

# 2007 Sitka Visitor Industry Plan

## Version 2.0



# 2007 Sitka Visitor Industry Plan Version 2.0

Approved by the City and Borough of Sitka Assembly  
July 24, 2007

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(See Page 3)

With acknowledgement of Visitor Industry Plan Version 1.0 as a  
reference

Cover photos courtesy of Maria Finkenbinder and Octobre Twaddle

# SITKA VISITOR INDUSTRY PLAN 2.0

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# SITKA VISITOR INDUSTRY PLAN 2.0

## A. INTRODUCTION

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- Project Background

This project is a continuation of a tourism planning process that had its formal beginnings in November 2005, when the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka (CBS) gave the go-ahead for preparation of a Sitka tourism plan.

The plan was prepared under the direction of the Long Range Planning and Economic Development Commission (LRPEDC). A consulting team was hired in February 2006, with local consultants Matthew Turner and Kayla Boettcher responsible for facilitating development of the plan. The team set up a collaborative community process to evaluate and research visitor and community issues, and to prepare a document that would make recommendations on how to deal with these concerns. In February 2007, after a year of hard work and over 30 community meetings, a 90-plus page draft Sitka Visitor Industry Plan (VIP) Version 1.0 was released for public review. After initial review of the draft document, the Assembly authorized additional work on the project. Agnew::Beck Consulting was hired to work with the community, and in particular, to bring in a set of organizations that had not been active in the preparation of the VIP 1.0 document. Matthew Turner and Kayla Boettcher were hired to assist Agnew::Beck in this process, primarily as “content experts” regarding the earlier draft, and to help keep records of the meetings and post results on the project website.

- Project Products

Specific objectives for this project were presented and agreed to at the first Working Group meeting, on April 24<sup>th</sup>. The intent was to create a “framework plan” with the characteristics listed below. This framework plan evolved to become this draft Visitor Industry Plan, Version 2.0.

- Based on tourism market realities
- Reflects diverse community views
- Can receive broad community support
- Provides basis for action

- Project Process

This Visitor Industry Plan 2.0 was prepared under the guidance of a newly formed, ad hoc entity – the Sitka Visitor Industry Working Group. Individuals and organizations included on this group were intended to include a diverse range of local perspectives. Some member organizations were explicitly identified by the Assembly.

Members included several “stakeholders” who worked closely in the preparation of VIP 1.0 (indicated in the list below as SVIP 1.0)

Larry Crews	Sitka Greater Chamber of Commerce
Dennis Demmert	Sitka Tribe of Alaska
Angela Filler/Jeff Farvour	SVIP 1.0 - local business/commercial fishing
Chris Fondell	Sitka Greater Chamber of Commerce
Roger Hames	Sitka Economic Development Association
Bob Loiselle	Sitka Economic Development Association
Sandy Lorrigan	Sitka Convention & Visitors Bureau
Mike Litman	SVIP 1.0 - local business
David Malone	Sitka Convention & Visitors Bureau
Mim McConnell	SVIP 1.0 - local business
Mary Beth Nelson	United States Forest Service
Jim Steffen	Long Range Planning & Economic Development Committee Chair; SVIP 1.0
Rachel Roy	Sitka Tribal Enterprises
Theresa Weiser	Sitka Charter Boat Operators Association
Fred Reeder/John Litten	Cruise Industry (invited, unable to attend)

This plan was developed by the working group, working with consultant Chris Beck and the full Sitka community. Primary goals of the process have been to build from the recommendations of the Visitor Industry Plan 1.0 and also to include new ideas and new perspectives.

The specific steps involved in the preparation of this plan are outlined below.

- Working Group Meeting 1 April 24
- Sitka Public Meeting April 24
- Working Group Meeting 2 April 25
- Circulation and refinement of partial draft VIP 2.0 April 27
- Working Group Meeting 3 April 30
- Sitka Public Meeting April 30
- Working Group Meeting 4 May 1
- Circulate first full draft for Working Group review May 8
- Working Group revises plan May 9-23
- Circulate revised VIP 2.0 for wide community review May 25
- Hold Community Meeting Mon June 11, 6:00-8:00
- Deadline for Public Comments Mon June 11, 8:00 PM
- Working Group Meeting Tues June 12, 8:00 AM

- Revised VIP 2.0 Draft released to Work Group      Wed June 13, 6:00 PM
- Present VIP 2.0 to LRPEDC and Assembly      Summer 07  
for review, approval

- Acknowledgements

Rapid development of this 2.0 draft plan has only been possible because of the extensive, thoughtful work completed previously in the Draft Visitor Industry Plan Version 1.0. The community of Sitka owes a debt of gratitude to everyone who participated in this effort. Particular thanks are owed to the members of the steering committee:

Cleo Brylinsky	Brian McNitt
Hugh Bevan	Julia Smith
Phyllis Hackett	Jim "Stef" Steffen

The volunteers on the Steering Committee and the volunteer "stakeholders" who participated in the process together put in literally thousands of hours of work. Additional, specific thanks should be given to Matthew Turner and Kayla Boettcher who skillfully facilitated the process, posted the work in progress on the internet, helped diverse participants find common ground, and working with the community, prepared the VIP 1.0. The project website - <http://www.sitkatourismplan.org/> provides a wealth of information on tourism in Sitka and the people and process associated with the creation of VIP 1.0 plan.

The clearest indication of the value of the Visitor Industry Plan, Version 1.0 is the content of *this* draft plan; a large percentage of the ideas and specific recommendations presented in this document are derived directly from the Visitor Industry Plan, 1.0.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the VIP 1.0 is its intent to create an open, productive conversation between the diverse viewpoints that exist in Sitka. Developing a plan that incorporates these diverse perspectives and establishes a structure for continuing that dialog is the only way the plan will ultimately produce real results. The year-long process that led to Visitor Industry Plan Version 1.0 was directed at that goal; VIP 2.0 continues down that path.

Sitka owes a heartfelt thanks to the diverse set of people who gave so much of their time and their creativity during the first phase of this project, working for the good of the community.

## **B. CONTEXT – SITKA ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER**

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**Summary** Sitka, with a population approaching 9000, is unusually culturally and economically diverse for a town of its size and location. Sitka is a friendly community surrounded by spectacular beauty and abundant natural resources. Tourism is one important part of that economic diversity, currently making up 10% of Sitka's employment<sup>1</sup>. In contrast to other major Sitka economic sectors, for example, government, education and health care, tourism is not based on government funding, and consequently is less vulnerable to the vagaries of state and federal budgets.

Highlights of statistics regarding Sitka's visitor industry are presented below. This information is derived from the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (AVSP) 2006. Overall, the magnitude of tourism in Sitka is flat to declining. Section E presents a more complete listing of information available regarding visitor industry trends; the VIP 1.0 website <http://www.sitkatourismplan.org> provides extensive additional information.

- Sitka had 286,000 out-of-state visitors in summer 06 (Juneau 1,034,000; Skagway 865,000)
  - Cruise: 240,000 visitors (25% of statewide visitors; Juneau 96%, Skagway 81%)
  - Air: 35,000 visitors (6% of statewide; Juneau 9%; Skagway 2%)
  - Ferry/highway: 7,500 visitors (9% of statewide; Juneau 21%; Skagway 40%)
- Sitka appeals to a range of travelers – package and independents; in and out-of-state, business, and vacation/pleasure.
- Sitka offers a strong set of visitor attractions, including Tlingit and Russian history, sport fishing, in and out-of-town sightseeing, and hiking, kayaking and other forms of adventure, and a healthy, locally-oriented, year-round downtown.
- The average length of stay in Sitka for overnight air passengers was 4.6 nights; the average stay for overnight ferry passengers was 3.0 nights.
- Sitka faces growing challenges in finding capable workers to perform service jobs – “the worst it’s been in my 30 years of management” according to Roger Hames, a local business owner.
- Tourism creates benefits, including jobs, business opportunities and tax revenues.
- Forty percent of CBS sales tax revenues are derived during three months of the summer season. Summer sales tax revenues reflect a combination of increased

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<sup>1</sup> SEDA, McDowell Report, Spring 2007.

tourism, commercial fishing and other seasonal activities, as well as the summer time increase in sales tax from 5% to 6%. This sales tax revenue funds a large portion of city services, enabling CBS to keep property taxes at an extremely low millage rate of six mills.

- Like most economic activities, tourism also has adverse side affects. Dominant issues are downtown character and congestion, concerns regarding how tourism impacts the character of resident recreation areas, impacts on the costs and availability of housing, and conflicts over allocation of fish among different users.



## C. CONTEXT – STATEWIDE TOURISM TRENDS<sup>2</sup>

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**Summary** Travel to Alaska is a large and important sector of the state economy. After years of rapid growth, the industry has matured and is beginning to stabilize, with slower growth rates, and fewer new businesses entering the tourism sector. Tourism in Alaska and the world is an increasingly competitive business; Alaskan businesses and communities compete on a global scale. A prospective traveler seeking a kayak trip in a beautiful setting can paddle in Patagonia, the South Pacific, or Sitka, all for about the same price. Statistics below, from AVSP 2006, provide an overview of out-of-state, summer visitor trends.

- Total statewide summer visitors: 1,630,000 (up 89% from 861,100 visitors in 1993)
- Rate of growth: average 5% annually over last 16 years; small decline in 2006
- Travel mode: 59% cruise, 36% air (both entry & exit), 5% ferry/highway
- Market share by sector; “market share” of cruise is up from less than 3 of 10 out-of-state visitors 15 years ago, to 5 of 10 today.
- Trip purpose: half of air visitors are visiting friends and relatives or business travelers
- Length of stay: 9.1 nights (slightly shorter for cruise, longer for air; 18 days for ferry/hwy)
- Most visited destinations (day and overnight combined): The top three are Juneau, which receives 63% of all visitors, Ketchikan, and Skagway. Sitka is 9th most visited destination, with 18% of all out-of-state visitors.
- Most visited overnight destinations: Anchorage is # 1, with 41% of all overnight visitors, followed by Denali and Fairbanks. Sitka receives 2% of all overnight visitors.
- Repeat visitors: one third of Alaska out-of-state travelers have previously visited the state; this represents a three-fold increase since the early 90’s. About one quarter of cruise travelers are repeat visitors; just less than three quarters of air travelers have visited Alaska previously.
- Trip planning: 68% used the internet, with 42% booking at least one trip component on-line; friends/family (that is, word of mouth) remains the second most important information source
- Demographics: average age 51.6; average household income \$103,000
- Activities, in order of popularity: shopping, wildlife viewing, culture/history, sightseeing, walking, sport fishing, adventure (kayak, camp, etc.). Surveys show the primary motivation for visiting Alaska is the natural world – mountains, glaciers and wildlife. In general, culture is an important, but secondary motivator.

<sup>2</sup> Information in this section is based on the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program, Summer 2006

- Spending/trip: (excluding access costs) average \$934; cruise – \$636; air – \$1,367; ferry/hwy – \$1,310. Expenses include all in-state expenditures – food, lodging, activities, shopping, etc. *Note:* Cruise figures do not include tour package expenses purchased through the cruise line, such as a day excursion.

## D. BROAD GOALS FOR TOURISM

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1. **Healthy Economy** – Support the visitor industry as one key part of a diverse, healthy local economy. Some of the characteristics of a healthy economy include durability, capacity to change as markets change, year round activity, reasonable pay, and, consistent with goal 2 below, growth. (see section H-4 for more discussion of tourism growth)
2. **Quality of Life** – Work actively to maintain and improve the quality of Sitka as a place to live and visit; focus on visitor-related investments that provide a high quality visitor experience that also improves residents quality of life. Key objectives in working towards this goal include maintaining Sitka’s sense of being an authentic town, and ensuring the high quality of the natural environment.

Elements that create good quality of life in Sitka include:

- Sense of place (see section H-3 for more about Sitka’s sense of place)
- Sustainable, equitable, diverse economy
- Healthy natural environment, including clean air and water and healthy natural ecosystems
- Safe and tolerant community
- Community support services and infrastructure
- Subsistence lifestyle, diverse lifestyle choices
- Community wellness
- Cultural and civic institutions, including good schools with skilled staff
- Affordable cost of living, including housing
- An attractive downtown that meets local needs, year round
- Variety of stores and restaurants, year round
- Opportunities for local business, year round
- Responsive local governance and balanced boards and commissions

3. **Local Benefits** – Take actions to ensure Sitkans accrue benefits from the Sitka visitor industry; help local residents and businesses become successful in their tourism enterprises.
4. **Guided Tourism** – Take a proactive role to manage tourism growth; work with the full community to reach these community tourism goals.

## E. SITKA MARKET CONDITIONS TODAY

**Summary** In recent years, the overall amount of travel to Sitka has been relatively flat. For the 2007 season, visitation is expected to decline, largely due to reductions in cruise visitation. Reasons for this decline (e.g., changes in cruise ship patterns, ferry service, travel costs and visitor behavior) will be difficult to overcome.

### Visitor numbers declining ↓

- Large Cruise – As the table below shows, cruise ship visits to Sitka have grown slowly over the last 25 years. After 9/11, the average increased and remained relatively stable from 2002 to 2005, and rose in 2006 to 267,026 passengers. Between 2002 and 2005, cruise visits statewide increased 30%, from 739,800 to 958,900.

### Cruise Ship Visitor Arrivals

Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.
1990	130,528	1995	221,000	2000	156,019	2005	229,793
91	151,125	96	252,256	01	206,279	06	267,026
92	167,214	97	183,562	02	249,472	07	239,914
93	174,000	98	163,351	03	256,782		
94	200,000	99	n.a.	04	232,399		

Based on figures from Cruise Line Agencies of AK/Southeast Stevedoring; 2007 estimates are based on current scheduled visits

Scheduled visits to Sitka are dropping in 2007 with an anticipated reduction of 30,000 passengers relative to 2006 (Cruise Line Agencies of AK). Based on preliminary cruise ship schedules, cruise visits are expected to drop further in 2008.

- Because of Sitka's location (off the main travel route with resulting higher fuel costs) and the market's desire for short trips, odds are against significant cruise growth
- Sitka does have the option to encourage higher percentage of visitors to leave ships, and for ships to stay longer than 5.5 hours
- Several lines are no longer coming but the number of ships remains relatively stable. See chart on Page 11.
- Independent travelers – this category includes the broad range of travelers who make their own travel arrangements, including lodging and transportation. While cruise visits to Alaska have grown dramatically over the last 10 years, independent travel to Alaska has been relatively stable. Reasons for this trend include increasing travel costs, declining state marketing budgets relative to other states, a nation-wide trend towards shorter trips closer to home, and

growing competition. Specific trends in different types of Sitka independent travelers are discussed below:

- Ferry travelers – ferry visits, by residents and visitors, have dropped steadily over the last 10 years, from 18,300 passengers in 1996, to 13,400 in 2006. Declines are largely due to decreasing quality of ferry service provided to Sitka (SCVB, data from State of Alaska Marine Highway)
- US Forest Service facilities (e.g. Public use cabins) – The revenue from the 24 Sitka District cabins from Oct 2001-Sept 2006, including both local and visitor use, has increased by 3%. Some USFS cabin use has declined because of access costs. The Forest Service is considering closing four cabins because of lack of use. (USFS statistics, from Mary Beth Nelson)

#### Visitor Numbers flat

- Sport fishing data for the last five years reflects modest growth. However, if the moratorium on new charter participants goes into effect in 2009 as expected, there should be a reduction in the number of charter vessels in our area. While many factors affect the decision on whether to come to Sitka to fish, this change, combined with the Sitka fish box tax and more restrictive catch regulations for Southeast Alaska, may tend to discourage sports fishing visitors in the future, and create a marketing disadvantage for the charter fishing industry relative to competing communities. (this statement prepared by Theresa Weiser, representing a charter perspective)
- Air travelers – There is no easy way to separate the number of “tourist” air travelers to Sitka from all air travelers (residents, workers, etc.) Air passenger departures have been flat over the last six years, with a modest downward trend in recent years.

#### Arrival Passengers into Sitka - By Month

	2001 Arrival Pax	2002 Arrival Pax	2003 Arrival Pax	2004 Arrival Pax	2005 Arrival Pax	2006 Arrival Pax
Jan	6,230	6,715	7,554	6,861	7,233	6,659
Feb	5,707	6,175	7,120	6,729	6,457	6,176
Mar	8,317	7,681	7,696	8,053	8,976	8,029
Apr	7,925	7,522	7,373	7,883	8,979	7,379
May	10,767	10,728	10,147	10,616	10,150	10,430
Jun	14,148	14,444	13,340	14,624	12,974	14,600
Jul	15,373	14,678	13,562	14,802	13,935	14,793
Aug	15,732	14,810	13,680	14,871	14,019	14,143
Sep	7,715	8,603	7,973	9,177	7,927	8,134
Oct	7,620	7,933	7,510	7,997	7,061	7,479
Nov	7,519	7,511	7,113	7,784	7,567	7,482
Dec	7,320	7,839	7,009	7,444	7,149	7,403
	114,373	114,639	110,077	116,841	112,427	112,707

Information provided by Alaska Airlines and the SCVB. Note: figures for Nov and Dec 2006 were not available. For purposes of this table, the average of the previous 5 years was used.

- Culture – Operators of Sitka-based culture-based business state that the numbers of visitors coming for cultural activities has been stable. Sitka recently hosted a first annual cultural conference, which was well attended.
- Private yachts (small volume, but high value) – *more information needed*
- “Ecotourism” – according to local ecotourism businesses (wildlife viewing, kayaking) while interest is growing nation-wide, local demand has been flat.

Visitor Numbers increasing/decreasing ↑↓

- Conference Visitors – The number of groups visiting Sitka has declined since 2004. The estimated number of group delegates in 2005 and 2006 was below most previous years, and the lowest that Sitka has seen in the last eight years. Estimated economic impact in 2004 from group business was \$3,691,264 and came from an estimated 3,697 delegates. By 2006, estimated economic impact from group business had dropped to \$920,832 with an estimated 1,292 delegates. In contrast to recent years, 2007 is off to a good start, including a newly established culture conference (*Data from SCVB and Dave Malone*).

TABLE OF SCHEDULED TOUR SHIP SITKA VISITS, LARGE AND SMALL  
1997-2007

Individual ships visiting per season by size

#SHIPS CAP.	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
700+	12	11	11	n/d	10	11	15	13	13	13	12
700-	11	11	12	n/d	n/d	14	n/d	12	12	13	11
Total	23	22	23	n/d	n/d	25	n/d	25	25	26	23

Source: SCVB cruise ship calendar & schedules 1997-2007

n/d = no data

Comment:

The mix of the numbers of large and small cruise ships has changed little in the eleven-year period. A range of twenty-two to twenty-six individual ships have called in a given season.

The twelve large-ship combined capacities have risen 40% from a ship-passenger capacity of 15432 in 1997 to 21734 in 2007.

The eleven small-ship passenger capacity has declined 4% from 1153 in 1997 to 1104 in 2007.

TABLE OF TOTAL SITKA VISITORS CRUISE SHIP CAPACITY 1989-2007

Year	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	
Pass/cap	108430	130528	151125	167214	174000	200000	221000	252256	183562	
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007*
	163351	168024	256019	206279	249474	256782	232399	229793	267026	236098

Source: Cruise Line Agencies of Alaska/Southeast Stevedoring

\*projected

Comment:

Highest year: 2006: 267026  
 Lowest year: 1989: 108430  
 Last Ten Average: 216524  
 Last Five Average: 244420

70% to 90% of passengers actually disembark.

## **F. SITKA'S STRENGTHS AS A VISITOR DESTINATION**

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**Summary** The list below was developed in a brainstorming session with the visitor industry working group. This material was further modified and refined by subsequent working group and community review. It provides a snapshot of Sitka's particular strengths as a place to visit (and to live). Recommendations for improvements to attractions are presented in Section I.

- Authentic, "a real community"
- Native culture – authenticity of Native culture, array of attractions including Sitka National Historic Park, SE Alaska Cultural Center, Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi (community house)
- Russian history – array of attractions including museums, the blockhouse
- Other cultural/historical resources – WWII history, churches, link to author James Michener (who lived in Sitka while writing his popular book about the state)
- Good sport fishing
- Beautiful setting – mountains, coastline, islands, and Mt. Edgecumbe, an iconic natural landmark
- Outdoor recreation opportunities – hiking, camping, boating, kayaking, etc.
- Wildlife – birds, marine and terrestrial species
- Gateway to National Forest – wild areas, trails, camping, public use cabins
- Shopping/Downtown:
  - Town is well laid out, easy to get around on foot, walkable
  - Locally-owned businesses (not chains)
  - Wide range of locally-produced products; contrast with other Southeast Alaska cruise destinations
- Town character
  - Friendly town, friendly merchants
  - Less crowded than other SE cruise destinations
- Established, popular, diverse events (e.g., Sitka Summer Music Festival, Whalefest)
- Scientific community – a wealth of information about the natural environment, a basis for information of interest to visitors
- Artist/intellectual community
- Local institutions:
  - Colleges, including University of Alaska SE and Sheldon Jackson College
  - Mt. Edgecumbe High School, a boarding school serving entire state
  - SE Alaska Regional Health Consortium Hospital – central point for health care for SE region communities
  - Government (USFS, National Park Service, etc.)

- Breadth of markets – “typical Alaskan visitors” plus:
  - Students (boarding school, colleges, Elderhostel)
  - Business travelers linked to local institutions such as the hospital
  - Commercial fishing (captains, crews, support)
  - Hub for surrounding small communities
- Reputation as a community with a distinctive, unique character; high satisfaction rates among visitors (based on surveys) and high return rates

## **G. SITKA’S CHALLENGES AS A TOURISM DESTINATION**

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**Summary** The list below was developed in a brainstorming session with the visitor industry working group, which was then further modified and refined in subsequent review by the working group and community. It provides the balance to the previous list – a consideration of Sitka’s particular challenges as a place to visit or run a tourism business.

- Difficult access
  - Out of the way location
  - Costly (“as much as flying to London”)
  - During the summer season it can be hard to reserve a seat on a jet into the Sitka
  - Poor ferry service, steadily worsening over the years
  - Problems as an entry point for cruise visitors (lightering is “not inviting” for some visitors; lightering dock areas are not visitor friendly)
  - Facilities for private yachts, small cruise boats need improvements
- Accommodations capacity is limited during summer peak
- Marketing – good today, but could be improved
- Off season weather (“on-season too”) – Sitka receives an average of over 100 inches of precipitation annually
- Attractions “gaps”
  - Winter activities (e.g., snow machining)
  - Improved cultural history venues
  - Stronger incentives for cruise visits, new attractions/excursions
- Challenges for charter sport fishing - from the perspective of the Sitka charter fishing industry, the fish box tax on charter fishing and catch limits create a disadvantage relative to competing communities and present a negative image to visitors<sup>3</sup>
- Steadily increasing competition from other destinations, in Alaska and beyond
- Disagreement among the community about visitor industry goals and priorities
- 

<sup>3</sup> While the fish box tax is seen as a challenge from the perspective of the charter fish industry, this measure was passed by a majority of Sitka residents. The counterpoint to the charter industry perspective is that a portion of the fish box tax (20%) brings in revenue that supports fishery-related infrastructure and ultimately can bring benefits to the industry.



## H. BIG PICTURE STRATEGIES

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**Summary** This section provides the bridge between tourism goals and background information, and the specific actions needed to reach these goals. It presents broad answers to address the underlying questions about Sitka tourism: what overarching strategies are needed, who to invite, (neighbors from smaller communities and villages. Visitors from other SE communities are culturally and economically important to Sitka), what to sell, and how many visitors?

### I. Overarching Visitor Industry Strategies

This section presents a set of strategies that apply generally in planning for and guiding visitor growth. This list includes ideas coming from the Working Group, Visitor Industry Plan 1.0, as well as suggestions from the general public.

- **Good for Residents/Good for Visitors** – Emphasize projects that benefit both residents and visitors. For example, improving access to the Starrigavan Bay recreation site benefits visitors and the entire community (see attractions section for more details regarding this project).
- **Cost/Benefit Approach** – Decisions on tourism investments should aim to get “maximum bang for the buck.” The community should be willing to invest in tourism-related programs or infrastructure where this leads to increased visitor spending, increased tax revenues, and/or helps minimize impacts on residents.
- **Don’t Reinvent the Wheel** – Build from the strengths and knowledge of existing organizations; take advantage of previous plans and research. This includes VIP 1.0, and also plans like the Sitka Trails Plan and the Sitka Gateway Plan.
- **Increase Length Of Stay** – Sitka, like many small communities, should work to be “sticky” – so both independent and cruise visitors reasons find that spending an extra hour, an extra day desirable and rewarding. Increasing length of stay adds significant benefits with minimal marketing and community costs. Instead of only focusing on increasing the volume of visitation, the community should work to increase the net community benefit per visitor.
- **Timing is Everything** – Timing is critical in managing the benefits and costs of visitation to Sitka. Particularly for the high volume, short visit cruise segment, efforts should be made to avoid “spikes” and to provide breaks in the timing of visits.
- **Capitalize on what Makes Sitka Unique** – Sitka’s character - its unique history and culture, lively arts scene, stunning natural setting - is a huge asset for residents and a significant economic resource, and should be maintained and strengthened.
- **Keep Sitka Authentic** – The theme of authenticity runs through many of the positive qualities that define Sitka. For example, visitors and residents greatly appreciate Sitka’s downtown, characterized by locally owned and operated

businesses, and the chance to experience authentic Tlingit culture. The community should work to maintain and build upon this sense of being a “real” community.

- **Partnerships** – The tourism industry is built around partnerships. Particularly important are cooperative marketing plans, cooperation with federal agencies such as the USFS and NPS, cooperative projects with businesses such as the cruise companies (who have contributed to several Sitka tourism infrastructure projects) and partnerships between local business, the City and Borough, and local non-profits, for example, to sponsor events.
- **Community Involvement** – Decisions about the Visitor Industry that affect the community should include the appropriate people and be based on good information, through a process that invites meaningful public participation.
- **Quality** – Aim for an overall upgrade in the quality of Sitka’s attractions, tours, accommodations and infrastructure. Provide a level of quality that attracts a discerning, high value visitor.

## 2. Who to Invite? Key target market opportunities

*Targets below were derived from a synthesis of work group and public comments, Sitka CVB policy, the Draft VIP 1.0 and other community planning*

- Independent Travelers – independents stay overnight, spend more per visit than cruise ship travelers
- Cruise Visitors – current trends are flat to downward, but cruise visitors do provide significant spending to support local business; proactive action is needed to sustain current levels and avoid significant declines
- Fall/Winter/Spring visitors – for conferences, special events, business, sports; these kind of visitors take advantage of otherwise underutilized capacity, and help transform what would otherwise be seasonal employment into jobs paying a year-round, living wage
- In-state visitors, e.g. sports, business, education, events
- Educational/cultural/ecotourism visitors – independent and package travelers interested in a combination of education and recreation, in a beautiful setting. This market plays to Sitka’s strengths as a cultural and scientific community.
- Adventure travelers – visitors seeking a chance to hike, fish, explore
- International visitors – same benefits as independent travelers
- Neighbors from smaller communities and villages. Visitors from other Southeast communities are culturally and economically important to Sitka.

## 3. What to Sell? What is the right (compelling, accurate) market image for Sitka?

Branding is an overused term, but there is power in developing a seamless package that includes marketing material, graphics and the realities of the experience of a

destination's attractions, setting and events. Sitka would benefit from a more aggressive, integrated branding initiative. Sitka's "brand" and associated marketing information needs to be true to the reality of Sitka.

- Authenticity – a real town, relatively un-crowded, focused on residential needs
- Diversity of culture and history – complex, rich history: Tlingit, Russian, WWII history, traditions of subsistence, commercial fishing
- Experience of natural world – stay on an island; experience wildlife, marine and forest environment, remote wilderness
- Concentrated walkable town with convenient access to natural world
- Art and music, intellectual life, scientific research
- Outdoor recreation – fishing, hiking, camping, kayaking

#### **4. How Many? What objectives for the magnitude of tourism in Sitka?**

The goals presented previously provide the necessary guidance for answering this question – Sitka wants a strong, healthy tourism sector, but not at the expense of the quality of the community as a place to live or visit. The community wants “managed tourism growth.” Points explaining this term are listed below:

- The effects of tourism on Sitka – positive and negative – are only indirectly tied to visitor numbers. The same number of visitors can have very different effects on the community, depending on when they come, how long they stay, what they do, how much they spend.
- Tourism should be allowed and encouraged to grow as long as Sitka remains a great place to live and visit. This guided growth policy is not a proposal for needless rules and constraints or a simplistic lid on growth; likewise it is not a policy for unconstrained growth. Instead this is a strategy for nuanced, “smart growth.” Growth is welcome that brings more benefits – more spending, jobs, business opportunities – without significant impacts on the resident quality of life and the quality of natural environment.
- “These days, no place stays special by accident” – Achieving managed growth will not happen by accident. The community will need to make new investments in tourism infrastructure, marketing and management. For example, building new trails pleases visitors and expands option for local trail use.
- Much of what affects the amount and rate of growth of tourism in Sitka is difficult for the community to control. For example, even if there was a desire for dramatic growth of cruise visitation to Sitka, the community is unlikely to see such growth due to its location and because of market limitations.
- Applying this strategy of “guided tourism growth” to the current situation in Sitka suggests the following:
  - Most categories of visitation in Sitka are currently flat or declining, and consequently the main focus should be to sustain at least historic levels of visitation.

- “Managed growth” means Sitka should ensure that any future growth maintains the quality of resident’s and visitor’s experience of Sitka, for example, without increasing downtown congestion.
- Views vary on the appropriate level of tourism in Sitka. At the same time, there is much common ground in the community – the large majority of residents want to keep what makes Sitka a great place to live and to have a healthy economy. This common ground creates the foundation needed for the success of this “managed tourism” strategy. Making this approach work will require starting with simple, achievable projects that can build trust among the different viewpoints that exist in Sitka.

# I. MEANS TO REACH GOALS

## I. IMPROVE ATTRACTIONS

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### Overview of Existing Situation – All Categories of Attractions

- Sitka has a rich, diverse array of cultural, natural attractions
- For a variety of reasons, despite having a range of quality attractions, visitation to Sitka is flat to declining and many existing offerings are underutilized
- The same features that please and attract visitors – downtown, recreation areas, parks and trails – are used and enjoyed by residents. This is the source of the concerns among some residents regarding existing and future tourism activities.

### Objectives for Improving Sitka Attractions

To reach community tourism goals, work is needed to expand and improve Sitka attractions. Objectives for improving attractions are listed below:

- Work to create and maintain attractions that benefit residents and visitors:
  - Beautiful, efficient public spaces and amenities
  - Unique year-round attractions, festivals, and celebrations
  - Distinct city identity, a “real town” focused on resident life
  - Unique educational opportunities
  - Active stewardship of historical and cultural resources, the wild and clean environment
- Emphasize what is unique – Alaska has many attractive coastal communities; to be competitive Sitka needs to emphasize what is most distinctive about Sitka.
- Improve “information infrastructure” – the community needs to do a much better job of bringing Sitka’s rich history to life. At the same time, the community needs to be respectful of who “owns” these stories, and acknowledge this is “living history;” these events happened within recent memory.
- Integration – Take full advantage of and integrate stories of Sitka’s history and cultures: Tlingit, Russian, WW II (e.g. causeway) and “life on the water” (commercial fishing, canneries, subsistence, maritime history, ship building). In particular, better integrate stories of Tlingit and Russian history.
- Maintain community quality – Ensure that actions taken to improve attractions don’t damage qualities that make Sitka an attractive destination.
- Reduce congestion by providing efficient transportation between attractions (see Access section for specifics)

The remainder of this section addresses three categories of attractions:

- a. Cultural History
- b. Natural Attractions
- c. Downtown

## **a. Cultural History, including Native and Russian History:**

### **Priorities for Action**

*(see appendix C for background information related to this topic, including an “idea bank” – a list of ideas that came up through process that is worthy of consideration)*

- **Interpretation** – Do a better job of telling the complex, real story of Sitka’s cultural history. Work with the National Park Service, the SCVB, local businesses, the Sitka Native community and CBS to significantly improve interpretation. This should include improved signage (e.g. with photos and explanations of historical buildings and uses that used to exist at locations that can be visited today), improved historical artifacts (e.g. totems, historic buildings), self-guided walking tours tied to monuments, paid tours, museums, and website information. (see also “way finding” section under downtown)
- **“Historical Itineraries”** – Develop “cultural/historical itineraries:” a set of themed activities and locations events (for quick visits or longer stays) that would make the story of Sitka’s past and current life more rich and compelling.
- **Causeway** – Improve causeway; bring out WWII history (see also following section) The Causeway is not merely a beautiful place; it is on the National Register of Historic Places and plays an important part in Sitka’s World War II history, and rehabilitation of this major historic site is underway.
- **Cemeteries** – Respect and maintain current cemeteries (look for solutions to help, like create a “adopt a cemetery plan”...). Prepare a brochure, replicated on website, which establishes a walking tour between cemeteries.
- **Excursions** – Encourage private sector development of historical and cultural excursions (cruise companies want their clients to be entertained; and they want products to sell).
- **Museums** – Complete an objective, comprehensive evaluation of existing museums – what are their strengths, weaknesses; what could be improved?
- **Historical Re-creations and Experiential History** – Explore options for historical recreations of events and buildings – e.g., the Tlingit fort at what is today Sitka National Historic Park, or on Castle Hill. Explore options for experiential history – in manner of Jamestown, Old Sturbridge Village. This might be done by having young people in period dress serve as downtown greeters.

## **b. Connections to the Natural World: Priorities for Action**

*(see appendix D for background information related to this topic, including an “idea bank” – a list of ideas that came up through process that is worthy of consideration)*

General strategy – most of the projects listed below are candidates for federal and state funding, if the community puts its full weight behind these proposals.

- **Improve Starrigavan/Old Sitka** – Make improvements to the fish viewing station on the Nelson Logging Road. This would provide secondary benefits including

improving opportunities for visitors and residents to see other wildlife and to picnic, enjoy short walks through the estuary, or connect to the Muskeg or Mosquito Cove trails. The recreation site is generally in good shape; the primary need is to improve the Nelson Logging Road which provides access to the Starrigavan area and other recreation sites. Land is held by a combination of USFS, City and State.

- **Continue Implementation of the Sitka Trail Plan** – Extensive planning went into the development of this thoughtful, comprehensive 2003 document. The plan identifies 16 new hiking trails, 14 trail reconstruction projects, improved kayak facilities, 2 ATV trails and 2 new mountain bike trails. Fourteen of these projects are in various stages of being completed at this time. Continue financial and partnership support to the Sitka Trail Works, Inc.
- **Improve the Causeway** – This attractive area offers a nearby, beautiful place to get a sense of the wild coastline that surrounds Sitka. Access to the interconnected islands in the area is by boat. As part of the 2007 legislative session, the City and Borough is working with the state to have this area legislatively designated an Alaska State Park
- **Improve Harbor Mountain Road** – Improve the road corridor to access a number of beautiful scenic overlook areas at the top of the mountain. The USFS completed the necessary environmental documents for this project and related improvements in December 2006. Proposed improvements include hiking, mountain biking and cross country skiing trails, and recreation facilities, including picnic areas, restrooms, winter shelter, trailheads, parking lots.
- **Harbor-front Boardwalk** – develop a boardwalk between the two lightering points.

#### c. **Town Itself – Downtown and Harbor Front**

- **Current Trends, Challenges and Opportunities, Previous Planning**
  - Downtown has many strengths. Downtown has an attractive, concentrated and walkable layout; a beautiful setting (mountain backdrop, near but not on water); trails connections to surrounding attractions, e.g. Totem Park; and attractive viewpoints, e.g., Castle Hill.
  - Downtown features a mix of well designed buildings, reflective of historical traditions, and also includes some less well designed buildings. In their size and relationship to the street, downtown buildings are successful at creating a sense of enclosure, and a concentrated walkable “Main Street” environment. More could be done regarding building appearance and weather protection.
  - Congestion is a significant issue in downtown on days with multiple cruise ships. This is a source of real frustration for residents and for visitors:
    - Sidewalks overflowing, visitors walking in streets, with resulting traffic and safety issues
    - Congestion in some areas, lack of visitors in others; in some locations volume of visitors exceed store capacity
    - Parking a problem

- In 1995 and 1996, the City and Borough of Sitka and the National Park Service worked with the community to prepare a quite detailed set of recommendations for improving downtown for residents and visitors. This plan, referred to as the Sitka Gateway Plan, has largely lain dormant since that time. The plan contains many good ideas, and should be used as a reference for developing improvements.
- Over the last 20-30 years, small downtowns all over the US have made major investments in planning, physical improvements, events and marketing. These programs, typically carried out through public-private partnerships, have helped transform and revitalize downtowns throughout the country, creating increased use and increased spending, by both residents and visitors.
- **Downtown: Priorities For Action**
  - **Prepare Downtown Improvement Plan** – A plan should be prepared that identifies specific improvements needed in downtown and sets out specific implementation strategies, to achieve the overall objectives listed below.
    - make downtown a better place for residents and visitors
    - create a more successful place to run a business
    - increase visitor spending, which in turn generates increased sales tax to support community services

*The remainder of this section lists suggested general strategies for downtown improvements; working out the details of specific projects will require more planning.*

- **Improve “Way finding”**  
 “Way finding” refers to signs, maps, brochures and other tools that help people find their way in unfamiliar locations. Way finding is particularly important for cruise visitors, who are often disoriented and concerned about schedules. Way finding programs are most successful when done systematically, providing, for example, maps on signs on the street that relate to maps distributed in brochures and on community websites. Specific way finding actions include:
  - Provide a system of signs and maps at lightering points and other locations (perhaps color coded) that aid in navigation.
  - Provide “greeters” at lightering points to answer questions and provide information.
  - Develop a simple brochure/map that can be given to visitors so they are oriented, aware of things to do in town, and comfortable walking to locations such as the Totem Park, without fearing getting lost or missing the boat.
  - Include interpretive information as part of way finding programs.
- **Improve circulation** See access, Section 1-3



- **Improve Comfort & Convenience**
  - Provide phones, internet service (needed for cruise staff, cruise visitors without cell phones or without cell phones that work in Sitka)
  - Provide more and better garbage containers (to lessen windblown trash from overfull containers); improve options for recycling
  - Improve weather protection – at the lightering facilities, and on the route from the facilities into downtown
  - Provide additional public restrooms
  - Improve public seating, including formal benches and informal seating areas such as the edge of planters
  - Revisit rules regarding onshore sales of excursions – the current approach often leads to unpleasant, pushy sales. Provide an improved, visible, attractive place and/or set of kiosks for these sales to take place (e.g., along eastern edge of expanded Convention Hall, and under O’Connell Bridge)
- **Appearance/Attractions**
  - Improve signage – cultural, natural history information, as well as “way finding” information (see section above)
  - Improve appearance of downtown public spaces/sidewalks – add flowers, landscaping, attractive lighting, benches
  - Improve appearance and the sense of welcome in key areas of downtown including: area in front of movie theater; sidewalks, street, landscaping around church (to encourage visitors to cross between the two halves of downtown)
  - Improve the appearance and function of the several narrow, asphalt pathways linking downtown and uses along the waterfront
  - Continue to manage location and character of private street signs and street vendors (see CBS Code section 14.16.010 for details)
- **Downtown Buildings**
  - Explore options for improving the appearance of downtown buildings. Avoid onerous requirements. Re-evaluate existing zoning code to ensure required standards (such as height, bulk, massing, setbacks and parking) create buildings that make a positive contribution to the downtown environment. Develop advisory design guidelines, regarding building styles, materials and appearance.
- **Demand-side** Consider options for influencing the “demand-side” of the downtown experience, that is, work to influence the timing and quantity of visitors, for example working with the cruise industry on the timing of cruise visitors (see marketing section for further discussion).

## 2. EVENTS

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### Overview of Existing Situation

- Sitka currently hosts a diverse array of events. In general these events are in good shape: they have adequate marketing and sufficient numbers of paid/volunteer staff to be well organized, and to have stable or growing attendance.
- Events provide valuable reasons to visit Sitka in the off season; events also support resident quality of life. Expanding off-season visitation is one of the major goals of this document, and events are one of the best strategies to reach this goal.

### Objectives for Improving Sitka Events

To reach community tourism goals, work is needed to expand and improve Sitka events. Objectives for improving events are listed below:

- Use events to create visitor attractions during fall winter and spring months.
- Find ways to improve event marketing, to attract more out-of-town visitors.
- Encourage more partnerships between non profits, businesses, and state and federal governments to help support and increase the success of events.
- Make decisions on proposed new/improved events considering Sitka traditions and visitor interests. Encourage events that emphasize key marketing themes; likewise encourage events that resonate with resident interests.
- Be realistic about the challenges of starting and sustaining viable events. Recognize the risk of “event burnout.”
- Improve ferry access to Sitka.

### Primary Existing Events

- Jan - Russian Christmas and Starring
- Feb - Sitka Jazz Festival (one week)
- Feb - Sitka Winter Classics Music Festival (single concert)
- Mar - Sac roe herring fishery (three weeks)
- Apr - Blessing of the Fleet (2 hours)
- May - Julie Hughes Triathlon (half day)
- May - Mothers Day Quilt Show (two weeks, classes)
- May-June - Salmon Derby (two weekends)
- Jun - Summer Music Festival (one month)
- Jun – Fine Arts Camp (5 weeks, but only for students age 7- HS seniors)
- Jun – Fourth of July Celebration (3-4 days)
- Jul – Island Institute’s Sitka Symposium (one week)
- Sep – Mudball Softball (one weekend)
- Sep – Running of the Boots (2 hours)
- Oct – Alaska Day (one week - improvements are in progress by AK Day committee)

- Nov – Native American Heritage Festival
- Nov – Whalefest

(Not all events are listed. Conferences are excluded.)

### Events: Priorities for Action

- **“Remove Impediments”** – Working with the SCVB, continue to document why some convention groups considered but ultimately chose not to come to Sitka; then remove identified impediments. Examples of possible impediments include: character of conference center, access, accommodations, options for activities outside of convention activities, etc. Focus on increasing attendance to off-season events when visitor spending is most welcome.
- **Upgrade Centennial Hall** – Upgrade the aging, existing convention center facilities in Centennial Hall to make the facility more competitive with other facilities in Alaska and the lower 48. Increase maintenance spending, upgrade internal equipment and facilities, upgrade communications and internet technology (review recommendations of previous convention center work group).
- **Performing Arts Center** – Plan for new performing arts center (to open fall 07). Find ways to use this facility to enhance Sitka’s draw for a range of events.
- **Sac Roe Fishing Season Event** – Explore options to create events focused on the spring sac roe fishing season. Issues associated with this strategy include:
  - The sac roe fishery is interesting to residents and visitors. It provides a window into commercial fishing, subsistence and traditional culture. Work is needed to provide better information on how the fishery works and access to results.
  - The primary focus of events should be the commercial fishing folks in town (pilots, tenders, individual boat captains, crew); many of these people have time and money to spend.
  - The challenge to creating events is working with unpredictable timing of openers.
  - One option – a “floating basketball tournament.” Use wide-spread access to radio (and internet?) to schedule games around openers
- **Alaska Day** – Explore options to improve Alaska Day celebrations. Few Alaskans know statehood events focused on Sitka. Seek partnerships with the State of Alaska to promote the story and the event.
- **Other New Events** – Continue to explore options for other new events, of fresh versions of existing events. Options include activities designed to take advantage of Sitka’s days of bad weather, or to attract potential customers to downtown (e.g. charter sport fish anglers).
- **Off-season event access** – Improve off-season event access, focused on partnerships with Alaska Air and the Marine Highway System. One example: Cordova and the state ferry work together to bring visitors to the Cordova Shorebird festival.

### 3. ACCESS

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#### Overview of Existing Situation

- Given Sitka's remote location and small size, the community has surprisingly good access, particularly the regularly scheduled commercial air service. At the same time, the quality of service to Sitka via the State Alaska Marine Highway system has steadily eroded over the years.
- The high cost of visiting Sitka – by cruise ship, jet or ferry – is a major hurdle in maintaining and expanding visitation to Sitka.
- The high cost of visiting Sitka provides a natural brake on the numbers of visitors in all categories, which has helped maintain the community's authentic character.

#### Objectives for Improving Sitka Access

- ~~Improve circulation systems for travel to and within Sitka – by land, water and air, by motorized and non-motorized means.~~
- Access to smaller communities by ferry has been lost with the LeConte removal from Sitka. These connections need to be restored.
- Develop and operate roads, trails, shuttles, air terminals and other transportation facilities consistent with the following objectives:
  - Safe and efficient to use, build and maintain
  - Attractive and enjoyable to use
  - Minimal adverse impacts on the natural environment (e.g. through the use of hybrid or electric shuttle buses)
  - ~~Beneficial to residents and visitors; help improve resident quality of life and has wide community support~~

#### Access: Priorities for Action

##### a. In-Town/Downtown (see also attractions section for more about downtown)

- Create better pedestrian pathways from lightering points to downtown and other visitor attractions; provide for safe, clear, comfortable, attractive, direct routes
  - Provide for safe, convenient places to cross the busy streets (e.g. on Harbor across from the convention center)
  - Improve the mid-block alleys that connect Harbor with Lincoln Streets)
- “Bridge the St. Michaels gap” – Many visitors to downtown tend to not walk past St. Michaels. If they arrive on the west side of downtown they rarely get to the east side of downtown; arrive east and they stay east. Action is needed so visitors are drawn to continue from one side of downtown to the other, for example, using on-street maps, signage, special paving, landscaping, or eye-catching features like art or banners. One interesting option that takes advantage of the frequent use of St Michaels as a reference point would be to use St. Michaels as the center of a compass rose, creating an image that shows up on maps and sidewalks.

- Add waterfront boardwalk from the O'Connell Bridge Lightering to the start of the public sidewalk by the Stanton property (near Harrigan Centennial Hall).
- Establish a regular service to run continuous shuttles between lightering areas and both ends of downtown (perhaps through a partnership between a new downtown business improvement district and the City). The Tribe or another agreeable party could be contracted to provide the service.
- Explore options for expanding capacity of Lincoln Street to support the large numbers of cruise visitors who walk through the area on days with multiple cruise ships. Three options were discussed; the first appears to be the most promising. A trial season should precede a final decision.
  1. Make Lincoln Street one way east bound, use lanes freed up for pedestrians (this has benefit of reducing congestion at signal)
  2. Drop parking on one side of the street; use the lane freed up for pedestrians (tried previously, generally seen as successful)
  3. Close Lincoln Street to autos
  4. Close a portion of Lincoln Street to autos
- Consider using local youth to direct traffic (as is done in Ketchikan)
- Improve Katlian Street, so it functions more efficiently for vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

#### **b. Ferry Access**

- Background – ferry service has steadily worsened in Sitka over the last decade, especially since the loss of the LeConte which provided about half Sitka's service. Ferry service everywhere in Alaska is subsidized. Service to Sitka is particularly costly, due to the community's out-of-the way location.
- Sitka should continue its ongoing active lobbying effort to improve ferry service. One promising option is to establish a passenger-only ferry, based in Sitka. The City and Borough of Sitka is making progress on this proposal, aiming towards six day a week service. In addition to maintaining ferry linkages from Sitka to Juneau and other major SE communities, work is needed to improve service to Sitka from surrounding villages.

#### **c. Air Access**

- Air terminal improvements
  - Background – the CBS has prepared a master plan for improving the terminal. Additional funding is needed to carry out these improvements. Improvements needed include:
  - Air Terminal Building Deficiencies from page 9 of Airport Terminal Master Plan 2005:
  - Constrained departure lounge is too small to accommodate B-737 aircraft
  - No post-security restrooms
  - Emplaning and deplaning circulation conflicts, security queues obstruct baggage traffic
  - Constrained outbound baggage-make-up area is below industry standards
  - Limited expansion for air taxi operations
  - Passenger queuing conflicts, ticket lines and traffic through the lobby

- Minimal mechanical space
- Limited parking capacity, short and long term
- Limited terminal expansion potential
- Larger area (3500' expansion in progress)

Other

Drop-off/pick-up area lacks rain canopy

No refrigeration for raw fish awaiting transport

Lack of emergency back-up electric power, outages shut-down terminal:

- Frequency & Quality of Air Access to and from Sitka
  - Background – Alaska Airlines provides the primary scheduled air service in and out of Sitka and the only regular service from outside SE. Service is remarkably good for a town of under 10,000 people; Sitka should work closely with state and federal governments and Alaska Airlines to maintain the existing level of quality.
  - During the summer air service to Sitka is at or near capacity. Alaska Airlines will set the supply of seats as a function of passenger demand and the option to generate a profit. To the extent possible, Sitka should work with Alaska Air to identify what is needed for improvements to summer service levels. Some improvements are expected in 2007, due to additional expected increases in freight service, which may free up some passenger seats.

**d. Water-based Access – from Cruise Ships to Kayaks**

- Background
  - At present, cruise ship passengers visiting Sitka arrive by lightering boat, either at the O'Connell Bridge or Crescent Harbor docks.
  - An improved marine facility would facilitate delivery of freight and support plans for exporting water.
  - The proposal to develop a dock for cruise ships has been debated in Sitka for many years. When put to a public vote, proposals to build such a dock have been defeated.
  - Sitka's facilities for smaller visitor-related water craft need improvements.
- ~~Improve functionality, comfort, overall quality of lightering facilities~~
- Recommendations regarding cruise ship dock
  - While the community has made clear what it doesn't want, there remains a need to resolve the issue of some form of improved marine facility for Sitka.
  - The Visitor Industry work group recommends the community discuss and resolve this issue in the near term.
  - While not taking a position either for or against a dock, the work group has identified objectives that should be considered related to this proposed facility; these are listed below:
    - provide inviting, safe, easy visitor entry point
    - serve multiple functions (e.g., freight, visitors)
    - deliver the right quantity of visitors
    - ~~be attractive (or at least not a conspicuous eye-sore)~~
    - have minimal environmental impacts
    - include a plan for good access to downtown

- not adversely impact downtown businesses
  - have the appropriate ownership
  - facility must have broad community support (note: a private facility on city property is required to go to a vote of Sitka residents)
- Options to reach these objectives may include: a new dock, an improved lightering service (e.g., use of a private service such as Allen Marine that could offer larger, more comfortable lightering craft)
- Other Water-related facilities
  - Develop an improved, downtown kayak launching site, with good vehicular and visitor access, a sheltered staging area, and a safe and attractive route to nearby kayak destinations that does not cross through areas with heavy boat use.
  - Improve harbor facilities for yachts, outfitter guides and small cruise vessels. The Sitka Harbormaster has prepared a plan that outlines many of the steps needed to make these improvements.

## 4. TOURISM MARKETING

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### Overview of Existing Situation

Sitka has a range of existing marketing organizations and programs. Any plans for expanding or improving visitor marketing should start with a clear understanding of these existing marketing efforts. Marketing efforts currently underway in Sitka include:

- Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau – The SCVB is a cooperative destination marketing organization, funded largely by bed tax, supplemented by business members and fundraising. The SCVB has the primary responsibility to promote Sitka to prospective visitors. The SCVB has adopted a five-year plan outlining general goals and specific actions to market the community.
- National Park Service, US Forest Service – These federal agencies host websites, publish brochures, maps and other materials that share information about Sitka with a national and even global audience.
- SEDA – The Sitka Economic Development Association hosts a website as well as publishing written reports and brochures presenting information about Sitka as an attractive place to live, visit or start a business. <http://www.sitka.net/>
- ADF&G – The State Department of Fish and Game has an active “wildlife trails” program focused on marketing wildlife viewing opportunities in Southeast.
- SEATrails – The Southeast Alaska Sea Trails program is a partnership among Southeast communities and the State of Alaska, focused on developing and marketing a system of trails throughout SE Alaska using the AK Ferry system. Trails would be developed for hiking, kayaking, and biking. Independent travelers are the target market for this program.
- Individual businesses – A range of businesses help promote the community, including locally based businesses such as downtown merchants, the charter industry, as well as large ventures such as Alaska Airlines and cruise companies.

### Objectives for Sitka Marketing

- Emphasize those qualities that make Sitka unique (see Section H3)
- Work to expand and diversify visitor markets
- Continue to use existing and expand marketing resources – funds, staffs and organizations
- Emphasize marketing that benefits locally-owned tourism businesses
- Emphasize Sitka as a gateway to beautiful, unspoiled wilderness Alaska, including the surrounding Tongass National Forest
- Conduct marketing programs consistent with the overall strategy of “managed growth” for example, focus marketing on groups such as independent and/or off season travelers that have maximum community benefits and minimum community impacts.

### Marketing: Priorities for Action

- **Existing Marketing** – Continue to support marketing efforts by public-private organizations and partnerships including the SCVB five-year plan.





- **Sitka Brand** – Better define and then convey a distinct Sitka “Brand.” Sitka would greatly benefit from developing a more concise, compelling market image. Ideally this would include creating a consistent “look & feel” in all the marketing materials developed in the community. See Section H3 for information regarding the appropriate market image.
- **Websites** – Upgrade the SCVB website, other community websites. Review existing community websites and assess roles, duplication, strengths and weaknesses. Work with local partners to present an efficient, linked, unified and comprehensive set of websites. Carry out an active program to publicize Sitka.org as the primary source of visitor information for Sitka.
- **Links to Cruise** – Improve marketing activities related to cruise visitors, with the objective of increasing the percentage of cruise visitors who disembark and increasing the benefits of cruise visits to local businesses.
  - Improve pre-visit marketing
  - Improve the “front door” to Sitka (see attractions section for specifics)
  - Create local quality assurance marketing program to benefit local independent retail businesses.
- **Regional Connections** – Continue and expand regional marketing partnerships.
- **Visitor Education** – Provide information to visitors so they enjoy their Sitka experience and at the same time, so they are safe and minimize their impact on the natural environment and local life. This might take the form of a short list of guidelines on the community website and in collateral material, addressing issues like interaction with wildlife, trail etiquette, being prepared for weather, and steps to safely navigate busy streets.
- **Emerging Target Markets** – Expand to specific, promising target markets
  - Small group package travelers, interested in cultural and natural history, educational travel
  - “Off season” visitors
  - Affinity groups – groups focused on a narrow, specific interest, such as specific historical topics
  - Fly fishing – small niche market in the Sitka area; potential for growth
  - Geotourism<sup>4</sup>
- **Regional Itineraries** – Utilize existing and develop new Southeast and Alaska itineraries, with Sitka as an anchor
- **Underutilized Sectors or Locations** – Focus promotion on visitor sectors or physical locations that are underutilized (e.g. off season)

<sup>4</sup> Geo-tourism is defined as “Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents”. Source for this quote is web link below, which includes a survey of travelers and their growing interest in this category of travel [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/10/1024\\_031024\\_travelsurvey.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/10/1024_031024_travelsurvey.html)

## 5. TRAINING AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

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### Existing Situation

- Finding and keeping a quality tourism/service workforce is one the biggest challenges facing Sitka. As one business owner said - "When it comes to finding employees in Sitka, it's the worst it's been in 30 years."
- Reports are mixed regarding quality of service; there is some evidence that Sitka customer service is often mediocre, other evidence suggests that customers find local merchants to be particularly helpful and friendly.
- Workforce issues are not unique to Sitka; the problem is complex and widespread:
  - Around Alaska and around the country, service industries are struggling to find motivated entry level workers.
  - Changing demographics in Sitka are part of the cause of this challenge. There are fewer families and consequently fewer young people in Sitka than in years past.
  - The cost of living in Sitka is high, particularly for housing. This adds to the challenge of attracting and holding entry level workers.
- In addition to finding entry-level workers, there is a need for training and support to start up businesses and prospective entrepreneurs.

### Priorities for Action

- **Coordinated Program** – Sitka currently has a remarkable array of organizations with the capacity and responsibility to train workers. What is needed is active partnership between these organizations and the visitor industry, focused on the following steps:
  - Hold initial discussions between the visitor industry and local job training organizations to better understand issues and options. The Sitka Educational Consortium might be the most appropriate forum for starting this dialogue.
  - The visitor industry needs to precisely describe the types of positions that are available and the skills required to fill these positions.
  - Training organizations need to respond with a range of job skills programs, focused on identified training needs.
  - Aim for a seamless link between training and paid positions, to provide incentives to gain the needed skills. Use on-the-job training where possible.
  - Carry out an active marketing and recruiting program so prospective employees understand opportunities available in the community. Make a special effort to reach students.
  - The visitor industry should continue to work (as is called for in this plan) to maximize the number of well-paid, rewarding visitor industry jobs.
- Examples of training programs and organizations available in Sitka are listed below:
  - Local colleges and high schools, including Sheldon Jackson College, University of Alaska Southeast.

- Sitka Works – provides seminars and workshops to help develop job skills; the organization also helps people apply for jobs, prepare for interviews, and helps them find their best work.
- New food workers training program.
- Alaska Host Program – increase regularity, improve timing of Alaska Host offerings; encourage local businesses to take advantage of the program.
- New local vocational center – focuses on youth who have not yet passed the high school qualifying exam; serves kids from all over Alaska.
- Investigate option to restart previous program affiliated with local high school – “after school co-op” – program carried out in partnership with USFS, other employers.
- Address underlying issue of affordable housing – the City and Borough recently adopted an affordable housing plan, and has hired a staff person to address this issue.

## 6. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION: COORDINATION & INFORMATION

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This section outlines strategies for implementing this plan. This plan contains a long list of widely supported recommendations that will help make Sitka both a better place to live and visit, and to provide for a diverse, healthy local economy (see section D for full list of goals). Carrying out these actions will require a decades-long investment of time, money and effort. Actions needed go beyond the capacity of existing local organizations. Implementing the plan will therefore require taking full advantage of existing programs, as well as developing new resources and new approaches.

### Objectives & Guidelines for Plan Implementation

- Increase cooperation, coordination and trust regarding visitor issues in Sitka.
- Give community members a more meaningful role in setting tourism policy.
- Collect factual information regarding the effects of tourism on Sitka, both positive and negative.
- Expand community capacity to implement tourism plan actions and strategies.
- Build community support for tourism.
- Priorities for action should be identified based on a cost-benefit approach; that is, making investments that offer a net positive return to the community.

## J. IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

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This section identifies priorities actions for achieving plan goals. For most of these implementation actions more work is needed to flesh out specific actions, responsibilities, costs and timing. It is recognized that for actions to be undertaken by the City and Borough, the Assembly retains the authority to determine the specific timing and objectives of any given implementation action, based on available resources and their judgment regarding the best interests of the community.

Implementation actions are ranked in 5 categories. These categories are listed below. The "Immediate 1 category" identifies the projects judged to be highest priority; other projects, while also important, are less urgent.

*(Highest priority)*

Immediate 1

Immediate 2

Near Term

Mid Term

Longer Term

*(Lower priority)*

This plan identifies three general types of implementation tasks:

- Simple, relatively well defined projects – projects with wide community support; e.g. benches downtown (VIP identifies and briefly describes specific priority projects)
- Planning projects with widely supported objectives, e.g., downtown plan (VIP defines need for a specific planning project, and identifies objectives)
- Tough issues, path not clear, but need for resolution is clear, e.g., dock construction (VIP notes need for resolution, suggests a possible process)

## IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

Cost: \$=1000's; \$\$=10's of 1000's; \$\$\$=100's of 1000's

PROJECT	APPROX. COST*	VALUE TO RESIDENTS	VALUE TO VISITORS	TIMING	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY
<b>I. ATTRACTIONS</b>					
<b>a. Culture/History</b>					
Interpretation	\$ to \$\$\$	Moderate	High	Near term	CBS (funds to write grant); historic commission, NPS, USFS
Cultural/History Itineraries	\$	Moderate	Moderate	Near term	SCVB, Tribe, NPS
Causeway	\$\$ to \$\$\$\$	High	High	Immediate	State Parks, CBS support
Cemeteries	\$	Moderate	Moderate	Near term	Work group with Churches
Excursions		Moderate	High	N.A.	private sector, Sitka Tribe
Museums Evaluation	\$\$	Moderate	Moderate	Mid term	?
Historical Re-creations/Experiential History	\$\$\$ to \$\$\$\$	Moderate	High	Mid term	Primarily private sector

<b>b. Connections with Natural World</b>								
Starrigavan - Nelson logging road	\$\$\$?	High	High	High	Mid term	USFS, CBS, State		
Sitka Trail Plan	\$\$	High to moderate	High to moderate	Immediate2	Immediate2	USFS, CBS, State, Volunteers; coordinated by Sitka trail works		
Causeway	SEE ABOVE			Immediate2				
Harbor Mtn Road	\$\$\$?	Moderate	Moderate	Long term	Long term	CBS, State, USFS		
Harbor-front boardwalk	\$\$	High	High	High	Mid term	CBS, with downtown businesses		
<b>c. Downtown</b>								
Downtown Plan	\$\$	High	High	High	Immediate1	CBS, with downtown businesses		
Improve Way finding	\$ to \$\$\$	High	High	High	Immediate2	CBS, with downtown businesses		
Improve Circulation	\$\$ to \$\$\$\$	High	High	High	Immediate2	CBS, with State, downtown businesses, cruise companies		
Comfort & Convenience		Moderate	High	High	Near term	CBS, with downtown businesses, cruise companies		
Dwntn. Attractions	\$\$ to \$\$\$\$	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Mid term	CBS, with downtown businesses		
Downtown Buildings	\$ to \$\$\$				Mid term	CBS, with downtown businesses. Historic Preservation Commission		

<b>2. EVENTS</b>						
Remove "Impediments" to expanded conferences	NA	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Ongoing	SCVB, Sitka Tribe, School District
Upgrade existing convention facility	\$\$ to \$\$\$\$	Moderate	High	Immediate <sup>2</sup>		CBS, with SCVB, businesses
Sac Roe Events	\$ to \$\$	Moderate	High	Near term		SCVB, other organizations that host events
AK Day Events	\$ to \$\$	Moderate	Moderate	Near term		SCVB, other organizations that host events
Access for off season events	?	High	High	Near term		State of Alaska, CBS
<b>3. ACCESS</b>						
<b>a. Downtown</b>						
Pedestrian capacity	\$\$ to \$\$\$\$	High	High	Immediate <sup>2</sup>		CBS, with downtown businesses
Pedestrian routes from lightering	\$ to \$\$	Moderate	High	Near term		CBS, with downtown businesses, cruise industry
Downtown Loop Shuttle	\$ to \$\$	Moderate	Moderate	Near term		Downtown businesses, Tribe, CBS



"St. Michaels Gap"	?		Low		Moderate	Near term	CBS, with downtown businesses
Lightering facility	?		Low		Moderate	Mid term	CBS, with downtown businesses, cruise industry
<b>b. Ferry</b>	\$ to \$\$		High		High	Near term	State, lobbied by CBS, downtown businesses, other community orgs.
<b>c. Air</b>	\$ to \$\$		Moderate		Moderate	Near term	SCVB, with community support
<b>d. Water</b>							
Improved lightering	?		Low		High	Immediate	CBS, with downtown businesses, cruise industry, other marine businesses
Resolve "dock"	?		Moderate		Moderate	Mid term	CBS with community
Kayak launch	\$ to \$\$		Moderate		Moderate	Mid term	CBS with community
Small ship, yacht etc.	\$\$ to \$\$\$		Moderate		Moderate	Near term	CBS, State with community
<b>4. MARKETING</b>							
Existing Marketing	\$\$\$		Moderate		High	Ongoing	SCVB & other local businesses, orgs
Sitka Brand	\$\$		Low		High	Immediate <sup>2</sup>	SCVB & other local businesses, orgs

Upgrade and coordinative websites	\$ to \$\$	Low	High	Near term	
Cruise line linkages	\$ to \$\$	Low	High	Immediate	
Regional partnerships	\$ to \$\$	Low	High	Ongoing	SCVB, local businesses, regional orgs
Regional itineraries	\$	Low	High	Ongoing	SCVB, local businesses, Marine Highway
Focused promotion on underutilized sectors, areas	\$	Moderate	High	Near term	
<b>5. TRAINING</b>					
Set up system for coordinated job training	\$	High	High	Immediate	SCVB and tourism businesses, working with Educational Consortium, individual training organizations, schools
<b>6. IMPLEMENTATION</b>					
Establish Tourism Work Group	\$	High	High	Immediate	CBS, with community organizations, individual residents. Perhaps the Tourism Work Group and Staff Support could be funded by providing additional Bed Tax funds to Sitka Convention and Visitor Center to provide this service.

Staff Support	0 to \$\$	High to Moderate	High to Moderate	Immediate	CBS, with community organizations, individual residents. Perhaps the Tourism Work Group and Staff Support could be funded by providing additional Bed Tax funds to Sitka Convention and Visitor Center to provide this service.
Assembly Reviews, Approves Plan		High	High	Immediate	Assembly

\*Cost: \$=\$1000's; \$\$=10's of \$1000's; \$\$\$=100's of \$1000's

## **APPENDIX A**

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Documentation of VIP 2.0 working group and public meetings:

Note: all work group meetings were open to the general public. The working group meetings were structured so that the public could ask questions and make comments at specified times. This always included at the end of the meeting, and typically at several other points in the process.

### **Work Group #1 – 4.24.07**

Full work group attended

Approximately 40 members of general public

Agenda:

- Brief personal introductions
- Project objectives
- Goals
- Context – tourism trends
- Sitka's strengths/target markets
- Next steps
  - Public meeting
  - Wednesday working group meeting

### **Public Meeting #1 – 4.24.07**

Approximately 2/3's of work group attended

Approximately 40 members of general public

Agenda

- Overview of process
- Summary of result of working group meeting #1-
  - Context
  - Goals
  - Markets today – numbers generally flat to declining
  - Strengths/weaknesses
- Tonight's Topic – Attractions
  - Downtown character/town itself
  - Cultural attractions/Russian history
  - Links to natural world
  - "Excursions"
  - Off season (other than events)
  - "Educational recreation"

### **Work Group #2 – 4.25.07**

Full work group attended

Approximately 20 members of general public

Agenda:

- Update – Progress to Date
- Review/Discussion Attractions
  - Culture
  - Natural World
  - Downtown – subcommittee
- Events
- Training
- Next Steps
  - Access
  - Marketing
  - “Oversight”

### **Initial Rough “4.26” Draft of Partial Plan Circulated for Work Group Review**

### **Work Group #3 – 4.30.07**

Full work group attended

Approximately 20 members of general public

Agenda:

- Update – Introductions
  - Plan objective: find the balance point
  - Working group “ownership” – public meeting presentations on Monday evening
- Progress check – Goals and “big picture” strategies, format, attractions/downtown, events, training
- New topics – Access, Marketing
- Plan Implementation/information/ sub-committee meeting followed major meeting

### **Public Meeting #2 4.30.07**

Approximately 2/3's of work group attended

Approximately 20 members of general public

Agenda

- Overview of process
- Presentation by working group of results meetings #1- #3
  
- Discussion of Version 1.0 fit into new framework plan
- Discussion of objectives and actions for access, marketing, plan implementation

#### **Work Group #4 – 5.1.07**

Full work group attended

Approximately 15 members of general public

Agenda:

- Approach to Plan Implementation
- Identification of suggested priorities among recommended plan actions

#### **5.8.07 Draft Circulated for Work Group Review**

- Comments received, changes made by Chris Beck
- Revised draft circulated for review
- Meeting scheduled for confirmation of changes

#### **Work Group #5 – 5.23.07 (evening)**

(Chris Beck participated by telephone, John Stein managed meeting)

- Reviewed and agreed to changes in draft to be released for public review
- Discussed relationship of VIP 1.0 and VIP 2.0
- Scheduled next round of public review

#### **5.25.07 Draft Circulated for Work Group Review**

#### **Public Meeting #3 6.11.07**

Work group members: Stef, Jeff, Roger, Theresa, Sandy, Dave, Larry, Chris

Approximately 20 members of general public

Agenda:

- Overview of process
- Review of Draft Plan, by section

#### **Work Group #6 – 6.12.07**

Work group members: Stef, Mike, Roger, Theresa, Sandy, Dave, Larry, Chris

Approximately 6 members of general public

- Working group reached agreement on changes to 5.25 draft, based on public comment
- CB made changes, sent a revised 6.12 draft to City, for distribution to the Work Group

# APPENDIX B

## Implementation Worksheet (from VIP 1.0)

Action Research Area: Specific Goal Title:		90 Day Implementation Scope	Start Date End Date:
90 Day Intent (Why):			
Implementation steps (How)	Who	By When?	
1)			
2)			
3)			
4)			
5)			
6)			
7)			
8)			
Communicator: Tharu Manthara (Signature)	Collaborator, presence	Evaluation instrument/ Success indicators	Stages Near Meeting Date

## Appendix C

### Background to Cultural Attractions Section

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- Current cultural facilities and services (partial list)
  - Sitka National Historic Park
  - Sheldon Jackson Library
  - SE Alaska Indian Cultural Center
  - St. Michael's Cathedral
  - Russian Bishops House
  - New Archangel Dancers
  - Lutheran Church
  - Castle Hill
  - Building 29
  - Block House
  - Naa Kahidi Dancers
  - Range of tours with cultural and historical themes
  - Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi (community house)
  - Old Sitka
  - Sheldon Jackson Museum
  - Sitka Historical Museum (formerly Isabel Miller Museum)
  
- Current Trends, Challenges and Opportunities Regarding Cultural and Historical Attractions
  - Visitor surveys show that the primary motivation to come to Alaska is rarely cultural/historical experiences; the possibility of overcoming this trend requires particularly unique and well developed programs and facilities.
  - Sitka already faces real challenges in maintaining existing facilities; this needs to be considered when new facilities are proposed.
  - Many local cultural facilities and programs are currently underutilized. For example, attendance at Sheet'ka Kwaan Naa Kahidi dance performances is well below capacity.
  - Cruise companies generally "sell" destinations with over-simplified, generalized labels; Sitka is generally labeled as "Russian history". The reality is that Sitka's history is much more interesting and complex.
  
- Possible improvements to cultural/historical attractions (based on working group brainstorm; VIP 1.0 as refined by further community review, see *Attractions section of main report for priorities*):
  - Improve events that help explain and celebrate local history (see more in section 2 - Events)
  - Develop themed events, such as a Russian music festival
  - Develop conferences related to Russian history (e.g., cooperative events with Russia)
  - ~~Improve interpretation~~ – consistency, signage, websites
  - Work in partnership with groups like NPS who have excellent information and other resources on Sitka's history



- Develop authentic re-recreation of past events (e.g., re-creation of battles, as is done with Civil War re-creations)
- Improve interpretation of religious aspects of Sitka's history (Russian Orthodox, Lutheran, Episcopalian)
- Take better care of existing resources, e.g. cemeteries, (11 in town; many need care, restoration and interpretation)
- Take greater advantage of history of Alaska Native Brotherhood (founded in Sitka)
- Take advantage of Mt Edgecumbe High School – a gathering place of young people from all native cultures present in Alaska
- Improve existing museums – need investment, more space
- Recreate cultural structures and facilities, e.g. a Russian tea room, Russian fort, clan houses
- Improve Old Sitka
- Improve Castle Hill, working in partnership with State Parks
- Combine recreation of a historic building with presentation of historic objects, stories, crafts on the inside
- Develop another Baranof Castle (??)
- Improve marketing of cultural/historic attractions (see section 4 following – for example, work with cruise companies so they share more about visitor opportunities in Sitka prior to arriving in town; broaden cruise line's simplification of Sitka as "Russian history");
- Overall - emphasize and take advantage of authenticity

## Appendix D

### Background to Natural Attractions Section

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- Current facilities and services (partial list)
  - Beautiful natural setting and scenery; attractive coastal waters – islands, bays, protected passages, open ocean; Tongass National Forest lands – the vast wilderness of Baranof Island
  - Abundant wildlife – including “wildlife out the window” – eagles, gulls, ravens, otters, etc.
  - Trails – a wide range of attractive trails, including Cross Trail, Totem Park Trail (some issues with trail capacity, local vs. visitor trail use)
  - Range of opportunities for independent outdoor recreation – e.g., camping, kayaking, boating, fishing, hunting
  - Range of tours and outdoor recreation opportunities – e.g., tours focused on sport fishing, wildlife viewing, snorkeling, surfing, bird watching sightseeing on land and water;
  - “Developed” natural areas: Totem Park, viewpoints like Castle Hill
  - Alaska Raptor Center
  - Fish Hatchery
  - Sawmill Creek Farm
  - Sheldon Jackson Aquarium
  
- Current Trends, Challenges and Opportunities
  - Despite bountiful natural resources, Sitka could improve opportunities to connect with the natural world, for residents and visitors.
  
- Possible improvements to natural attractions (based on initial work group brainstorm; refined by further community review):
  - Improve Harbor Mountain road (provides trail access, and opportunity to explain linkage of road to WW II history)
  - Stronger relationship between downtown and waterfront
  - More trails, improved trail management
  - Better natural history information, especially re birds; more easy opportunities to see and learn about birds, fish, wildlife
  - Improved access; improvements to the Causeway
  - Improved opportunities for tent camping
  - Encourage private sector development of excursions
  - Improved winter recreation opportunities