

January 18, 2020

Dear Visitor Industry Task Force Members,

I moved to Juneau 25 years ago to work a summer job as a guide on the Mendenhall River and was quickly drawn to the beautiful and welcoming community. The visitor industry has provided me with a stable career that I am grateful for every day. It's allowed me to own a home and raise a family in this amazing place. My story is not unique. There are countless members of our community for whom the visitor industry has provided gainful employment and a diverse and healthy local economy.

Our company has ten year-round employees in Juneau, and we hire 150 additional staff on a seasonal basis each summer. We are just one company of many whose economic impact is significant. As a company and as individuals, we all buy local goods and services, pay taxes, and own or rent property. The visitor industry is how we make our living, support our families and invest back into the community. The health and continued responsible growth of local business is how we will not only preserve but also improve our quality of life.

The positive economic impact of the visitor industry to Juneau is substantial. The fees collected from the cruise lines have funded significant infrastructure improvements to our town. Sales tax revenue generated by the visitor industry funds a meaningful portion of the city's operating budget. The continued responsible growth of this industry could not come at a more important time as the State continues to shift more of the financial burden to city governments. The additional taxes and fees collected by the city as the visitor industry grows will help to fill the shortfall in state funding for services that are critical to all Juneau residents.

The idea that tourism in Juneau can grow totally unrestricted is simply not true. The cruise lines are limited by our existing infrastructure. Only so many ships can call on Juneau on any given day due to the docking limitations. The idea of the city instituting a cap on the number of people that we allow to visit is deeply concerning. The visitor industry is one of few business sectors that is currently growing and providing opportunity in an otherwise struggling business environment. The continued responsible growth of this industry provides opportunity for existing local businesses to grow and reinvest in our community. It also creates opportunity for new entrepreneurs to enter into a business venture.

New business opportunities becoming available to local residents should be a priority, not something that is undermined or discouraged. Countless businesses that are locally owned have made substantial financial investments based on the natural growth and opportunity that the visitor industry has created. The potential negative impacts of limiting this natural growth could have very real consequences to all of them. The city has also made substantial investments based on visitor industry growth, many of which have been financed with repayment coming directly from the fees being collected from the industry. The potential impact to our local government's financial wellbeing from a reduction, artificial or otherwise, would certainly trickle down to impact all residents by way of reduced government services and increased taxes.

The recent purchase of waterfront property by Norwegian Cruise Lines (NCL) is an investment in our community that comes with great opportunity. NCL has a desire to build a dock and has indicated a willingness to build infrastructure that will benefit not only their company, but the city as a whole. I urge the city to work with NCL and the community to develop a plan that will meet the needs of residents, downtown stakeholders and NCL.

Additionally, shifting NCL vessels from their existing docking location will better disperse visitors throughout downtown, reduce congestion at the south end, potentially reduce the need for ships to anchor and eliminate “hot berthing” of the NCL vessels on Tuesdays. The city has invested millions in development of the sea walk with the intent of unifying the waterfront and better distributing visitors throughout the downtown corridor. A dock at the subport property is a means to that end. Not working with NCL on an acceptable development plan sends the wrong message to other potential investors in our community.

Recent public comments have been made about activity on Basin Road. Our company has been responsibly operating a gold history tour in Last Chance Basin for over 40 years. We take small busloads of visitors to the Basin every season. But Basin Road is accessed by a variety of users – not just those on a commercial tour. We share the public road to the Basin with people driving to Juneau’s most popular hiking trail system – the Perseverance – which was Alaska’s first road and is one of the three most historically significant trails in Alaska.

Every summer day, dozens (sometimes hundreds) of dog walkers and bike riders but mostly hikers - some in private vehicles, some in taxis - drive Basin Road to access the trailheads. They hike Mt. Roberts or take the Perseverance to Ebner Falls or Granite Creek - or the side trail that leads to the edge of the AJ Glory Hole. Some hike to the top of Mt. Juneau. It’s spectacular and no surprise so many people go there.

Anyone who doesn’t realize how famous Perseverance is should read this link:

<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/perseverance-national-recreation-trail-juneau-alaska>

Basin Road also provides access to the city-owned historic Last Chance Mining Museum in the Basin. This unique educational attraction caters to independent travelers and Juneau locals alike and has a loyal clientele.

Even though Juneau’s overall number of cruise visitors has grown, our company now takes FEWER people to this area today than we did 10 years ago. In fact, as of 2019, the number of people we have brought to Last Chance Basin has dropped nearly 23 percent since 2008.

Our company contributes City sales tax, plus pays the CBJ a fee of \$3.50 for every guest who participates in our tour. The taxes and fees collected on our operation are used to fund local government services, including maintaining public roads like Basin Road.

All business activities have impacts to the communities in which they operate. The visitor industry in Juneau has been a leader in developing self-implemented guidelines and a code of conduct designed to mitigate impacts wherever possible. The TBMP program that has been in place for over 20 years is constantly evolving to address community concerns as the industry changes and grows. The effort to self-regulate and address community concerns is supported by the vast majority of industry related business. Most of these businesses are owned and/or operated by residents of our community who value and respect their fellow citizens and care deeply about the quality of life in our city. We are your neighbors and value the quality of life we all share in Juneau. we are committed to minimizing impacts associated with our business in order to protect the qualities that make Juneau a great place to live and to visit.

I appreciate you taking the time to read my comments. Thank you for serving our community as members on the Visitor Industry Task Force.

Sincerely,

Chris Meier
President
Alaska Travel Adventures, Inc.