendly community, I talked to some people at SEARHC who have this as an organizational goal. I asked them about some things that need to happen before Sitka could become a designated ped-friendly city. The Benchmark of actually becoming pedestrian-friendly, I think that's Marketing, so I'll put that benchmark out there. [MT places that card far into the future with the Marketing Strategic Direction.] They said first you need to gather data about ped/bike usage. [That card goes into the Data SD, closer to the present on the timeline.] Then there's a “walkability and bike-ability” study, which indicates infrastructure priorities. That one has to happen after the first study [it goes in Transportation]. Then “funding committed for infrastructure needs” – right now, the funding stuff is under transportation and infrastructure. Another thing, are there policies in place for this? [A card for exploring policies goes to the incentives and policies SD.] Then, why not have police on bikes! [Goes into partnerships.] Once all these things happen, ped-friendly is achieved. That's one example of how all the Benchmarks for all the Strategic Directions need to work together, and be put into consecutive order. That will really happen full-on for the whole plan once the committees start to meet and flesh out those final pieces.

Q: Who's in charge of making sure these committees all do this work?

MT: That's up to the SC to think through. Some of the questions will come up tonight in the small groups; but it's also a question about how to work within existing structures.

MT: NEXT, a tough stumbling block this group has been trying to tackle is the question about how to state target visitor numbers and putting a benchmark in there for that. The Steering Committee has met on this for awhile, and now recommends that the plan say the following to move this issue forward. First, they moved this whole issue into the Oversight committee – the intention of setting target numbers makes more sense there. (It used to be in Marketing.)

The Action Area reads: “Setting visitor numbers based on visitor contributions and impacts. Aim to avoid spikes; Provide for breaks.”

Then, they wrote the following as a benchmark for that: “Work to maintain 2006 level of large cruise ship visitors and modestly expand other markets with future growth tied to future impacts and contributions.”

MT asks “are we gaining or losing cruise ships passengers next year?” The SH respond that we’re losing them. MT points out that “work to maintain 2006 levels” then provides direction to the city that we should work to get more visitor next year; either more boats, or find another way.

MT: Somewhere in the future is also a benchmark that says “evaluate visitor industry impacts and contributions to set new visitor numbers,” because that is what will inform the Oversight committee on how to set future target numbers. Where do we put this benchmark? Let’s figure that out using the plan. At some point, we’re saying we’ll evaluate impacts and contributions...what are we going to need to know to do that?

SH: We’ll need more data, like actual numbers of people that get off the ships, and their impact on the tax structure.

MT: So one of the things we need is a count of how many people get off the ship.

SH: Is the 2006 number...does that mean how many actual people, or the capacity?

A: its capacity, it’s all we have right now. But we can do better in the future. So we’ll get specific data on how many people get off the ship.

[“Annual count of disembarking cruise ship passengers” is added as a benchmark to the Data Strategic Direction.]

MT: What’s another?

SH: Actual contribution that’s made to our tax base. There was a community that was doing it very systematically – we need to have city policy that follows that.

[“City institutes visitor dollar tracking” is added.]

MT: Any other impact and contributions that a board would need to know to satisfactorily set a target for large ships and other expanding markets?

SH: Need to know cost to city – police, fire, Centennial Hall, etc.

MT: Are you looking for costs of cruise ships specifically, or more general?

SH: It’s more useful if it’s general; maybe try to separate by market category.

SH: If it’s confined to study cruise ship passengers, maybe we can see if the head tax money can be used; and if other markets included would mess it up.

SC: So, we need a benchmark that researches funding for study

[“research funding for study” is added to transportation/infrastructure]

MT: Are there other things that need to be measured?

SC: We need to hear from businesses that are very dependent on mass quantities of people, to make sure they’re going to have enough traffic to stay in business.

SH: We should get an idea of \$ spent in other markets, to have a sense of where high-value visitors come from.

SH: Don’t we have a lot of that summarized in the studies we did, where it shows an average dollar spent?

MT: So, we know what they’re spending, but how does that impact the businesses? I’m channeling Ken Rear, who runs a business based on the cruise industry – they provide a kind of market that isn’t available to other businesses. It’s predictable, they market for you, and you can set up your schedule accordingly. I don’t want to drive this too hard, but if we’re trying to evaluate the target visitor numbers, what do we need to know to make that decision?

SC: We need to know from businesses what their needs are,  
MT: Are we able to get that? (the SH don't know...)

SH: I really think the target number should be a range, instead of a number. Also, what are we going to do if they close Glacier Bay and suddenly we have 350,000 people coming here?

MT: Using the plan – the overarching mission statement is to maximize contributions and minimize impacts. If we find out we're going to have a big spike in a certain market, I hope if we know that's happening, we can engage all the committees to minimize the impacts and maximize the contributions of that big spike so the community isn't ruffled and we benefit without being harassed.

MT: There's a pervading concern that we're out to set a cap – is that true?

SC: No, this is a starting place. By saying this, we can alleviate some concerns about unmanaged growth and others that worry about being shut down. Having a definite starting place could ease people's minds.

MT: Also, I hear concerns about how this is this maintained – what does it mean to have that number there? So, you've set a number, what does that do? What this group needs to articulate is how it intends to set target visitor numbers. Most concerns are about big boats – how does this group intend to manage big boat traffic? When the Oversight committee meets, we should have a specific plan outlined to tell them how to do it. What we can do here is perhaps set a Benchmark that articulates how at “whatever certain time” we'll have a plan that will affect visitor numbers in certain markets.

SH: Is this where we'd put in a benchmark about having open dialogue with cruise ships to talk with them about what days they come? I know they're locked in; but is this where we can put it in, to try to have some input?

MT: Yes – maybe we don't have the answers, but how can we put in a benchmark to get us to that answer?

SH: If we want to deal with the impacts of cruise, we need to look at the infrastructure here, so if a certain number does come we can handle them. People for years have tried to get the cruise ships to smooth out their schedule.

MT: Those things are here – mitigating those impacts are in the transportation SD. You have to look at whole plan to get it. Chris Beck said, and we know from our own experience, that there are days when there are too many people in this town. According to the survey those Union College students did, people on the ships don't like that many either. You could decide to stop the 4-ship days. But our mission is to minimize the impacts. So how can we make a 4-ship day not FEEL like a 4-ship day?

SH: Wouldn't it be better instead of limiting it to 2006 levels, to limit it to 4-ship days? It seems more about the daily capacity...

MT: This statement is not limiting to say 2006 levels – we already know that we'll have to recruit more next year.

SH: But how will that statement change if there is more cruise traffic?

MT: That's dependent on getting this better information that we've been talking about. We're hoping that by 2008, there are things in place to mitigate that congestion. I don't have the answer to your question, and all the people who should answer it aren't in this room. Yes, we need partnerships, such as dialogue with the cruise industry. We still need other benchmarks to figure out what it means to set this benchmark. I'm hoping what we can do tonight in focused groups will start to point us in that direction. Think about how to establish Benchmarks that move us toward the answer, even if you don't know exactly what

the answer is. How can this plan be worked to be sensitive to businesses and Sitka's quality of life?

SH: How do we try to weed out conflicts between these steps?

MT: When all the benchmarks are solid, we'll lay them all out together and look at how they all line up. It'll be a monstrous brain-scratching activity, but it'll be fun.

SH: I'm really stuck on the number thing – what if we said 300,000?

MT: I don't know – this proposal we have now is the council of your expert consultant (Chris Beck) and the Steering Committee.

SC: I also think the number is not so critical – it's more critical to have the time to evaluate it. Right now, we already know that we'll have to work for more. We also know that the community has voted against tourism expansion – in the dock initiative, etc. In my mind, this effort is in an overall plan – it's not promotion and it's not a regulation plan, it's an overall community approach to tourism. We have to try to walk a fine line. In my opinion, this does walk a pretty fine line. It gives us a place to start and a place to look – it gets the community more involved.

SH: I also have some concerns about saying "2006 level." The days were so unbalanced last year – as a store, your hiring is screwed up. I can't hire fulltime people when it's that uneven. The total number could be bigger if they were spread out – more consistently 2 boats/day or something. It makes it hard for people to earn a living if they're working part-time.

MT: [pointing to the action area as written] So that if the committee were to work toward avoiding spikes and providing for breaks?

SH: yes – if the spikes were gone, it would be much more manageable.

SH: I think that's a huge negative statement; also to the cruise industry – that would be a message of Sitka not wanting them;

SC: Even though it's not an overarching principle, it's a place to plan for starting growth? That's not the last word.

SH: But I don't see a plan in place to change that statement. If you write it down and put it in place but don't show how this will change in the future, it looks permanent.

MT: Exactly – and those are the concerns that need to be addressed through this plan. And one of the committees is going to look more closely at that now.

Matthew then tells the SH that we're going to start by looking at three of the Strategic Directions: Oversight, marketing, and transportation. The SH are told to select one of the groups, and each group has a Steering Committee member or two that will help facilitate the dialogue.

The groups work together for 30 minutes.

Matthew then brings the whole group back together and each group is given 5 minutes to share the work they did, or ideas they had.

#### *Marketing:*

They raised a question about the following action area:

- Improving attractions and events might belong somewhere else. ("Marketing just brings people in, doesn't create new. We just questioned that – we think it should move to a different Strategic Direction.")

New Benchmarks:

- 80-100% of cruise ship passengers are disembarking, regardless of weather (2007)
- VI report/website developed (2007) (so people know what's going on in VI, which grants have been applied for and received, place to put survey results – getting the word out to the public about the “healthy visitor industry”)
- Partnerships exist between SCVB and local visitor destinations and events (2007) (this one is to work with NPS, Raptor Center, etc. to have facilities open for people attending off-season conventions)
- SCVB/Community group established to promote culture/historical events (2007)
- Sitka appears in 20 national publications in a favorable light (2008)
- 20% more conventions and increase in large conventions (2008?)
- Pamphlet on fisheries information (i.e. species identification, history, recipes, handling, conservation) that are distributed with all sport fishing licenses (2008)

Possible committee members: Judy Ozment, Mary Jo McNally, SCVB

MT: any concerns as you worked?

SH: Deciding whether things are gems or benchmarks.

SH: One comment about partnering with ADFG – to do all that, you have to go through the legislature, or you could just do it here locally through people that sell the licenses. You may be able to leave ADFG out, may just want to do it for Sitka.

*Oversight:*

Never went back to evaluate action areas.

New Benchmarks:

They decided to split the one benchmark about target visitor numbers into the following:

- Increase back to 2006 levels with future growth in cruise ship industry tied to future impacts and contributions (2007)
- Work to increase other markets tied to future impacts and contributions (2007)

They came up with the following implementation ideas for the city-sponsored VI board:

- Evaluate whether oversight committee falls under purview of SCVB: steps to decide include funding mechanism through head tax; getting support of Assembly to encourage CVB to participate (2007)

And added the following as benchmarks:

- Establish web presence to exchange info about tourism (2007)
- Evaluate VI impacts and contributions to set visitor numbers (beyond)

Potential committee members: Jeff Budd, Chris Fondell, Chris Bryner.

Emerging issues?

- Setting target numbers – how to best articulate it and what is the real goal. They didn't evaluate what mechanisms need to be in place to assure people that that this isn't limiting.
- Solving the perception issue. There are people who feel there should be no oversight; others think it should be heavy-handed.
- They didn't really start by looking at the action areas – they realize that would have been helpful.

MT: Of all the Strategic Directions, this one needs to be taken the furthest down the line before it goes to the Assembly if it's going to work. It will be interesting to find strategies that resolve those issues within this SD and also, resolving those will help get endorsement.

SH: I just keep wondering why that target number can't be based on daily numbers instead of over a year. We were trying to figure out how to spread out pedestrian traffic in our group, too – why not figure out the daily max instead of the whole tourism season?

MT: So you could consider it over a day, a week, and a year – all have different impacts. They need to be looked at through that group.

*Transportation and Infrastructure*

They spend a lot of time discussing the action area about structuring local revenues to meet service demands – they felt that one wasn't very clear. They added “existing” so it reads “structuring existing local revenues...” to distinguish from the next action area, which is about generating new revenues.

New Benchmarks (from Matthew's example at beginning of meeting):

- Manage infrastructure to grow with growth of VI (2007)
- Research funding source(s) for implementing studies and surveys (2007)
- Mitigate impact of heavy congestion days (2008)

Potential committee members: Public works, Ports and Harbors, City Finance, Parks & rec, John Litten, Centennial Building staff, State, Local downtown business owner, ferries.

Emerging issues/roadblocks? We don't feel it has a lot of red flags. Seems like infrastructure is easy to agree on.

Matthew and Kayla have placed three new topics around the room for the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of small groups: Data, Incentives, Partnerships. SH reorganize into their group of interest and work together for 30 minutes.

After 30 minutes, each group presents on their work.

#### *Data:*

New action area:

- Gather information on impacts and contributions of visitor industry – [idea is to get more local input – this may actually need refining to become a benchmark]

Benchmarks added:

- City institutes method for tracking visitor dollars (2007)
- Annual count of disembarking cruise ship passengers (2007)
- Visitor statistic collected monthly (2008)
- Independent contractor hired for information/data collection (2008)
- Sitka hosts regional Visitor Industry data collection convention (beyond)
- Local college offer data collection course which includes counting disembarking cruise ship passengers (beyond)
- Sitka recognized statewide as model community for VI data collection (beyond)

Possible committee members: SCVB board member, CBS finance/computer person, Mim McConnell.

Emerging issues? Biggest issue is about who's going to collect the info and who oversees it so it's accurate, complete. Methodology will also be huge, but not our concern.

MT: why the new action? Is it different from the ones that were there before about gathering information?

SC: We thought the first was just about visitor numbers, sales tax...more about the visitors, and we wanted to add an action area about gathering information from local people about impacts on them, their perception of VI, etc. Maybe it should be a benchmark.

#### *Partnerships*

Didn't add any action areas,

New benchmarks:

They talked for a long time about the fishing issue; its something that's been brought up a lot and we hadn't put it in the plan anywhere, and thought it could be here. We didn't want to say anything about allocations, because this is not the place for that. But there are concerns common to charter and commercial, as well as sport and subsistence, and it's possible that we could begin a dialogue.

- A fishing user group partnership is working on common local concerns (2007)
- User groups create fisheries awareness packet (2007) (similar to idea stated above in Marketing)

- Citizen group advises Assembly in dialogue with cruise ships (2007) (missing link in town – there’s no feeling like we have a dialogue with the cruise industry, so this adds the idea that we can influence them through dialogue)
- Sitka partners with potential user groups to lobby cruise ships to come to Sitka (2007) (coming out of idea that there are big groups that sometimes go on cruise ship, those groups really like Sitka – we could be working with them to put pressure on cruise to go to Sitka.)
- City works to give cruise ship businesses incentives to get all passengers off boats and for companies to promote Sitka and Sitka businesses (2007)

Committee members: Peter Gorman

Emerging issues?

- One place we need influence is with Assembly, because of their relation with Cruise industry – they already have rapport with them, and we can make sure they represent SH group.
- Fishery thing is ongoing – tried to tease out part that belong here and ignore the parts that don’t belong here.

MT: It wouldn’t take me very long to find other Strategic Directions that could house those partnership Benchmarks; on the other hand, that Strategic Direction emerged as it’s own strand out of a definite theme we’ve had throughout this process. What do you think – do we need to have a SD called “partnerships”?

SH: It could function as clearinghouse for ideas from other committees to pull together people to make those happen.

SH: From what I’ve seen of the community in the short time I’ve lived here – it tends to polarize over issues. Just having this in there and showing the Assembly that one thing we want to see is more collaborative partnerships – there are lots of common ground issues, not just polarizing issues.

SH: It makes sense as separate area, but it might get structured differently...I’m not sure what the mechanism would be, but if an issue would come up, we could have a process in place to work through it collaboratively.

SH: I wonder if maybe a statement about the importance of partnerships should be a principal – those benchmarks can go into other Strategic Directions if we had an overarching principal about forming partnerships.

MT: I see that, and hear what these other people say – is it possible to form the committee that is unassailably neutral, whose sole function is to bring people to the table to help them conduct dialogue?

SH: But isn’t identifying appropriate partnerships in every other Strategic Direction as well?

MT: Part of this comes down to the implementation steps – identifying the appropriate partnerships is part of that step.

SH: Imagine a pin that says VIP – Visitor Industry Partner – you only get to wear if you’re in a partnership.

*Incentives and Policies:*

SC: One thing that came up – it’s kind of an aside, but central to the whole plan – it’s important that at some point we talk about how this all gets centralized. If all 6 committees approach the Assembly with their ideas, they’ll go nuts.

Added to Action Areas:

- Establish community economic standards

- Promote incentives and solutions to improve community economic standards.

Benchmarks:

- Changed one to read: “Establish mechanism for managing pedestrian density” (2007)
- Added “Incentives in place for business owners to pay living wage to employees” (2008)

Emerging issues: none.

MT: Here’s what happens next: this is the last scheduled meeting we have as a SH group. The SC is responsible for figuring out how to resolve a couple of large issues. Some of them are specific to some of the big questions that we’ve heard here. My own counsel is that the Oversight committee needs to be thought through pretty well – they have the issues that just light the room on fire (e.g. visitor numbers). Can we get there? Can this community come to some form of consensus about some of the sticky questions in here? That’s for each of you to answer, but I believe so. There’s a chance for frank dialogue and good understanding about the Visitor Industry – this group has laid the groundwork for that. The people sitting here now have such great insight behind how the VI works, all the ins and outs – that’s part of the reason to have a collaborative process.

Next: Ideally, some committees are formed, not more than 10 people, around each SD. Those committees will be formed out of a sample of folks that have been through this process and other appropriate people who make sense to be there. They need to further flesh out the benchmarks to meet these Action Areas. Once they’ve done that – we’ll do a process where we look at them all in relation to each other so they make sense sequentially. We’ll put those back in relation to 2007, 2008 etc. I think that can be done in one or two meetings. Then, the groups have a little more work to do the implementation plan – to further detail the steps to achieve the benchmarks and by when, how much will it cost?

The SC needs to answer some of these big questions: where do these committees come from, how do they fit into the existing city structure – will the existing structures be augmented, or new ones created?

Finally, another stage that need to be happening: there needs to be a public and Assembly endorsement effort – that “discipleship” thing of helping people understand the plan, what it does, how it addresses concerns, etc. Rather than try to get all 9000 people on board, the Steering Committee is thinking they’ll go back to the originally identified 60 SH. If they can get behind it, that should be a representative sample for the rest of the community.

Also, Kayla will be writing the plan – first the bare bones action plan, then the story about how we got here. All of that goes to the Assembly. There will also be a review process before the final version is done.

SC: It seems there needs to be another SH meeting, at least to distribute a draft of the plan. [There seems to be a lot of agreement for doing this.]

SC: Don’t know how we’ll let you know – but be prepared for another meeting in January. We’ll get in touch.

SC: Like the solid waste plan – although that was intensive work for a longer period with a bigger number of people, there’s been an ongoing implementation committee since then of about 4 people. They’re still cranking stuff out The real success of that process is from them sticking with it. The message is that we need to stick with this and bring others along.

SH: As far as bringing along other people that haven't been involved for a while – should we send them a list of SD headings and let them sign up to be involved?

MT: All of this is up to the SC – come to their meeting on Wednesday; lending your support to them will be great.